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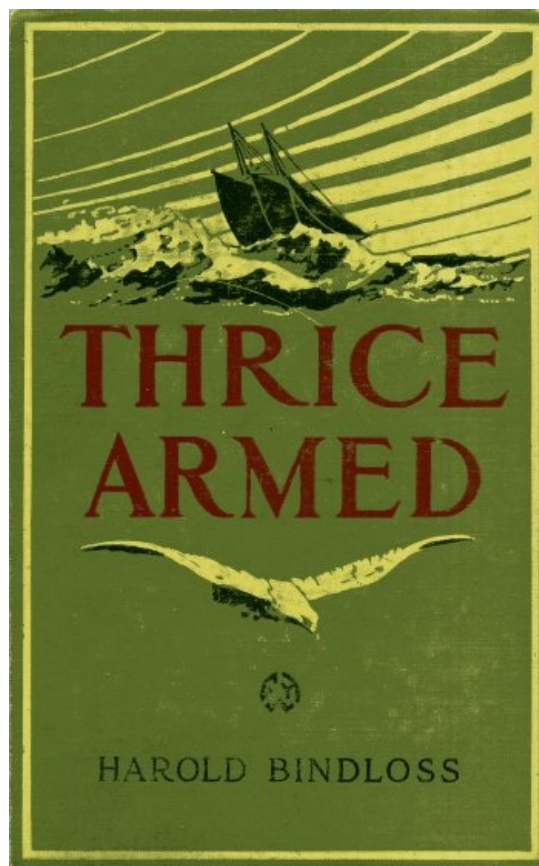
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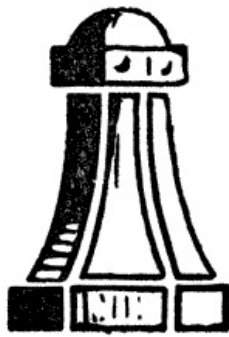
*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THRICE ARMED ***



THRICE ARMED

BY
HAROLD BINDLOSS

Author of "Winston of the Prairie," "Delilah of the Snows," "By Right of Purchase," "Lorimer of the Northwest," etc.



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Thrice Armed

[Pg 1]

CHAPTER I JIMMY RENOUNCES HIS CAREER

It was with somewhat mixed feelings, and a curious little smile in his eyes, that Jim Wheelock

stood with a brown hand on the *Tyee's* wheel as the deep-loaded schooner slid out through Vancouver Narrows before a fresh easterly breeze. Dim heights of snow rose faintly white against the creeping dusk above her starboard hand, and the busy British Columbian city, girt with mazy wires and towering telegraph poles, was fading slowly amidst the great black pines astern. An aromatic smell of burning followed the schooner, and from the levels at the head of the Inlet a long gray smear blew out across the water. A fire which had, as not infrequently happens, passed the bounds of somebody's clearing was eating its way into that part of the great coniferous forest that rolls north from Oregon to Alaska along the wet seaboard of the Pacific Slope.

The schooner was making her six knots, with mainboom well out on her quarter and broad wisps of froth washing off beneath her bows, slanted until her leeward scuppers were close above the sliding foam. Wheelock stood right aft, with his shoulders just above the roof of the little deckhouse, and, foreshortened as the vessel was, she seemed from that point of view a mere patch of scarred and somewhat uncleanly deck surmounted by a towering mass of sail. Two partly seen figures were busy bending on a gaff-topsail about the foot of her foremast, and Wheelock turned as one of them came slouching aft when the sail had been sent aloft. The man wore dungaree and jean, with a dilapidated oilskin coat over them, for the wind was keen. He appeared to be at least fifty years of age. Leaning against the rail, he grinned at Wheelock confidentially.

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"She'll make a short trip of it if this breeze holds," he said. "I guess you find things kind of different from what they were in the mail-boats?"

Jim Wheelock nodded as he pulled up a spoke of his wheel, for it was that difference that had brought the smile to his eyes. It was several years now since he had touched a vessel's wheel, or done more than raise a directing hand to the trimly uniformed quartermaster who controlled the big liner's steering engine. He was twenty-eight years of age, and held an extra-master's certificate, and he had just completed the year's training in a big British warship which gave him his commission as a lieutenant R.N.R. It was certainly a distinct change to figure as supernumerary on board the Canadian coasting schooner *Tyee*, but he did not resent the fact that it was the grizzled, hard-faced man leaning on the rail beside him who had brought him there.

"Aren't you going to get the main gaff-topsail on to her? We'll carry smooth water with us 'most across the Straits," he said.

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This was not to the purpose, as both of them felt, but it gave the other man the opening for which he had been looking.

"No," he replied, "I guess not. We'll feel the wind fresher when she draws out from the land, and there's a streak of dry rot in her mainmast round the partners. That stick was sound right through when we put it into her, but it has stood the wind and weather quite a while, and I guess it's getting shaky, like its owner."

Now, the redwood logs hewn in the British Columbian forest as a rule make excellent masts, but they naturally deteriorate with time, and in some of them there is hidden a latent cause of trouble which now and then leads to premature decay. Jimmy was aware of this, and fancied that he knew why his companion had reminded him of it. It was scarcely two hours since he had arrived on board the *Tyee*. He had made a long journey to join her, because his father's kinsman Prescott, her mate, had sent for him; and now, though he almost shrank from asking for the information, there were points on which it was necessary that the latter should enlighten him. He leaned on his wheel in silence a minute or two and the smile died out of his eyes. Prescott regarded him steadily.

Jim Wheelock, who hitherto had taken life lightly, could bear inspection, for he was a personable man, as more than one of the young women who traveled in the big liner of which he had been mate had decided, and he had seldom experienced much difficulty in finding a pretty partner at any of the dances given to the warship's officers. He had whimsical blue eyes, and, though he was Colonial-born, a face of the fair, clean-skinned English type, which had in it an occasional suggestion of latent force. He had a well-proportioned frame, and his life in the mail-boats, and the R.N.R. training, had set their stamp on him. Just then he was attired incongruously in an old skin-cap, battered gum-boots which reached to his knees, trousers showing signs of wear, and a steamboat mate's jacket with gilt buttons on it, in much the same condition; but, in spite of that, he did not appear the kind of man one would have expected to come upon steering a coasting schooner.

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"What do you think about my father, Bob?" he asked.

"What I said in the letter," the other man replied. "I guess you ought to understand it, now you've seen him. Tom's going to looard fast, 'most as fast"—and he seemed to search for a metaphor—"as a center-boarder when her board won't come down. It kind of struck me it was 'bout time you came home and looked after things and him. That's why I wrote you. He'd have never done it, anyway."

Jim Wheelock knew this was true. Prescott's letter, which had come to hand at Portsmouth just after he had finished his navy training, had somewhat startled him, and, as the result of it, he had forthwith started for Vancouver, traveling second-class and by Colonist car, as one does not gain very much financially by serving in the R.N.R. On arriving there he had been further startled by the change in his father whom he had last seen several years earlier when Tom Wheelock was, apparently, at least, beyond the reach of adversity as the owner of several small coasting vessels,

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one of which he insisted on sailing personally, though this had not seemed needful at the time. It was evident to Jimmy that he had been going to leeward very fast in several ways since then.

"Yes," he said, "that is a sure thing. When did the change begin? I mean, when did things first go wrong with him?"

"When he lost the *Fish-hawk*—that was 'most four years ago. Anyway, that was when I began to notice it. Then the cannery people put on their steamboat, and he couldn't keep the *Eagle* going without their trade. She lay ashore in a bad berth with a big load of Wellington coal in her, and it cost him about a thousand dollars before she was fit for sea again. Things were slack that season, and he gave Merrill a bond for the money. I guess that made the real trouble. Merrill's a mighty hard man, and he has been putting the screw on him."

Jim Wheelock looked thoughtful. "A thousand dollars isn't such a great deal of money, after all. The old man seemed to have plenty of it when I left home."

"Well," said Prescott dryly, "it's quite certain he hasn't got it now, and I've more than a notion that there's a big bond on the *Tyee*. Why did he bring your sister Ellen back from Toronto?"

Jim Wheelock did not know. He had, in fact, once or twice asked himself the same question without finding an answer. His sister Eleanor, who was an ambitious and capable young woman, was now earning a pittance by teaching at a ranch near New Westminster; but she had never given him any reason in her letters for abandoning the studies she had gone East to pursue in Toronto.

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"Anyway," said Prescott, "it's quite clear to me that your father needs a man with sense and snap to stand right behind him and see that he worries out of Merrill's clutches. I don't know whether you can do it—I can't—I'm no use at business. Tom and I were always honest. Then, supposing you can do that, you're 'bout half-way through with the thing."

"Only half-way?"

"'Bout that. Tom's been drifting to looard. You want to brace him sharp up on the wind again."

He broke off somewhat abruptly, for the scuttle slide in the deckhouse roof was flung back, and a man below lifted his head above it.

"Come right down and get your supper, Jimmy. Bob will take your wheel," he said.

Jimmy left the helm to Prescott, and with an effort he braced himself for the interview before him as he descended to the little stuffy cabin. It was dimly lighted by an oil-lamp that creaked as it swung, though the *Tyee* was ploughing her way westward steadily as yet. A little stove made it almost intolerably hot, and the swirl of brine beneath the lee quarter filled it with a sound that was like the rattle of sliding gravel. Jimmy sat down, and ate the pork, potatoes, fresh bread, and desiccated apples set before him, which he surmised might be considered somewhat of a banquet on board the *Tyee*, and then he took out his pipe and turned toward his father as he filled his pannikin again with strong green tea. He had arrived in Vancouver only that afternoon, and they had had no time for conversation in the hurry of getting to sea.

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"Take some whisky in it?" asked Tom Wheelock. "It's not much of a supper after what you've been used to on board the liners."

"No, thanks," said Jimmy. "I'm glad I didn't miss you."

"Got your wire," said Wheelock, who helped himself liberally to the whisky. "We weren't through with the loading until yesterday, and, though the folks want those sawmill fixings bad, I figured we could wait another twenty-four hours. It's good to see you sitting there; but I don't know yet what brought you over. It's quite a long way."

Jimmy spent some time in filling his pipe. He was a truthful person, and Prescott, who wrote the letter, had pledged him to secrecy; then, too, he was by no means certain that his father would appreciate what either of them had done, or would consider it in any way necessary. He also had scarcely got used to the change in his circumstances and surroundings, and did not feel quite at ease. On the last liner he sailed in, the officers dined in the saloon, and, though the battleship's wardroom was less luxurious, it was, at least, very different from the *Tyee's* quarter-cabin. Tin pannikins and plates of indurated ware lay on a soiled, uncovered table; a grimy brown blanket from the skipper's bunk trailed down across the locker that served as a settee; and the fish-oil lamp smelt horribly. Then he glanced at his father, who sat silent, sipping his tea, which was freely laced with whisky.

Tom Wheelock was by no means dressed as neatly as most of the Vancouver wharf-hands, and he looked like a man who had lost heart, and pride as well. He was gaunt and big-boned, with a seaman's weather-darkened face, but there was weariness and something that suggested vacancy in its expression. He and Jimmy had the same blue eyes, and they were kindly and honest in the case of each; but Tom Wheelock's were a trifle watery, and there was a certain bagginess under them, while his mouth was slack. In fact, the man, as his son recognized, appeared to have sunk into a state of limpness that was mental as well as physical.

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"Well," said Jimmy, with a little laugh, "I don't quite know. There were, you see, several reasons. To begin with, I had to come out of the mail-boat for my year's training, and when that was over there were a good many men on the Company's list to be worked off before they wanted me

again. Trade is slack over there, and it seemed wiser to await my turn. After all, it doesn't cost so much to come across second-class and Colonist; and I guessed you would be glad to see me."

"So I am;" and there was no doubt that Wheelock meant it. "I've been wanting you quite a while, Jimmy. Things aren't going well with me. Take some whisky?"

It was evident to Jimmy that his father already had taken as much as was good for most men; and he did not often shrink from a responsibility, that is, when he recognized it as such, which is now and then a little difficult when one is young.

"Well," he said, "this time I guess I will."

He took the bottle, and, after helping himself sparingly, contrived to slip it out of sight on the locker.

"How's Eleanor?" he asked.

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"Quite well; but though she has her mother's grit, life's hard on the girl. Ellen could have done 'most anything if she'd got her diplomas, or whatever they are, and I had figured I'd do something for one of my children when I sent her back East. It was your mother's brother—the brains come from that side of the family—did everything for you. A kind of pity you and he quarreled, Jimmy!"

Jimmy smiled drily as he remembered the year he had spent in Winnipeg with the grim business man before the call of the sea that he was born to listen to grew irresistible and the rupture came. Young as he was then, he had proved himself equal in strength of purpose to the hard old man, and had gone to sea in an English ship. It cost his father fifty pounds for his outfit and premium, and that was all that Tom Wheelock had done for him. He had made his own way into the steamers, and the extra-master certificate and the commission in the R.N.R. he owed to himself. Now it was evident that he must renounce all that they might bring him—at least, for a while.

"I don't think we ever would have hit it off together; and I can't help a fancy that, after all, he didn't blame me very much for taking my own way in spite of him," he said. "Still, it is a pity Eleanor had to come back. I suppose keeping her in Toronto was out of the question?"

Wheelock's eyes seemed to grow a trifle bloodshot, and his voice sank to a hoarser note. "Quite. I might have done it but for the bond I gave Merrill when the *Eagle* went ashore. It wasn't that big a one, but he fixed up quite a lot of things I never figured on. I was to insure to full value, and have her repaired whenever his surveyor considered she wanted it. Twice the man ran me up a big unnecessary bill, and I had to go to Merrill for the money. Now the boat's his, and there's a bond on the *Tyee*. When the old man goes under, you'll remember who it was squeezed the life out of him, Jimmy. Say, where d'you put that whisky?"

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"I'm not quite through with it yet;" and Jimmy, who did not pass it to him, smiled reassuringly. "Anyway, I wouldn't worry too much about Merrill. I've a few dollars laid by, and I'm going to stay right here and look after you. Bob Prescott tells me the Siwash wants to go ashore, and that makes a berth for me. It's scarcely likely the Company will want me for three months or more."

The old man looked at him with a gleam of comprehension in his watery eyes. "Jimmy," he said, "you have been a good son—and it wasn't quite my fault I never did anything for you. Your mother was often ailing, and when I sent her East twice to the specialists the freights I was getting would scarcely foot the bill. Oh, yes, things were generally tight with me. Now they're tight again; but when Merrill wants my blood you've come back to see it out with me."

He made a gesture of weariness. "Well, I guess I'll turn in. I've been trailing round the city most of the day after a man who owes me forty dollars—and I'm 'way from being as young as I used to be."

He climbed somewhat stiffly into his bunk, and Jimmy went up on deck. It was dark now, and the *Tyee*, leaning down until the foot of her lee bulwarks was almost in the foam, swept through the dark water with a leisurely dip and swing. A dim star or two hung over her mastheads, and the peak of the big gaff-topsail swung athwart them a little blacker than the night; but there was no shimmer of light on all the water, and the schooner swung out to westward, vague and shadowy, with one blurred shape gripping her straining wheel. It reminded Jimmy of the sailing-ship days when he had set his teeth and borne what came to him—wet and cold, utter weariness, want of sleep, purposeless exactions, and brutal hazing. Those black days had gone. He had lived through them, and had been about to reap his reward when the summons had come and he had gone back West to his duty. The broken-down man in the little cabin needed him, as Jimmy, who tried not to admit the greatness of the change in him, realized. Then he turned as Prescott spoke to him from the wheel.

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"Now you've had a talk to him, I guess you'll understand why I sent for you," he said. "You've got to take hold and straighten things. Tom's been letting go fast."

Jimmy Wheelock said nothing, but he knew that in the meanwhile he must put his career aside; and once more he set his lips and braced himself to face the task before him as he had done often in the sailing-ship days.

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CHAPTER II TO WINDWARD

Two days had slipped away since Jimmy joined the *Tyee*, when, with her dew-wet canvas slatting at every roll, she crept out from the narrow waters into the Pacific. Astern of her the Olympians towered high above the forests of Washington, a great serrated ridge of frosted silver that cut coldly white against the blue of the morning sky. To starboard the shore of Vancouver Island rose, a faint blur of misty pines, and ahead the sea was dimmed by drifting vapors out of which the long swell swung glassily. At times a wandering zephyr crisped it with a darker smear, and the *Tyee* crawled ahead a little. Then she stopped again, heaving her bows high out of the oily sea, while everything in her banged and rattled.

There was nothing that any one on board her could do but wait for the breeze and wonder whether it would come from the right direction. Jimmy sat on the deckhouse with his pipe in his hand, and Tom Wheelock, whose face looked careworn in the early light and showed pasty gray patches amidst its bronze, glanced westward a trifle anxiously as he held the jerking wheel.

"It's a kind of pity we lost that breeze," he said. "The people up yonder want those sawmill fixings, and with the wind from the east we'd 'most have fetched the Inlet to-night. There was talk of somebody putting a steamboat on, but the mill's a small one, and they figured they'd give me a show as long as I could keep them going. I've got to do it. There's a living in the contract."

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Then his face hardened suddenly, and he sighed. "That is, there would have been if Merrill hadn't got his grip on me. That man wants everything."

He appeared about to say something further, but just then Prescott flung the scuttle slide back, and a smell of coffee and frizzling pork flowed out of it.

"If you want your breakfast, Tom, I guess you'd better get it," he said, and lumbered round the deckhouse toward the wheel.

Wheelock went below, and Jimmy, who seemed to forget that he had meant to light his pipe, glanced thoughtfully at Prescott.

"Who is this Merrill, Bob?" he asked.

Prescott made a vague gesture. "I guess he's everything. He has a finger in most of what goes on in this Province, and feels round with it for the money. Calls himself general broker and ship-store dealer; but he has money in everything, from bush ranches to steamboats."

"You mean he holds stock in them?"

"No," said Prescott, "I guess I don't. I'm not smart at business, and Tom isn't either, or he'd never have let Merrill get his claws on him; but it's quite plain to me that stocks don't count along with mortgages and bonds. When you buy stock you take your chances, and quite often that's 'bout all; but when you hold a bond at a big interest you usually get the ship or mill. Anyway, that's how Merrill fixes it."

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Jimmy lighted his pipe, but he looked more thoughtful than ever, as, in fact, he was. Hitherto, he had taken life lightly, for, after all, wet and cold, screaming gale and stinging spray, are things one gets used to and faces unconcernedly; but Jimmy could recognize a responsibility, and he realized that there was now to be a change. Tom Wheelock was growing prematurely old and shaky, and it was, it seemed, his son's part to free him from the load of debt that was crushing him, if this by any means could be done; if not, at least to share it with him. He feared it would be the latter. Hitherto he had waged only the clean, primitive strife with the restless sea; but he did not shrink from the prospect of the meaner and more arduous conflict with the wiles of man and the forces of capital, or consider that in renouncing his career he was doing a commendable thing. He was by no means brilliant intellectually, though he had a certain shrewdness and a ready wit; and it only occurred to him that the course he had decided on was the obvious one. He did not even think it worth while to mention that he had done so, which indeed would have been unnecessary, since Prescott seemed to take it for granted.

"I believe you had the wind from the east for several days," he said. "Why didn't you run across before?"

"Well," replied Prescott reflectively, "we might have done so, but Tom didn't seem greatly stuck on trying it. Took time over his loading when he got your wire. Perhaps he didn't want to leave you hanging round Vancouver until we got back again."

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Jimmy said nothing—he had partly expected this; and while he smoked his second pipe, the vapors were rolled apart, and the breeze came down on them. Unfortunately it came from the northwest, which, as the sawmill they were bound for stood at the head of a deep inlet on the west coast of Vancouver Island, was ahead of them; so for a while they let her stretch out into the Pacific, close-hauled upon the starboard tack.

The *Tyee* was comparatively fast, and, under all the sail they could pile on to her, excepting the main gaff-topsail, she drove along with a wide curl of foam under her lee bow and the froth lapping high and white on her side. Then by degrees the long roll of the Pacific heaved itself up

into steep, blue-sided seas with tops of incandescent whiteness, and as she lurched over them the spray whirled in filmy clouds from her plunging bows. Still the breeze freshened, and by noon they hove her to with jibs aback while they hauled two reefs down in her mainsail, and it became necessary for somebody to crawl out to the end of its tilting boom, which stretched a good fathom beyond her stern. Prescott was a little too old for that work; Tom Wheelock held the wheel; and the Siwash deck-hand was busy forward. Jimmy laughed as he swung himself up to the footrope.

"It's several years since I've done anything of this kind, but I dare say I can tie those after-points in," he said.

He clawed his way out, and, as he hung with waist across the spar and both hands busy while the *Tyee*, flinging the spray all over her, plunged upon the long, foam-tipped roll, a big Empress liner came up from the eastward, white and majestic. She drove close by the schooner with a slow and stately dip and swing, and Jimmy Wheelock, clinging to the *Tyee's* reef-points, smiled somewhat curiously as he glanced up at her. Her tall side rose above him like a wall, and he saw the cluster of saloon passengers beneath the tier of deckhouses move toward the rail to gaze down upon the little dingy vessel, and the two trim officers high above them in the sunshine on the slanting bridge. That was his world—one in which steam did the hard work, and man merely pressed the telegraph handle or laid a finger on a spoke of the little steering wheel; but it was a world on which he had turned his back, and there was nothing to be gained by repining.

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He broke two of his nails before he finished his task and dropped from the footrope to the *Tyee's* deck, and the liner had sunk to a gleaming white blur and a smoke-trail on the rim of the sea before they had reefed the foresail and once more got way on her. Then Prescott grinned at Jimmy as he glanced toward the fading smear of vapor.

"A head-wind's quite a little matter to that boat," he said. "I guess you'd feel more at home on board of her?"

Jimmy laughed good-humoredly. "Perhaps I would, but after all I don't know that it counts for very much."

They came round some hours later, and, heading her in for the land on the other tack, found how little they had made to windward, whereupon there followed a consultation. Prescott was for running back and coming to an anchor in smooth water to wait for a shift of wind, but Wheelock would go on. He blinked at the white sea to windward with watery eyes, while the *Tyee*, putting her bows in, flung the spray all over her; but there was a certain grimness in Tom Wheelock's eyes, for, if he was not smart at business, he was at least a resolute seaman.

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"Those sawmill people want their fixings, and if we're to hold on to their contract I guess they've got to have them," he said. "She should thrash down to the Inlet by to-morrow night. I figure she'd go along a little easier without her staysail."

They hauled it down; but the *Tyee*, being loaded deep with heavy machinery, was not appreciably drier afterward, and by the time the angry, saffron sunset faded off the foam-crested sea, she put her bows in somewhat frequently. Then there was a thud as she charged a big comber, and the frothy cataract that seethed in over her weather rail swirled aft a foot deep, while the spray blew all over her. Jimmy, buttoned to the throat in oilskins, stood at her wheel dripping, through four hours of darkness; and then, crawling down into the little cabin, which was intolerably foul, flung himself into his bunk and incontinently fell asleep, with the thud and swish of falling water going on above him. When he awakened, his first proceeding was to grope for the button that would summon a steward boy to bring him his morning coffee, but as he could not find it he looked around and saw his wet oilskins, which had shaken off the hook, sliding amidst the water up and down the *Tyee's* cabin floor. Then he remembered suddenly, and, dropping from his bunk, put on the oilskins and went up on deck.

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A sheet of spray temporarily blinded him as he crawled out of the scuttle, and then there was little to be seen but a haze of it flying athwart a gray sea lined by frothy ridges and smears of low-driving cloud. The *Tyee's* slanted mastheads seemed to rake through the latter, and she was wet everywhere; but she was still hammering to windward with bows that swung up streaming over the long seas. On the one hand, a dingy smear, that might have been a point with pines on it, lifted itself out of the grayness, and Tom Wheelock pointed to it as he swayed with his wheel. His wet face was almost gray, and Jimmy could see the suggestive bagginess under his eyes.

"I guess we should fetch the Inlet by dark if it doesn't harden any more; but we'll have another reef down now you're up," he said.

They got the reef in with some difficulty, for all of them were needed to haul the leech-earing down; and, because the Siwash hand was a better boatman than sailor, Jimmy went out to the end of the boom again to tie the after-points. When he came back the *Tyee* proceeded a little more dryly, with the big gray seas that were topped with livid froth and had deep hollows between them rolling up in long succession to meet her. She went through some of them, for the sawmill machinery was a dead-weight in her, and a white cataract foamed across her forward. When she plunged into one that was larger than usual, Prescott, who now stood knee deep at her wheel, shook his head.

"Tom didn't ought to expect it of her," he said. "He wouldn't have held her at it if he hadn't been mighty afraid of losing that contract."

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Jimmy made no answer. He understood by this time how his father was circumstanced, and had discovered already that the man who stands between the devil and the deep sea cannot afford to be particular. Merrill, who held a bond on the *Tyee*, might, it seemed, very well stand for the devil.

They thrashed her to windward most of that day. The sea got worse, and there was not a dry stitch on any of them; but just at sunset the clouds were rent apart, and Wheelock, who was standing on the deckhouse, pointed to something that loomed amidst the vapor as they reeled inshore.

"The head!" he said. "The Inlet's about two miles beyond it."

Prescott glanced at Jimmy as he pulled up the wheel. "With a blame ugly tide-rip setting dead to windward across the mouth of it!"

Jimmy said nothing, though naturally he was aware that when the ocean streams run against the breeze they are very apt to pile up whatever sea there is into curling, hollow-crested combers. A craft of the *Tyee's* size will often snugly ride out a hard gale—that is, if she is hove-to under a strip or two of canvas; but to drive her to windward when she must meet the onslaught of the seas, and go through them, is an altogether different matter, and it seemed to him that she was already doing as much as any one reasonably could expect from her. Then his father came down from the deckhouse.

"Well," he said, "she has got to go through it; those people want their fixings. I guess we'll heave her round." [Pg 20]

The words were simple, but they implied a good deal. Wheelock could have heaved his schooner to, or could have run away for shelter in another inlet down the coast; but, as he had said, the sawmill people wanted their machinery, and when he must choose between it and the devil he would sooner face his ancient enemy the sea. Its attack was honest and open, and the man with nerve enough might meet and withstand the charge of its seething combers. Quickness of hand and rude, primitive valor counted here, but it was otherwise in the insidious conflict with the human schemer. Tom Wheelock's eyes were watery, but there was a snap in them as he signed to Prescott and laid his hands on the wheel.

"Get forward, Jimmy, and tend your head-sheets," he said. "We'll have her round."

She came round, but none too readily; and as they stretched out seaward Jimmy had a brief vision of great rocks and hollows filled with pines that opened out and closed on one another. Then as he glanced to windward he saw the seatops heave athwart a blaze of crimson and saffron low down under ragged wisps of cloud.

They brought her round again presently, and she reeled in shoreward to weather the second head on that side of the Inlet, with her little three-reefed mainsail wet to its peak and the two jibs above her bowsprit streaming at every plunge, while the big combers in the tideway smote her weather-bow and poured out to leeward in long wisps of brine. Still, she was slowly opening up the sheltered Inlet, and it was only a question whether she would go clear enough of the head on that tack. It was, however, a somewhat momentous question, for it seemed to Jimmy very doubtful whether she would come round with them again. [Pg 21]

Tom Wheelock stayed at the helm, and the head that had grown dim again lifted its vast rock wall higher and higher out of the whirling vapors that streamed amid the shadowy pines. It grew very close to them, but the *Tyee* was half-buried forward most of the time, and the break beyond the crag, where smooth water lay, had crept a little forward instead of aft from under her lee-bow when a comber higher than the rest hove itself up to weather, and fell upon her. It foamed across her forward, and when it went seething aft as she swung her bows up there was a crash, and Tom Wheelock loosed the spinning wheel.

Jimmy saw him strike the bulwark and Prescott clutch him; but, knowing that the plunge would probably make an end of the schooner if she rammed another sea, he sprang to the wheel. She was coming up when he seized it, which almost threw him over it, and there was a bang like a rifle-shot as one of her streaming jibs was blown away. The veins swelled on his forehead as he forced the helm up, and as the *Tyee* fell off on her course again he had a momentary vision of a great wall of rock that seemed to be creeping up on them. He also saw a man lying in the water that sluiced about her deck, while another who strove to hold him with one hand clung to a stanchion. Then, while he set his teeth and braced himself against the drag of the wheel, he could discern nothing but a haze of flying brine, and could feel the hard-pressed vessel strain and tremble under him. [Pg 22]

He did not know how long the tension lasted, nor for a minute or two did he see much of Prescott and his father; but at last the rocks seemed to slide away, and the *Tyee* drove through the furious turmoil in the mouth of the Inlet. Then the wind fell suddenly, and, rising upright, the dripping schooner slid forward beneath long ranks of misty pines. He left the helm to the Siwash, and Prescott and he between them got Wheelock down into the little cabin. He gasped when they had put him into his bunk and poured a liberal measure of raw whisky down his throat.

"Well," he said faintly, "I guess we've saved that contract. You weathered the head?"

"We did," answered Prescott. "Jimmy grabbed the wheel in time. Seems to me we had 'bout twenty fathoms to spare. Feel as if you'd broke anything inside you?"

Tom Wheelock moved himself a little, and groaned. "No," he said, "I guess I haven't; but it hurt me considerably when I washed up against the rail. Mightn't have felt it one time, but I'm getting old and shaky. Anyway, you can light out and get your anchor clear. I'm feeling kind of dizzy."

Prescott went up the ladder, but Jimmy stayed where he was, and did not go up on deck until his father's eyes closed. It was quite dark, and he could see only vague, shadowy mountains black against the sky. Presently, a long Siwash canoe with several men paddling hard on board her came sliding down the dim lane of water that seemed to wind into the heart of the forests. She stopped alongside, and a man climbed on board.

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"We've been expecting you the last two days, and I'm glad you got in now," he said. "Merril, who talks of running a steamer up this coast, has been worrying our Vancouver people to make him an offer for their carrying. It's quite likely they'd have made a deal with him if you'd kept us waiting."

They made the canoe fast, and the *Tyee* slowly crept on beneath the shadowy mountains and the misty pines, for only a faint air of wind disturbed the deep stillness here. Jim Wheelock, however, noticed very little as he leaned on the rail with a vindictive hatred in his heart for the man who, it seemed, was bent upon his father's ruin.

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CHAPTER III JIMMY MAKES FRIENDS

They had landed the machinery, and partly loaded the *Tyee* with dressed lumber, when Jimmy Wheelock, who was aching in every limb after a day's arduous toil, sat, cigar in hand, in the office of the sawmill manager. It was singularly untidy as well as unclean, for few men in that country have time to consider their comfort. Odd bottles of engine-oil and samples of belting lay amid the litter of sketches and specifications, while the plates and provision-cans on the table suggested that the manager and his guest had just finished their evening meal. The window was open wide, and a clean smell of freshly cut cedar drifted in with the aromatic fragrance of the pines. From where he sat Wheelock could see them rolling up the steep hillside with the white mists streaming athwart them, and the narrow lane of clear, green water winding past their feet. There was deep stillness among them, for the mill was silent at last, and it was only now and then that a voice rose faintly from the little wooden settlement which straggled up the riverside.

The manager, dressed in a store jacket and trousers of jean, lay upon what seemed to be a tool-chest, and he had, like Wheelock, a cigar of exceptional flavor in his hand. He was a young, dark-eyed man, somewhat spare of frame, and when he spoke, his quick, nervous gestures rather than his accent, which was by no means marked, proclaimed him an American of the Pacific Slope. It was characteristic that Wheelock, who had spent less than a week in his company, already felt on familiar terms with him. He had discovered that it is usually difficult to make the acquaintance of an insular Englishman in anything like that time.

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"Old man feeling any better this afternoon?" inquired his companion.

"He says so;" and Jimmy looked thoughtful, as he had done somewhat frequently of late, though this had not been a habit of his. "Still, he was flung rather heavily against the rail, and, though he insisted on working, I'm not quite satisfied about him."

The American nodded comprehendingly. "Parents are a responsibility now and then. I lost mine, though. Raised myself somehow down in Washington. Anyway, your father has been going down grade fast the two years I've known him, and I'm sorry. He's a straight man. I like him."

A trace of darker color crept into Jimmy's bronze, though he was aware that candor of that kind is usual on the Pacific Slope, and there was nothing he could resent in his companion's manner. However, he made no answer, and the American spoke again.

"I'm glad you got in on time. As I told Prescott, Merrill has a notion of going into the coasting trade, and wants our carrying. He has a pull on some of our stockholders, but I don't like the man, and you'll get our freight as long as you can keep us going. Why did you let the old man borrow that money from Merrill?"

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"I wasn't here. In fact, it's only a few weeks since I left an English ship at Portsmouth."

"Mail-boat?"

"No," said Jimmy; "a warship."

The American looked at him hard a moment, and then made a little gesture with the hand that held the cigar. He had seen Jimmy Wheelock carrying boards on his shoulder all that day, and now he was dressed in the Canadian wharf-hand's jean; but he had no difficulty in believing him.

"Lieutenant in your second fighting line? Came back to look after the old man?" he said. "Well, I

guess he needs you. You want to keep your eye on Merrill, too. If you don't, he'll have the schooner. It's a sure thing."

Jimmy realized, without knowing exactly why, that he could give this man, whom he had met only a few days ago, his confidence.

"The same thing has occurred to me," he said. "Do you mind telling me what you know about Merrill?"

"No; it's only what everybody else knows. Merrill's a machine for stamping money—out of anything. Got a ship-supply store in Vancouver, and is working himself into the general carrying business. Lends money on vessels, and fits them out. He'll give you a long credit, at a blame long interest, and by and by he gets the vessel, or a controlling share in her. He can't touch the express freight and passenger traffic—knows too much to kick against the C.P.R. or the big sound steamers; but there's the general freight for the mines, sawmills and canneries up and down the coast, and his vessels won't cost him much the way he buys them. The trade's going to be a big one. If I'd forty thousand dollars I'd buy a steamer." [Pg 27]

Jimmy's eyes twinkled. "A steamboat isn't a sawmill. Would you know how to run her?"

The American laughed. "If I didn't, I guess I could learn. It can't be harder than playing the fiddle, and I've worried into that."

He stopped a moment, and then announced quietly with the almost dramatic abruptness which usually characterized him: "Anyway we'd make something of it. I'd put you in command of her."

"I wonder what leads you to believe I would suit you?" said Jimmy reflectively.

His companion waved his cigar. "Saw you packing lumber. You stayed right with the contract, though you'd never done the thing before. Know what the first few days are—I've been there. Stacked two-inch planks in Washington when I was seventeen and my strength hadn't quite come to me, and went home at nights walking double, with every joint in my body aching. Then they started me log-wedging, and that's 'most enough to break a weak man's heart. Still, I stayed with it, and now I'm drawing royalties on my swing-frame and gang-saw patents, and hold stock in several mills!"

This was, perhaps, a trifle egotistical; but then it was, or would have been in most other countries, somewhat of an achievement for one, who had commenced with the lowest and most brutal labor, to make himself patentee, manager and stockholder, while still a very young man; and Jimmy had met mail-boat officers who gave themselves a good many airs on the strength of possessing a refined taste in uniform tailoring and a prepossessing personality. Individually, he felt it was more reasonable to be satisfied with one's ability to invent and run a mill. Just then, however, the door opened, and another man came in. He wore a blue shirt which fell open at the neck for want of buttons, and jean trousers which were very old and torn, and there were smears of oil and paint on his hands. [Pg 28]

"I came to ask when you are going to saw me those fir frames, Jordan?" he said.

"Take a cigar!" said the American, and turned to Jimmy, with a grin. "Ever heard of Thoreau who lived at Walden Pond?"

Jimmy had, as it happened, read his book on board one of the mail-boats, though he scarcely would have fancied that Jordan had done so. The latter indicated the newcomer with a wave of his hand.

"Well," he said, "that's another of them, though he lives in a yacht and his name is Valentine. There are men—and they're not all cranks—who seem to think the life most other people lead isn't good enough for them."

Valentine, who looked very different from any of the yachtsmen Jimmy had seen on the English coast or elsewhere, sat down, and the latter was a trifle astonished when he said, "That wasn't why Thoreau went to Walden. He was an abolitionist, and made Walden a station for running niggers into Canada. Anyway, why does a man want to go into business and slave to pile up money, when he can have the greatest thing in nature for nothing at all?"

"What's that?" asked Jordan. "It's not the young woman one may take a fancy to; she usually costs a good deal." [Pg 29]

Valentine laughed softly, and looked hard at Jimmy. "Though you earn your bread upon it, I think you know. There's nothing in this little world to compare with the sea!"

Then he stretched out his hand for the cigar-box. "I'll take two. It's the brand your directors use. Saw those frames to-morrow, or I'll come round and raise the roof for you. In the meanwhile, if you'll come along, Mr. Wheelock, I'll show you my boat."

Jordan grinned at Jimmy. "Better go along. You'll have to see her, anyway."

The two went out and left him, and as they paddled down the Inlet past the endless ranks of climbing pines whose aromatic odors were heavy in the dew-chilled air, Valentine glanced at his companion.

"This world was made good, except the cities; but nothing was made much better than that

smell," he said. "It doesn't put unrest and longing into you like the smell of the sea-grass and the sting of the powdered spray; there's tranquillity and sound sleep in it; and, too, it gives one comprehension."

This was not what Jimmy would have expected from his companion, but he understood. In that deep rift of the ranges where no wild wind ever entered, and the sunlight called up clean, healing savors from the solemn pines, one could realize that there was a beneficent purpose behind the scheme of things, and that the world was good. Still, Jimmy usually kept any fancies of that kind to himself.

"The introduction seems familiar," he said. "I almost fancy I have heard something very much like it before." [Pg 30]

"It's quite likely;" and Valentine laughed. "It has been said of several other things, including tobacco."

"You come here often?"

"Usually to refit. It's quiet and clean; and I like Jordan. He's a man with a mind, and straight, so far as it can be expected of any one in business."

"You don't follow any?"

Valentine smiled somewhat curiously. "I'm a pariah. I take toll of the deer and halibut instead of my fellow-men—that is, except when I charter the boat now and then. Still, it's only when money is scarce that I shoot and fish for the market. You see, I'm not in any sense of the word a yachtsman. I live at sea because I like it. The boat makes an economical home."

Jimmy felt that this was as much as he was intended to know, and he asked no more questions until presently they slid alongside a powerful cutter of some thirty tons, which lay moored with an anchor offshore and a breast-rope to the pines. Valentine took him into the little plainly fitted forecabin where he lived, and afterwards led him through the ornate saloon and white-enameled after-cabin. "That," he said, as they went up the ladder again, "is for the charterers, though I'm by no means sure the next lot will be pleased. It's a little difficult to get the smell of halibut out of her."

"You sail her alone?" asked Jimmy, who sat down on the skylights.

"Generally. Wages run high in this country. But I have to ship a man or two when any of the city people charter her. She's not so much of a handful when you get used to her." [Pg 31]

He did not seem to expect Jimmy to talk, and they sat silent a while, the latter smoking thoughtfully as he looked about him. It was growing dark, and the lower pines were wrapped in fleecy mist, out of which a rigid branch rose raggedly here and there; but the heights of the range still cut hard and sharp against the cold blueness of the evening sky. Westward, a soft smoky glow burned faintly behind a great hill shoulder, and, for no sound reached them from the little settlement, it was impressively still.

Jimmy felt the vague influence of the country creeping over him. It is a land of wild grandeur, empty for the most part as yet, though it is rich in coal and iron as well as in gold and silver, and its hillsides are draped with forests whose timber would supply the world. It is also, as he seemed to feel, for the bold man, a land of possibilities. Enterprise, and even labor, is worth a good deal there; and Jimmy felt that if his heart were stout enough such a land might have more to offer him than a mate's berth on a heavily mortgaged schooner. Jordan evidently believed that one might achieve affluence by making the requisite effort, and Jimmy considered himself equally as capable as the sawmiller. Still, as he sat there in the dewy stillness breathing the clean scent of the pines, he realized that there was also something to be said for his companion's attitude. He asked and strove for nothing, but was content to live and enjoy what was so bountifully given him. Perhaps Valentine guessed where his thoughts were leading him, for once more he broke into his little soft laugh. [Pg 32]

"One is as well off here as in the cities," he said. "Are you one of the hustlers like Jordan yonder?"

Though it was growing dark, Jimmy, disregarding the question, looked at him thoughtfully. "Do you know? Have you tried the other thing?"

"Oh, yes!" said Valentine, with a wry smile in his eyes. "I have tried them both, and that is one reason why I'm here. You haven't answered me; though, after all, I guess it's an unnecessary question."

This time Jimmy laughed. "I don't know that I have any option. It seems that a life of the kind Jordan leads will be forced on me. There are circumstances in which one's inclinations don't count for very much, you see. Anyway, it's almost time I turned in; I've been loading lumber since early morning."

Valentine got into the dory, and paddled him to the little wharf where the *Tyee* was lying.

"Come off again, and any time you see the boat along the coast I'll expect you on board," he said.

Jimmy climbed on board the schooner, and, descending to the little cabin, found his father lying propped up in his bunk. His eyes were more watery than ever, and when he spoke his voice was a trifle thick. The light of the fish-oil lamp projected his worn face blackly in gaunt profile on the

bulkhead.

"Been talking to Jordan? He's a man to make friends with," he said. "Guess he and the other young ones with blood and grit in them are going to set their mark on this country. It mayn't count against you if you leave the mail-boats, Jimmy. Manhood stands first here, though my day has gone. Perhaps I fooled my chances, or didn't see them when they came. But you're going to be smarter; you have red blood and brains."

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Jimmy said nothing. He had noticed already that Tom Wheelock had fallen into a habit of inconsequent rambling, and there were times when it pained him to listen. The old man, who did not seem to notice his silence, went on:

"You got them from your mother, as Eleanor has done. She died—and I'm often thankful—before the bad days came. Guess it would break her heart if she could see her husband now, a played-out, broken man, with a bond on which he can't pay the interest on his last vessel. Maybe things would have been different if she had lived. I was never smart at business—I am a sailorman—and it was your mother who showed me how to build the fleet up and save the money to buy each new boat. When you went to sea we had four of them. Now they're all gone. The last was the *Fish-hawk*, and she lies in six fathoms where she drove across the Qualyclot reef with her starboard bilge ground in."

"Merril doesn't own the *Tyee* yet," said Jimmy.

"No," said Wheelock drowsily; "but unless you know enough to stop him he's going to. You'll have nothing, Jimmy, when I'm gone; but you'll remember it was that man squeezed the blood out of me. Anyway, it won't be long. I'm played out, and kind of tired of it all. Couldn't worry through without your mother. Never was smart at business—I am a sailorman. It was she who made me boss of the Wheelock fleet, and now I guess she's waiting for the old and broken man."

His elbow slipped from under him, and, falling back, he lay inert and silent, with eyes that slowly closed, and his face showing very gaunt and unhealthily pallid in patches under the fish-oil lamp. There was no longer any suggestion of strength in it, for dejection had slackened his mental grip as indulgence had sapped the vigor of his body. Jimmy Wheelock, who remembered what his father had been, felt a haze creep across his eyes as he gazed at him, and then a sudden thrill of anger seemed to fill his blood with fire. Merrill, who held a bond on the *Tyee*, had, it seemed, a good deal to answer for.

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CHAPTER IV IN THE TOILS

It was a month later when Jimmy Wheelock stood leaning on the *Tyee's* rail one morning, while she lay alongside a sawmill wharf at Vancouver. The Siwash deck-hand had left them, and Jimmy, who had done his work, was very hot and grimy after trimming ballast in the hold. He and Prescott were waiting for another few loads of it, and expected that the *Tyee* would go to sea shortly after they got them. This, however, was by no means certain, since a surveyor had come on board a few days ago, and Tom Wheelock, who had been summoned to Merrill's office, had not yet come back.

It was then about eleven o'clock, and the broad Inlet sparkled in a blaze of sunshine, with a fresh breeze that came off from the black pine forests crisping it into little splashing ripples. Jimmy was glad of the chill of it on his dripping face, and as grateful for the respite from toil with the shovel, as he gazed at the climbing city. It rose with the dark pines creeping close up to it, ridged with mazy wires and towering poles, roof above roof, up the low rise, and the air was filled with the sound of its activity. A train of ponderous freight-cars rolled clanging along the wharf; a great locomotive with tolling bell was backing more cars in; and the scream of saws rang stridently through the clatter of the winches as Empress liner and sound steamer hove their cargo in. Jimmy Wheelock had, of course, gazed upon a similar scene in other ports, but there was, he seemed to feel, a difference here.

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In this new land the toiler was not bound by iron laws of caste and custom forever to his toil. The Mountain Province was awakening to a recognition of its wealth, and there was room in it and to spare for men with brains as well as men with muscle. There were forests to be cleared, roads to be built, and mine adits to be driven, and nobody troubled himself greatly about the antecedents of his hired hand. If the latter professed himself able to do what was required of him, he was, as they say in that country, given a show. Jimmy also knew that where all were ready to attempt the impossible, and toiled as, except in the New West, man has seldom toiled before, it was the English sailormen, runagates from their vessels, who had built the most perilous railroad trestles, and marched with the vanguard when the treasure-seekers pushed their way into the wilderness of rock and snow. He felt as he listened to the scream of the saws and the tolling of the locomotive bells that amid all that feverish activity there must be some scope for him, which was reassuring, since it was becoming clear that he would have to find some means of supporting

himself and his father before very long.

Then he looked around as Prescott, who touched his arm, pointed to a trim white cutter which was sliding through the flashing water with an inclined spire of sail above her and a swath of foam at her lee bow.

"I guess that's Valentine's *Sorata*," he said. "Got the biggest topsail on her, and she has a deck-plank in. If she'd only her lower canvas, most men would find her quite a big handful to sail alone. It's when he rounds up to his mooring the circus will begin."

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The *Sorata* came straight on toward them, close-hauled on the wind, until they could hear the hissing of the brine that swept a foot deep along her slanted deck; then there was a banging of canvas, and she swung as on a pivot, while a bent figure with its back against her tiller became furiously busy. Slanting sharply, she drove away on the other tack, and shot in with canvas shaking between a great four-masted ship and a steamer with white tiers of decks. Then her head-sails dropped, and she stopped with a big iron buoy which Valentine seized with his boat-hook close beneath her bowsprit. After that there was a rattle of chain, and Prescott made a gesture of approval.

"Smart," he said. "I guess there are not many men in this Province who could have brought her up in that berth without another hand on board."

Valentine appeared to see them, for he waved his hand; but the next minute Jimmy, who looked around, lost his interest in him, for Tom Wheelock was coming slowly across the wharf. He walked wearily, with head bent and dejection expressed in every languid movement. Prescott's face grew troubled as he glanced at him.

"I guess we're not going to sea to-day," he said. "Your father has more to carry than he can stand. That—Merril has been putting the screw on him."

Wheelock dropped somewhat heavily upon the *Tyee's* deck, and, though they looked at him questioningly, he said nothing to either of them as he made his way to the little after-cabin. When he reached it, he sat down and wiped his forehead before he poured himself out a stiff drink of whisky; then he made a little, hopeless gesture as he turned to Jimmy, who stood at the foot of the ladder with Prescott in the scuttle behind him.

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"You'll stop loading that ballast," he said. "I'm fixed this time. I guess Merrill has the ship. Carpenters to come on board to-morrow, and as far as I can figure, eight hundred dollars won't see them clear. Besides that, it's a sure thing we'll lose the coast mill contract."

Jimmy said nothing, but he set his lips tight, and Tom Wheelock had finished his whisky before he looked at him again. His eyes were half-closed, and he sat huddled and limp, with one hand trembling on his glass, a broken man.

"Carpenters will be here to-morrow. I guess there's no use stopping them—I've got to see the thing right out," he said. "Still, you can tell the boys we don't want that ballast. I feel kind of shaky, and I'm going to lie down. Not as strong as I used to be, Jimmy, and I haven't quite got over that thump I got against the rail."

Jimmy made a sign to Prescott and went up the ladder, and when he stood on deck the grizzled sailorman wondered at the change in him. There was no geniality in his blue eyes now, and his face was set and grim, for pity was struggling within him with a vindictive hatred of the man who had brought his father down. Tom Wheelock, it was evident, had been brought low in more ways than one.

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"If you'll see about that ballast, I'll go straight to Merrill's office. I want this thing made clear," he said.

"Well," advised Prescott, "I'd walk round a few blocks first; you want to simmer down before you talk to a man like that. Go slow, and get a round turn on your temper."

Jimmy, who made no answer, swung himself up on the wharf, and it was not until he had traversed part of the water-front that he remembered it might have been advisable to change his clothes. He was still clad in blue jean freely smeared with the red soil that he had been shoveling in the hold, and his face and hands were grimy and damp with perspiration. Still, that did not seem to matter greatly, since, after all, it was a costume quite in accordance with his station. The days when he had worn a naval uniform had passed.

Striding into an office in a great stone building, he accosted a clerk, who said that Mr. Merrill was busy, and then appeared to grow a trifle disconcerted under Jimmy's gaze. The latter smiled at him grimly.

"Then it's probably fortunate that I'm not busy at all," he said. "In fact, I'm quite prepared to stay here until this evening; and since there seems to be only one door to the place it will perhaps save Mr. Merrill inconvenience if he sees me now. You can explain that to him."

The clerk, who grinned at one of his companions, disappeared, and, coming back, ushered the insistent visitor into a sumptuously furnished office; and, when the door closed behind him, Jimmy was a little astonished to find himself as collected as he had ever been in his life. He was one of the men who do not quite realize their own capabilities until driven by necessity into strenuous action. An elderly gentleman with a pallid and somewhat expressionless face, dressed

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with a precision not altogether usual in that country, looked up at him.

"Well?" he said inquiringly.

Jimmy drew forward a chair, and sat down uninvited. "You know my name," he said. "I want to understand exactly why you are sending those carpenters on board the schooner?"

Merril looked at him gravely, but Jimmy did not appear to find his gaze in any way troublesome.

"I don't think you have anything to do with the matter," he said. "Still, out of courtesy——"

"No," interrupted Jimmy; "I'm not asking a favor, only anticipating things a little. It is, I am afraid, quite likely that I shall have to take over the schooner before very long."

"Then, in accordance with a clause in the agreement, the vessel must be kept in efficient repair to the satisfaction of a qualified surveyor. The man I sent down reports that she needs a new mast, decks relaid, and a good deal of new planking about her water-line. Your father has particulars."

"I suppose," said Jimmy very quietly, "there would be nothing gained by asking you to allow the repairs to stand over until we have brought down one or two more loads of lumber. I expect you know it will cost us the sawmill contract if we lay the schooner off now?"

Merril made a little gesture. "I'm afraid not. I can't afford to take the risk of having the schooner lost, to oblige you, and the fact that you may not carry out the sawmill contract naturally does not concern me."

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"Has it occurred to you that we might question your surveyor's report? Half the repairs are quite unnecessary, as you no doubt know. Why the man recommended them is, of course, a question I'm not going into, though it wouldn't be very difficult to hit on the reason. There are, however, other men of his profession in this city."

Again Merrill looked at him steadily, with a faint, sardonic gleam, which was more galling than anger, in his eyes. "You will, of course, do what you consider advisable, but if the repairs are not made I shall apply for an injunction to stop you from going to sea; and the law is somewhat costly. The redemption instalment and interest are overdue, and if your father has any money with him, one would fancy it would be more prudent for him to settle his obligations than to give it to the lawyers."

Jimmy realized that this was incontrovertible. Unless the arrears were paid within a fixed time, Merrill could foreclose on the vessel and sell her to somebody acting in concert with him, which was, no doubt, what he wished to do. There was, it seemed, no wriggling out of his grip; and, though he felt it would be useless, Jimmy resolved to appeal to his sense of fairness.

"So far as I can figure, you have been paid in interest and charges about forty cents on every dollar you lent; and you still hold a bond for the original amount," he said. "That would be enough to satisfy most men; and all we ask is a little time and consideration. You could let those repairs stand over, and could wait a while for your interest. It will most certainly be paid if we can keep hold of the sawmill contract."

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"I'm afraid you are wasting time;" and Merrill glanced at the papers before him. "There are several reasons which make it necessary for me to insist on your father's carrying out the conditions of his bond. He owes me a good deal of money now."

A hard glint crept into Jimmy's blue eyes, and there was a trace of hoarseness in his voice. "I want you to understand that it will crush him," he said. "He is an old and broken man, and you would lose nothing by a little clemency. I will take every dollar of his debts upon myself."

"I'm sorry, but it can't be helped," said Merrill, with a shrug of his shoulders which seemed to suggest that his patience was becoming exhausted. "The conditions laid down must be carried out."

Jimmy rose slowly. Every nerve in him tingled, though there was only the ominous scintillation in his eyes to indicate what he was feeling. Laying one hand on Merrill's desk, he looked down at him, and they faced each other so for, perhaps, half a minute. The man who held in his grasp many a small industry in that Province shrank inwardly beneath the sailor's gaze.

"Then," said Jimmy, with a slow forcefulness that was the more impressive because of the restraint he put upon himself, "you shall have your money, and everything else that is due you. If I live long enough—all—my father's debt will certainly be paid."

He went out; and Merrill, to whom an interview of this description was not exactly a novelty, was for once a little uneasy in his mind. There was a certain suggestion of steadfastness in the seafarer's manner that he did not like, and he felt that he could be relied on to keep his promise if the opportunity were afforded him. Still, the bondholder fancied it would not be insuperably difficult to contrive that the occasion did not arise.

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Next day the carpenters duly arrived on board the *Tyee*, and when they took possession there was nothing for any one else to do, which was partly why it happened that Jimmy sat smoking on the skylights of the *Sorata's* saloon one hot afternoon. He had told Valentine, who lay near him on the warm deck, part of his troubles. There was scarcely a breath of air, and the smoke of the big mills hung in a long trail above the oily Inlet and floated in a filmy cloud athwart the towering

piners. The tapping of the carpenters' mallets on board the *Tyee* came faintly across the water.

"It will be three weeks, anyway, before you get your new deck in, and it may be longer," said Valentine. "All the carpenters on this coast are going up to the new railroad trestles, where they're getting almost any price they ask. What are you going to do in the meanwhile?"

Jimmy said he did not know, and was sorry this was the case. He had discovered that board costs a good deal in that country, and while the *Tyee* was practically gutted it would be necessary to live ashore. Valentine appeared to ruminate, and then looked up at him.

"Well," he said reflectively, "I'm going up the coast, and I want an experienced skipper. That's easy, because I know too much about charterers to let them have my boat without taking me. Yachting's just becoming popular here. Next, there's to be a capable cook, and that could be contrived, because, although Louis is about the worst cook I know, they needn't find it out until we're well away to sea. The third man is the difficulty. He's to be warranted sober, reliable, and intelligent, since he may be required to take the young ladies out fishing in the dory. All to be civil and clean, and provided with suitable uniform. It's in the charter. They appear to be particular people."

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Jimmy laughed. "Evidently. Still, I don't quite see what it all has to do with me, since I'm not going. Where's the man you had when you took the last party?"

"On the wharf; he'll never come back again with me. He was a blue-water man, and one day he broke loose and got at the charterers' whisky. Tried to kiss one of the young ladies as he was carrying her on board the dory, and, though I threw him in afterward, her father made considerable unpleasantness over the thing."

He stopped a moment, and looked at Jimmy with a whimsical twinkle in his eyes. "Now, I don't know any reason why you shouldn't come if you feel like it. You seem reasonably sober, and I guess you could be civil. Charterers aren't quite so trying here as one would fancy they are in the Old Country. I've been there; but on the Pacific Slope we haven't yet branded the people who work as quite outside the pale. You could put on the steamboat jacket, and I've an old man-o'-war cap with gold letters on it. The man who left it on board the *Sorata* privately discharged himself from one of the Pacific squadron. It was a dark night, and he was almost drowned when I got him. Well, it would bring you twelve dollars a week, all found—it's what I'd have to pay another man—besides being a favor to me."

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Jimmy laughed outright. He had his cares just then, but he was, after all, a young man of somewhat whimsical temperament, and the prospect of the adventure appealed to him. The twelve dollars a week were more attractive still, since he had reasons for believing that the small sum he had brought with him to Vancouver would be badly wanted before very long, and while the *Tyee* lay idle he could not trench upon his father's scanty store.

"Well," he said, "it sounds a crazy kind of thing, but that is, perhaps, why it attracts me. I'll come."

Valentine smiled. "Then you'll come off early to-morrow, and try to remember you're a blue-water man who has hired out to me. You want to get yourself up kind of smartly. We'll go below and see what I've got. It's in the charter."

Half an hour later Jimmy was rowed ashore, and he walked back to the wharf where the *Tyee* was lying with, for the first time during several weeks, a smile in his eyes. It would be a relief to forget his troubles for a week or two, and his father would not need him in the meanwhile. Naturally he did not know that the crazy venture on which he had embarked was to have somewhat important results for him as well as for other people.

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CHAPTER V

VALENTINE'S PAID HAND

It was about five o'clock in the evening when Jimmy stood on the Vancouver wharf beside an express wagon, from which the teamster had just flung down what appeared to him an inordinate quantity of baggage. He was then attired in a steamboat officer's jacket, from which he had removed a row of buttons as well as the braid on the cuffs, an old pair of Valentine's white duck trousers carefully mended with sail-sewing twine, a pair of canvas shoes with a burst in one of them, and a somewhat dilapidated man-o'-war cap. In this get-up he expected to pass muster as a professional yacht-hand, though as yet there were very few men who followed that calling in Vancouver or Victoria. Had he been brought up in England he might have felt a little more uncomfortable than he did, but the average Westerner is troubled by no false pride, and is usually willing to earn the money he requires by any means available. Still, Jimmy was not altogether at ease, for he had, at least to some extent, become endued with his comrades' notions during the time he had spent in the mail-boats and the English warship.

A little farther up the wharf Valentine was talking to a gray-haired gentleman whose immaculate blue serge, level voice, and formal attitude seemed to stamp him as different from the men of the Pacific Slope, who have as a rule no time to waste in considering appearances. Two young ladies stood not very far away, and, though the breeze was no more than pleasantly cool, one of them was wrapped in a long cloak and shawl. Jimmy could not see the other very well because of the wagon, but when she moved across the wharf her lithe step and graceful carriage at least suggested vigorous health.

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By and by the rattle of a neighboring steamer's winch ceased suddenly, and he heard the voice of the elderly gentleman, who had been glancing in his direction.

"I suppose that is your man," he said, with a clear English intonation. "Couldn't you have got him up a little more smartly? That man-o'-war cap, for instance, is a little out of keeping with the rest of his things."

Jimmy saw Valentine's badly suppressed smile, and caught his answer. "He was in one of the warships, sir, and is a reliable man. I can warrant him civil and sober."

"Well," said the other, "we may as well go off while he brings down the baggage."

The party moved toward the *Sorata's* dory, and Jimmy was not exactly pleased when he found himself left to carry their baggage, which appeared to be unusually heavy, down a flight of awkward steps. It was not very long since he had stood beside a mail-boat's hatch, and merely raised a hand now and then while her deck-hands stowed the baggage under his direction; but he found something faintly humorous in the situation until, hampered by an awkward load, he lost his balance and fell down the steps. Still, he contrived to deposit the charterers' possessions at the water's edge, and when Valentine came back he packed them into the dory, and about fifteen minutes later staggered into the little white ladies' cabin on board the *Sorata* with a big trunk in his arms. One of the girls was busy unstrapping a valise, but the other looked around as he came in.

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"Put it there!" she said, with a swift glance at him, and then, though he noticed that apparently she had something in her hand, she seemed to change her mind and turned around again.

Jimmy went out backwards, with a faint warmth in his face, and when he had brought in the rest of the baggage he went up and assisted Louis, their third hand, to break out the anchor and get the *Sorata* under way. She was sliding out through the Narrows when he dropped through the scuttle into the forecabin, and found Valentine filling a tray.

"It's part of your business to carry the baggage," he said. "You want to remember they're particular people, and you're expected to make yourself generally useful and agreeable. Still, I guess there's no need to talk as you would in a mail-boat's saloon."

Jimmy took the tray, but, as it happened, the *Sorata* lurched on the wash from a passing steamer as he went through the sliding door in the bulk-head, and, plunging into the saloon with arms stretched out, he fell against the table. It was a moment or two before he partly recovered his equanimity, and then, as he looked about him, a hoarse laugh fell through the open skylights. To make things worse, he fancied that the elderly gentleman cast a suspicious glance at him, while he was quite sure that there was a twinkle in one of the young ladies' eyes. She leaned back somewhat wearily upon a locker cushion, and her face was thin and fragile; but her companion sat upright, and Jimmy saw that she also was regarding him. She was tall and somewhat large of frame, with a quiet face that had something patrician in it, and reposeful brown eyes. Jimmy fancied that she and the others must have heard the laugh above.

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"It's only that idiot Louis, sir," he said. "It's a habit he has. You'll hear him laugh to himself now and then when he's at the helm."

Then it occurred to him that he was speaking more familiarly than an Englishman would probably expect a yacht-hand to do, and, pulling himself up abruptly, he commenced to lay out the table and pour the coffee.

"You take sugar, miss?" he asked.

"She does," said the man dryly. "When a spoon is not available she prefers her own fingers."

The delicate girl laughed a little, and Jimmy felt his face grow warm, for he was conscious that her companion was watching him with quiet amusement; but he contrived to find the spoons he had forgotten, and when he was about to withdraw the girl with the brown eyes made a little sign.

"I suppose we are at liberty to read any of those books?" she asked, pointing to the hanging shelves. "They are the skipper's?"

Jimmy knew what she was thinking, because the works in question were by no means of the kind one would have expected a professional yacht-hirer to own or to appreciate. He also knew that the forecabin slide was open, and that Valentine was probably listening.

"Of course, miss," he said; "take any of them, if you can understand them. I think it's more than the skipper does. Still, he has a little education, and bought them cheap at book sales. They give a kind of tone to the boat."

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"I see," said the girl with the reposeful eyes, and Jimmy backed out in haste. He fancied a little ripple of musical laughter broke out after he had closed the forecastle slide. Then he glanced deprecatingly at Valentine, who did not appear by any means pleased with him.

"I didn't expect too much from you, but the last piece of gratuitous foolery might have been left out," he said. "Did you ever come across a yacht steward who took passengers into his confidence in the casual way you do?"

"No," said Jimmy candidly, "I don't think I ever did. Now, I don't in the least know what came over me, but I can't remember ever losing my head in quite the same way before. It must have been the way the girl with the brown eyes looked at me. In fact, she seemed to be looking right through me. Who is she?"

"Miss Merrill."

"Ah!" said Jimmy, a trifle sharply. "Still, it doesn't seem to be an unusual name in this country, and, after all, one couldn't hold her responsible for her father's doings—if she is the one I mean. It's quite possible they wouldn't please her if she were acquainted with them. In fact, it's distinctly probable."

"I wonder why you seem so sure of that? She is the one you mean."

"From her face. You couldn't expect a girl with a face like that to approve of anything that was not——"

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He saw Valentine's smile, and broke off abruptly. "Anyway, it doesn't matter in the least to either of us. What is she doing here, and who are the others?"

Valentine laughed. "I don't think I suggested that it did. The man is Austerly, of the Crown-land offices, and English, as you can see—one of the men with a family pull on somebody in authority in the Old Country. I believe he was a yacht-club commodore at home. The delicate girl's his daughter. Not enough blood in her—phthisis, too, I think—and it's quite likely she has been recommended a trip at sea. Miss Merrill is, I understand, a friend of hers, and she evidently knows something of yachting too."

"What do you know about phthisis?"

A shadow suddenly crept into Valentine's brown face. "Well," he said quietly, "as it happens, I do know a little too much."

Jimmy asked no more questions, but got his supper, and contrived to keep out of the passengers' way until about ten o'clock that night, when he sat at the helm as the *Sorata* fled westward before a fresh breeze. To port, and very high above her, a cold white line of snow gleamed ethereally under the full moon. A long roll tipped by flashing froth came up behind her, and she swung over it with the foam boiling at her bows and her boom well off, rolling so that her topsail which cut black against the moonlight swung wildly athwart the softly luminous blue.

Jimmy was watching a long sea sweep by and break into a ridge of gleaming froth, when Miss Merrill came out from the little companion and stood close beside him with the silvery light upon her. She had a soft wrap of some kind about her head and shoulders, and, though he could not at first see her face, the way the fleecy fabric hung emphasized her shapely figure.

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"I wonder whether you would let me steer?" she asked.

For a moment or two Jimmy hesitated. The *Sorata* was carrying a good deal of sail, and running rather wildly, while he knew that a very small blunder at the tiller would bring her big main-boom crashing over, the result of which might be disaster. Still, there was something in the girl's manner which, for no reason that he could think of, impressed him with confidence. He felt that she would not have asked him for the helm merely out of caprice, or unless she could steer.

"Well," he said, remembering he was supposed to be a yacht-hand, "we will see what kind of a show you make at it, miss. Take hold, and try to keep her bowsprit on the island. It's the little black smear in the moonlight yonder."

The girl apparently had no difficulty in doing it, though for a while he crouched upon the side-deck with a brown hand close beside the ones she laid on the tiller. Then as, feeling reassured, he relaxed his grasp, she appeared to indicate her hands with a glance.

"They are really stronger than you seem to think," she said, "and I have sailed a yacht before."

Jimmy laughed. "I only thought they were very pretty."

The girl looked around at him a moment, without indignation, but with a grave inquiry in her eyes which Jimmy, who suddenly remembered the rôle he was expected to play, found curiously disconcerting.

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"What made you say that?" she asked.

"I really don't know;" and Jimmy had sense enough not to make matters worse by admitting that he had said anything unusual. "It seemed to come to me naturally. Perhaps it was because they—are—pretty."

This time Miss Merrill laughed. "Well," she said, "I should just as soon they were capable. But

don't you think she would steer easier with the sheet slacked off a foot or two?"

Jimmy had thought so already, but while he let the sheet run around a cleat he asked himself whether this was intended as a tactful reminder that he was merely expected to do what was necessary on board the vessel. On the whole he did not think it was. One has, after all, a certain license at sea; and though he had naturally met young ladies on board the mail-boats who apparently found pleasure in treating every man not exactly of their own station with frigid discourtesy, he fancied that Miss Merrill differed from them. However, he sat silent and out of the way upon the *Sorata's* counter, until presently a lordly, four-masted ship swept up out of the soft blueness of the night.

She crossed the *Sorata's* bows, braced up on the wind, and, for she carried American cotton sailcloth, she gleamed majestically white, with four great spires of slanted canvas tapering from the great arch of her courses to the little royals that swayed high up athwart the blue above a long line of dusky hull. It was hove up on the side nearest the *Sorata*, and the sea frothed white beneath her bows, which piled it high in a filmy, flashing cloud. Miss Merrill could hear the roar of parted water, and, as the great vessel drove by, the refrain of a sighing chantey that fell amidst a sharp clanking from the black figures on her spray-drenched forecandle.

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"Ah!" she said, "that is a picture to remember. I wonder what those men have undergone, and where they come from?"

Jimmy smiled, presuming that she was addressing him, though he could not be sure of it.

"Well," he said, "I should fancy they have borne 'most everything that a man could be expected to face, except want of food, while they thrashed her round the Horn. She's American, and, if they drive men hard on board their ships, they at least usually feed them well."

"You know what they have done?"

Jimmy laughed, and forgot his man-o'-war cap as he saw that she was interested. "I believe I do. They've crawled out on those long topsail yards probably once every watch by night and day, clawing at thundering folds of hard, drenched canvas, while the ship lay with her rail in the water when the Cape Horn squalls came down thick with blinding snow. Then they've crawled down with bleeding hands and broken nails, and flung themselves, in their dripping oilskins, into a soddened bunk to snatch a couple of hours' sleep before they were roused to get sail on her again. They have lived for days on cold provisions soaked in brine when the galley fire was drowned out, and it is very likely have not stripped a long boot off for a week. She carries a high rail, but the icy sea that chilled them to the bone has poured across it at every roll."

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"Ah!" said the girl; "going west it would be to windward. In one way it's almost an epic. I suppose it's always more or less like that?"

"Yes," said Jimmy; "one of the epics nobody has ever written, perhaps because nobody really could. There are a good many of them. As you say, when one has to fight to windward, things generally happen more or less that way."

Miss Merrill turned and looked at him as he sat on the *Sorata's* counter in the navy cap, and a smile crept into her eyes.

"Still," she said, "perhaps it is, after all, worth while to face them."

They both remembered that afterward, but in the meanwhile it did not strike Jimmy as in any way incongruous that she should talk to him in such a fashion or credit him with more comprehension than one would expect from a professional yacht-hand.

"I don't know," he said simply. "One's heart is apt to fail when one looks forward and sees only the snow-squalls to drive one back to leeward, and the steep head seas."

Then he stood up suddenly with a little laugh as Louis came slouching aft from the forecandle scuttle.

"I'm relieved, and I had better see whether they want anything in the saloon," he said.

It appeared that they wanted nothing, and when he crawled into the forecandle Valentine looked at him with evident curiosity.

"You had apparently a good deal to say to Miss Merrill," he observed. "Might one ask what you found to talk about?"

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"The last topic was whether it is worth while to hang on and fight one's way to windward when the outlook is black. If I understood her correctly, she seems to believe it is."

Valentine grinned sardonically. "Did you discuss it like a German philosopher, or as a forecandle hand? I suppose it never struck you that it's rather an unusual subject for a yachting roustabout to go into with a young lady passenger?"

"It is," agreed Jimmy, making a little deprecatory gesture. "I'm afraid I didn't remember that before; but it probably doesn't matter, since it's hardly likely that she did either."

His comrade looked at him, and shook his head. "You can believe that—at your age?" he said. "My dear man, a young woman of Miss Merrill's intelligence would notice anything that wasn't quite in

character the moment you said it. Still, that is your affair. It's the other one I'm worrying about."

"The other one?"

"Miss Austerly. The girl's very sick—probably worse than her father realizes—and it's rather on my conscience that I told them that Louis could cook. Anyway, if this breeze holds we'll bring up off Victoria early to-morrow, and though we're not going in, I'll slip ashore before breakfast and see what one can pick up at the stores."

Jimmy asked him no more questions, but crept into his bunk. About nine o'clock on the morrow, when the *Sorata* was lying in a bight on the south coast of Vancouver Island, he was aroused by the dory bumping alongside, and he went out on deck. It was then raining hard, and all he could see was a stretch of gray sea and a strip of dripping boulder beach on which a little white surf was breaking. There was a good deal of water in the dory, and Valentine's oilskins were dripping when he climbed out of her with several packages under his arm. Stores open early in that country.

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"Now," he said, "you can bail her out, and come down in half an hour when I've fixed up a breakfast that any one could eat."

Jimmy did so, but it was with some little diffidence that he carried the tray into the saloon. It occurred to him that Miss Merrill might regret that she had unbent so far the previous night, and he wondered uneasily whether he had ventured further than was advisable. He was also conscious for the first time that the repairs Valentine had made in his garments were less artistic than evident. The girl, however, looked up with a smile, which might have meant anything, and afterward confined her attention to the articles he was laying on the table. There were Chinese preserved dainties and fruit from California, as well as the ordinary fare.

"An unusually good breakfast," said Austerly. "Does your skipper always treat his charterers so well?"

"Yes, sir," said Jimmy. "That is, when he can. You see, he couldn't get these things in Vancouver; there isn't the same demand for them as there is in the capital."

Austerly did not appear altogether satisfied with the ingenious explanation, but he said nothing further. Indeed, he was not a man who said very much on any occasion; and while he commenced his breakfast Miss Merrill looked at Jimmy with her little disconcerting smile. Still, there was no malice in it.

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She was as fresh that morning as when she came off the previous evening, though both Austerly and his daughter appeared a trifle the worse for the night's run. Miss Merrill was wholly unostentatious in speech or bearing, and there was a certain gracious tranquillity about her which suggested latent vigor instead of languidness. She was then, he decided tolerably correctly, in her twenty-fifth year, brown-haired and brown-eyed, with broad, low forehead, unusually straight brows, and, in spite of her smile, a curiously steady gaze. Her face was a full oval, her mouth by no means small, and, while he had seen women of a somewhat similar type whose vigor was tinged with coarseness or a hint of sensuality, there was about this girl a certain daintiness of thought and speech, and a quiet dignity. What she said was, however, sufficiently prosaic.

"I presume that means he went to Victoria for the extra stores this morning; but how did he get there? It must be some distance, from what I know of the coast, and he would have a head-wind all the way back."

"He walked," said Jimmy. "It's necessary for him. One doesn't get very much exercise of that kind at sea. In fact, he walks miles whenever he can."

Miss Austerly appeared a trifle astonished, and her father looked up from his coffee.

"It's a trifle difficult to understand how he manages it," he said. "One would consider the *Sorata* forty feet long."

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Jimmy felt Miss Merrill's gaze upon him, and, as had happened before, his ingenuity failed him. Her smile vaguely suggested comprehension, and, for no ostensible reason, that disturbed him. He also saw Louis grinning down at him through the skylights.

"Sugar, sir?" he said; and this was so evidently an inspiration that Miss Austerly laughed, and when her father said that he had been offered it twice already, Jimmy went out with all the haste available. He closed the fore-castle slide somewhat noisily, and then sat down and frowned at Valentine.

"Well?" said the latter dryly. "Been making an exhibition of yourself again?"

"I'm afraid I have," said Jimmy. "If it happens another time you can carry the things in yourself and see how nice it is. Still, I don't quite know why I lost my head. I have naturally met quite a few young ladies in my time. I suppose it's wearing that confounded cap and these more confounded clothes."

He kicked one foot out, and disgustedly contemplated a burst white shoe, while the duck trousers cracked. Valentine leaned back against the bulkhead and laughed.

"Don't be rash, or they'll split; and the jacket's opening at a seam," he said. "It's rather a pity a

man can't rise above his clothes. Anyway, you may as well give Louis a hand to get the mainsail on to her. As soon as they've finished breakfast we'll break out the anchor."

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CHAPTER VI

A VISION OF THE SEA

There was rain and thick weather for several days, during which the *Sorata* crept northward slowly along the wild West Vancouver coast. Austerly, it appeared, had business with an Indian agent who lived up an inlet near which the restless white prospectors were encroaching on a Siwash reserve. The boat was wet and clammy everywhere, though a bark fire burned in the little saloon stove. Miss Austerly lay for the most part silent on the leeward settee with a certain wistful patience in her hollow face which roused Jimmy's compassion. He noticed that Valentine's voice was gentler than usual when he mentioned her, and wondered why it was so, though his comrade did not favor him with an adequate explanation then or afterward.

At last one afternoon the drizzle ceased, and, during most of it, Miss Merrill sat at the tiller with Jimmy's oilskin jacket round her shoulders to shield her from the spray, while the *Sorata* drove northward, close-hauled, across the long gray roll of the Pacific which was tipped with livid foam. Sometimes she swung over it, with dripping jib hove high, but at least as often she dipped her bows in the creaming froth and flung the brine aft in showers, while all the time the half-seen shore unrolled itself to starboard in a majestic panorama.

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Great surf-lapped rocks rose out of the grayness, and were lost in it again; forests athwart which the vapors streamed in smoky wisps rolled by; and at times there were brief entrancing visions of a towering range, phantoms of mountains that vanished and appeared again. There was water on the lee-deck; showers of it drove into the drenched mainsail's luff; but still Miss Merrill sat at the tiller with her damp hair blown about her forehead, a patch of carmine in her cheeks, and a gleam in her eyes. She seemed, as she swung with the plunging fabric when the counter rose streaming high above the froth that swept astern, wholly in harmony with the motive of the scene; and at this Jimmy wondered a little now and then, though he discovered afterward that Anthea Merrill almost invariably fitted herself to her surroundings. There are men and women with that capacity, which is, perhaps, born of comprehension and sympathy.

Her grasp was firm and steady on the straining helm, her gaze quick to notice each gray comber that broke as it came down on them; but, when he looked at her, Jimmy saw in her eyes something deeper than the thrill of the encounter with the winds of heaven and the restless sea. He could find no fitting name for it. It eluded definition, but it had its effect; and he felt that a man might go far and do more than thrash a yacht to windward with such a companion, though he also realized that this was, after all, no concern of his. Apart from that, her quiet courage and readiness were noticeable, though it was, perhaps, her understanding that appealed most to him. Anthea Merrill never asked an unnecessary question. She seemed able to grasp one's thoughts and motives in a fashion that set those with whom she conversed at their ease, and when in her company Jimmy usually forgot his yacht-hand's garments and the man-o'-war cap.

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It was toward sunset that evening, and Miss Austerly was sitting well wrapped up on a locker in the cockpit, when the vapor melted and was blown away, as not infrequently happens about that time at sea. The dingy clouds that veiled the sky were rent, and a blaze of weird, coppery radiance smote the tumbling seas, which changed under it to smears of incandescent whiteness with ruddy gleams in them, and ridges of flashing green. It was sudden and bewildering, impelling one to hold one's breath. But a more glorious pageant leaped out of the dimness over the starboard hand. Walls of rock that burned with many colors sprang into being, with somber pines streaming upward behind them, and far aloft there were lifted gleaming heights of never-trodden snow whose stainless purity was intensified by their gray and turquoise shadows.

The vision was vouchsafed them, steeped in an immaterial splendor, for perhaps five minutes, and then it faded as though it had never been. Miss Austerly, who had gazed at it rapt and eager-eyed, drew in her breath.

"Ah!" she said; "if it was only to see that, I am glad I came—it may be the last time."

Jimmy, who was sitting on the skylights, saw the apprehension in Anthea Merrill's eyes as she glanced down for a moment into the fragile face of her companion, and he fancied that Valentine did so too; but the girl smiled wistfully.

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"Still," she said, "it is a good deal to have seen the glory of this world, and one would almost fancy that other one—where the sea is glassy—could not be much more beautiful."

There was a hint of reproach in Anthea Merrill's quiet voice, which reached Jimmy.

"Nellie," she said, "you have morbid fancies now and then. We brought you on this trip to make you cheerful and strong."

The sick girl smiled again, and the pallor of her fragile face intensified the faint shining of her eyes. "I think you know that I shall never get strong again, and, after all, why should I wish to stay here when I may leave my pains and weaknesses behind me? You can't understand that. You have the vigor of the sea in you—and the world before you."

It apparently occurred to Valentine that he was hearing too much, for he stood up, swaying while the *Sorata* plunged, and called to Austerly through one of the open skylights of the saloon.

"We'll have the breeze down on us twice as hard in a few minutes, sir, and there's an inlet we could lie snug in not far astern," he said. "It's quite likely we might come across a Siwash or two who would pole you up the river at the head of the inlet to within easy reach of the agent's place, to-morrow."

"Very well!" said Austerly; "you can run her away."

It appeared advisable, for the *Sorata* buried her bows in a smother of frothing brine and dipped her lee-deck deep, as a blast swept down. Valentine glanced at Miss Merrill somewhat dubiously. [Pg 64]

"Do you think you could jibe her all standing?" he asked.

Jimmy almost expected Anthea Merrill to say that she could not, for, unless the helmsman is skilful, when a cutter-rigged craft is brought round, stern to a fresh breeze, her great mainsail with the ponderous boom along the foot of it is apt to swing over with disastrous violence. There was, however, no hesitation in the girl's face, and Valentine made a little gesture that implied rather more than resignation.

"When you're ready!" he said. "Stand by, Jimmy!"

They laid hands on the hard, wet sheet, and, while the girl swayed with the helm, and the *Sorata* came round, stern to sea, dragged the big mainboom in foot by foot until it hung over them, lifting, with the great bellying sail ready to swing. Then, though nobody knew quite how it happened, Jimmy got a loose turn of the rope about his arm as a sea washed in across the counter. In another second or two the boom would swing over, and it seemed very probable that his arm would at least be broken. While the tightening hemp ground into his flesh, he saw the color ebb in Valentine's face, and then the girl's voice reached him sharp and insistent.

"Now!" was all she said.

The *Sorata's* bows swung a trifle further, and no more. The boom went up with a jerk, and, while the blood started from Jimmy's compressed arm, came down again. For a second the turn of rope slackened, and he shook it clear. Then the sheet whirred through the quarter-blocks as the great sail swung over, and the *Sorata* rolled until one side of her was deep in the foam. She shook herself out of it, and Jimmy, who forgot the man-o'-war cap and what he was supposed to be, saw the girl's eyes fixed on him with a faint smile in them, and made her a little inclination. He felt that she was asking him a question. [Pg 65]

"Thank you!" he said simply. "I don't think I was unduly frightened. I seemed to know you would not fail me."

Anthea Merrill made no answer, but a slight flush crept into her cheek. She was very human, and it was in one sense an eloquent compliment. Then Jimmy went forward to haul the staysail down, though he found he had to do it with one hand, and he was kept busy until he went down with Valentine into the little fore-castle, when the *Sorata* lay snug in a strip of still green water close beneath the dusky pines. Louis had just gone ashore with the dory to gather bark for fuel, and, for the scuttle was open, they could hear the splash of his oars through the deep stillness that was emphasized by the murmur of falling water. Valentine sat on a locker with the lamplight on his bronzed face, which was a trifle grave.

"Rain again, and I'd sooner lose my next charter than have bad weather now," he said.

"Why?" asked Jimmy.

His comrade made a sign of impatience. "Didn't you hear what that girl said—it was the last time? She knew that she was right, too, though it's probably only natural that her father wouldn't believe it. A last treat she's getting—and she's as fond of the sea as I am, or you are either." [Pg 66]

Jimmy did not know why he smiled, but perhaps it was because he was stirred a little and did not wish to show it. In any case, Valentine frowned at him.

"Oh, yes," he said, "I know. It's a dog's life, and other things; but you wouldn't quit it, anyway, and that's not the question. Can't you understand what that sickly girl's life has been, with all that other women might expect to have denied her?"

There was a certain hoarse insistence in Valentine's inquiry, from which it seemed to Jimmy, who had noticed the solicitude with which he had endeavored to minister in every way to the comfort or pleasure of their delicate passenger, that his companion had some special reason for understanding what the girl's lot had been.

"Well," he said reflectively, "one would suppose that to be born foredoomed is hard upon such as Miss Austerly."

Valentine made a little abrupt gesture. "It's evident they once had a yacht of their own. Any one

could see how fond of it she is; and I'm taking her father's money—he hasn't too much of it—like a—moneylender that she may have a last taste of the one thing she can take pleasure in. Lord, when one has so much for nothing, what selfish hogs we are!"

"It can't be helped, anyway. You couldn't offer a favor to a man like Austerly."

"No;" and Valentine frowned. "He's a man with all the condemned prejudices of his class, and he would, naturally, sooner see his daughter's one wish ungratified. After all, women now and then rate the value of things more justly than we do. There's Miss Merrill who came with them, and somehow it was she who brought this trip about. She has her pride, full measure of it, but she has sense as well, sense of proportion, and if we had only her to deal with we'd let every other charter slide and go south to-morrow to find the summer."

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Jimmy was not in the least astonished. He had, of course, listened to a certain amount of fore-castle ribaldry, though, after all, conversation and badinage of that nature is, at least, as frequent in a mail-boat's smoking-room; but he knew the ways of his fellows, and it seemed a very natural thing to him that Valentine the pariah should in his own fashion reveal these depths of chivalrous compassion. He had seen hard-handed men of coarse fiber do many a gentle deed with a curse on their lips that was probably worth a good deal more than a conventional platitude. Still, it would have been wholly extraordinary if he had mentioned anything of this.

"One would fancy Miss Merrill has a good deal of character," he said.

"Too much for the man she marries, if there's anything small and mean in him. That's a girl with a capacity for doing more than sail a boat to windward well, and she will probably expect a good deal. In one way there's something humorous in the fact that her father is one of the ----est rogues in this Province, though there are naturally a good many people who look up to him. Of course, she isn't aware of it yet. Brought up back East, I believe, and somebody told me she had lived a good deal with her mother's people. It probably means trouble for her when she understands the reality."

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He rose with a little shrug of his shoulders. "I'm talking like an old woman, and these things have nothing to do with us. We have our wet watches to keep at sea, and perhaps we are better off than the rest of them because that is all. You can turn in if you want to; I'll wait for Louis."

Five minutes later Jimmy crawled into his bunk, and fell fast asleep. When he awakened, he found that the day had broken still and sunny. There was a Siwash ran-cherie a mile or two up the Inlet, and when an Indian had been found who would carry a message through the forest, Austerly, who never forgot what was due to a Crown-land official, decided to stay where he was and allow the agent to visit him. He was not in any way an active man, and appeared quite content to sit in the cockpit reading, when Valentine, who had procured a Siwash river canoe—a long, light shell of cedar with some two feet beam—offered to take his daughter up the Inlet to see the ran-cherie. Miss Austerly was pleased to go with him, and Anthea Merrill, who watched the knife-edge craft slide away, turned to Jimmy.

"If you will get the trolling-spoon I will go fishing," she said.

"Yes, miss," said Jimmy, touching his cap—a thing that is very seldom done in Western Canada. Hauling the dory alongside, he handed her into it. Then he dipped the oars, and they slid slowly up the Inlet with the silver and vermilion spoon trailing astern. He had laid Valentine's shot-gun across the thwarts.

The lane of clear green water was, perhaps, two hundred yards wide, and the stately pines which shroud all that lonely coast rose in somber ranks on either side, distilling their drowsy fragrance as their motionless needles dried in the sun. There was not a sound when the splash of Valentine's paddle died away, and Jimmy dipped his oars leisurely, now and then venturing a glance at his companion. It seemed to him that the big white hat she wore became her wonderfully well, and it is possible that she guessed as much and did not resent it, for Jimmy was, after all, a personable man.

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"Your skipper is very good to Nellie Austerly," she said. "I am rather pleased with him because of it. There are, naturally, not many things in which she can take any great interest."

"I suppose," said Jimmy reflectively, "there are people who would consider it good of him, but, in one way, it really isn't. It doesn't cost him anything, and he can't help it. That man would do what he could for anybody who didn't want to take advantage of him. What's more, he would do it almost without realizing what he was about."

"Do you know why he lives as he does at sea?"

"I don't. Probably because he likes it."

Anthea Merrill smiled. "Is that all? It has not occurred to you that there is, perhaps, a reason why he and Nellie Austerly understand each other?"

"Both fond of the sea?"

"That mightn't go far enough. Nellie has had to give up so much, or rather it has been taken away from her. You can understand that?"

Jimmy nodded assent. It had already occurred to him that his comrade was a man who had lost

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something he greatly valued, and it did not appear incongruous that Miss Merrill should be speaking in this familiar fashion to him. In fact, she frequently contrived to make him forget that he was Valentine's hired hand and wore the man-o'-war cap.

"What would a boat like the *Sorata* cost to build?" she asked.

"Perhaps four thousand dollars in this country."

"Ah!" said the girl; "and with that sum one could probably set up a store, buy one of the little sawmills near a rising settlement, or start on one of the other paths that are supposed to lead to affluence."

Jimmy laughed. "Supposing he owned the big Hastings mill, what more could it offer a man with his views? As he will tell you, he gets what he likes almost for nothing. He may be right, too. After all, it is clean dirt one has to eat at sea."

"There are not many men who could live as he does; the rest would go to pieces. And isn't it rather shirking a responsibility?"

"You mean that one ought to make money?"

"I think one ought to take one's part in the struggle that is going to make this the greatest Province in the Dominion; but not exactly for that reason." Then Miss Merrill apparently decided to change the subject. "You had a good halibut season?"

Jimmy saw the twinkle in her eyes, and understood it. "I hadn't. I'm afraid I wouldn't know a halibut when I saw it. There are, one believes, plenty of them, but so far very few people go fishing."

"Then you were probably killing the Americans' seals?"

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"I wasn't. I am, I may mention, mate on board a lumber-carrying schooner."

His companion's nod might have meant anything. "I fancied," she said, "you had not gone to sea very often as a yacht-hand."

Jimmy, who was uncertain what she wished him to understand, pulled on leisurely, until, as they crept along the shore, a widening ripple that spread from beyond a point caught his eye, and, laying down the oars, he reached for the gun.

"I was told to bring back a duck for Miss Austerly if I could," he said. "You don't mind?"

Anthea Merrill made a sign of indifference, and the dory slid on, until, as they opened up a little bay, Jimmy flung up the gun, for a slowly moving object swam in the midst of it. Then he felt a hand on his arm, and a voice said sharply, "Put it down!"

Jimmy did so before he saw the reason, and it was a moment later when he noticed a string of little fluffy bodies stretched out from the shore. The mother bird paddled toward them, and, disregarding her own danger, strove to drive them back among the boulders. Then he saw the curious gleam that was half anger and half compassion in his companion's eyes, and felt his face grow a trifle hot.

"I didn't know," he said. "It must be an unusually late brood. I never noticed them. I shouldn't like you to think I did."

"Open the gun, and take out the cartridges!" ordered his companion.

"Very well, miss," said Jimmy, who could not resist the impulse of adding, with a whimsical twinkle in his eyes: "Shall I take off the trolling-spoon?"

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Anthea Merrill laughed. "No," she said. "Still, I can't complain of the suggestion. Head out from shore, and row faster."

Jimmy said nothing further, but busied himself with his oars. He had discovered by this time that he could talk more or less confidentially with Anthea Merrill only when it was her pleasure that he should do so, and she was able to make it clear when that time had gone. Still, he did not for a moment believe she would have been more gracious had her companion not happened to be the *Sorata's* paid hand.

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CHAPTER VII

BLOWN OFF

The evening was cool and clear. Anthea Merrill and Jimmy followed an Indian path that wound through the primeval bush. On the one hand a great, smooth-scarped wall of rock ran up far above the trees that clung about its feet into the wondrous green transparency, but the light was

dying out down in the hollow where towering fir and cedar clustered. They were great of girth and very old, and beneath them there was silence and solemnity.

Jimmy, who carried his companion's sketching materials, went first to clear the dew-wet fern away, and the girl walked behind him silently; but this was not because there had been any change in her attitude toward him. Indeed, a certain camaraderie had grown up between them during the few days they had spent fishing and wandering in the bush, and there was, after all, nothing astonishing in this, for Jimmy was guilty of no presumption, and social distinctions, which are, indeed, not very marked in that country, do not count for much in the wilderness. Still, that camaraderie had been a revelation to him, and he was uneasily aware that during the rest of his life he would look back upon the time when he had been Miss Merrill's guide and attendant.

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They had been up the bank of a river that afternoon, and the girl, who had spent an hour or two sketching a peak of the range, had remained behind with Jimmy when the rest had retraced their steps to the Inlet lest Miss Austerly should suffer from the chill of the dew. The two were accordingly coming back alone, which, indeed, had happened several times before. It was Anthea who spoke at last.

"It will be dark very soon, and it might have been wiser if we had gone back the way the others did," she said. "Still, this trail looked nearer. I suppose it must come out at the Inlet?"

"Oh, yes," said Jimmy. "I can hear the river, though it doesn't seem to be quite where I expected. The others will be on the beach by now."

"I shouldn't like to keep Nellie there," said Anthea. "Still, I scarcely think they would wait long."

"Of course not," said Jimmy. "Tom is as careful of her as if she were his sister, and they wouldn't worry about our not turning up to go off with them. They're probably getting used to it by this time."

He realized next moment that this was, perhaps, not a particularly tactful observation; but he could not see his companion's face, and, as had happened before, he had sense enough not to make things worse by any attempt to explain it, which Anthea Merrill, who recognized that he had spoken unreflectively, of course, noticed. What she thought of him—and she had, naturally, formed certain opinions—did not appear until some time later.

In a few minutes he stopped abruptly where the trail wound round a screen of salmon-berry, for a creek came splashing down across their way. It appeared to be at least two feet deep, and when his companion saw it she turned to him with a little exclamation.

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"Oh!" she said, "how are we going to get across? We certainly can't go back."

"I'm afraid not," and Jimmy glanced dubiously at the sliding water. "It will be dark in half an hour, and this bush is bad enough to get through in the daylight. I'll go in anyway, and see how deep it is."

He plodded through rather above his knees in water, which was mostly freshly melted snow, and then turned and looked at the girl as she stood regarding him somewhat curiously from the opposite bank. The light had not quite gone yet, and he could see her standing, tall and supple and shapely, with her white serge skirt gathered in one hand, and a patch of crimson wine-berries at her feet. The great brown-and-gray trunk of a redwood behind her forced up the fine outline of her figure, and made a fitting background for the delicate coloring of the face that was turned toward him. Then, as had happened once or twice before, a little thrill ran through the man, and he glanced down at the sliding water.

"You can't wade through, and there's no use trying to look for a spot where it's not running quite so fast. I don't think a Siwash could get through this bush," he said.

He stopped somewhat abruptly, and was glad that the girl met his glance without wavering, as she said, "Well?"

Jimmy's tone was deprecatory. "There's only one way, Miss Merrill. I must carry you over."

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Anthea laughed, though it cost her a slight effort. She was, at least, glad that he had addressed her unconcernedly, and as a yacht-hand would. She was also quite aware that young ladies who go rowing in small dories, or venture into the wilderness, have to submit to being carried occasionally; but, for all that, she would sooner the suggestion had been made by another man.

"Do you really think you could?" she asked.

Jimmy's eyes twinkled, which was more reassuring than any sign of embarrassment.

"Well," he said reflectively, and again she was pleased that he was very matter-of-fact, and had sense enough to drop back into his rôle, "I guess I'm used to carrying three-inch redwood planks."

He came splashing through the water, though he did not look at her, and in a moment or two she felt his arms about her. She wondered vaguely whether he had often carried any one else, for it was, at least, evident that he knew exactly what he meant to do, and she recognized the strength the sea had given him, as he stepped down easily into the creek, holding her high above the water, with the loose folds of her skirt wrapped about her. Anthea was reasonably substantial, as she was, of course, aware; but, though he twice floundered a little in the depths of a pool, he set

her down safe on the other side and stood before her with flushed forehead, which was, as she promptly realized, in one respect a mistake. He said nothing, and did not, indeed, look at her; but as he drew in a deep breath from the physical effort she glanced at him, and saw something in his face that suggested restraint. That spoiled everything.

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"It is getting late," she said quietly. "Doesn't the path go on again?"

They turned away, Jimmy walking first, for which she was thankful, because the moment or two when they had stood silent had been more than enough. There was nothing for which she could blame the man. His demeanor had been everything that one could have expected; but she had seen the momentary light in his eyes and the tightening of his lips, and knew that their relations could never be exactly what they had been. Something had come about, for the fact that he had found it necessary to put a restraint upon himself had made a change. Perhaps he felt that silence was inadvisable, and once more she appreciated the good sense that prompted him to talk, much as a seaman would have done, of the straightness of the shadowy redwoods they passed and their value as masts, though this was naturally not a subject that greatly interested her.

When they reached the beach they found that Valentine had left them the Siwash canoe; and the rest, with the exception of Nellie Austerly, were sitting in the *Sorata's* cockpit when Jimmy paddled alongside. Miss Merrill furnished a suitable explanation of their delay, but she overlooked the fact that Valentine was acquainted with the bush about that Inlet.

"You must have struck the creek," he said. "I should have remembered to tell you about it."

He looked at Jimmy, but the latter wisely decided to leave it to Miss Merrill, and turned his attention to the canoe. He felt that she was competent to handle the matter.

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"I was almost waist-deep when I last went through," said Valentine, who did not display his usual perspicacity. "How did you get across?"

Anthea dismissed the subject with perfect composure. "Then there could not have been anything like so much water. Jimmy helped me over."

Jimmy went forward, and disappeared through the scuttle into the forecabin, and some little while later Valentine came down and looked at him with a dry smile.

"I don't yet understand how Miss Merrill got across that creek," he said.

"I fancied she told you;" and Jimmy felt his face grow warm.

Valentine laughed. "Perhaps she did, but it seems to me that she wasn't remarkably explicit."

Jimmy said nothing, and presently climbed into his berth, where he lay for a while trying to recall every incident of the journey he and Anthea Merrill had made through the shadowy bush, until it occurred to him that he was only preparing trouble for himself by doing so, and he went to sleep.

It was raining when he awoke, and it rained for most of three days as hard as it often does on that coast, until the crystal depths of the Inlet grew turbid, and it flowed seaward between its dripping walls of mountains like a river. At last one afternoon the clouds were rolled away, and when fierce, glaring sunshine beat down Austerly decided that he would go ashore to fish. The men went with him, Valentine to pull the dory into the swollen river, Jimmy and Louis in the Siwash canoe to gather bark for fuel. When they approached the beach where they usually landed, Jimmy glanced thoughtfully at the great torn-up pines that went sliding by.

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"If one of those logs drove across her it might start a plank," he said. "Besides, there's every sign of a vicious breeze, and I think I'll go off by and by and swing her in behind the next point. She would lie snugger there out of the stream."

Valentine looked up at the hard blue sky across which ragged cloud-wisps were driving, and nodded. "It generally does blow quite fresh after rain like what we have had," he said. "You could break the anchor out yourself. I want Louis to get a good load of bark."

Jimmy went ashore with Louis, who carried a big axe, but by and by he left the latter busy, and wandered back to the beach. He did not like the angry glare of sunlight and the way the wind fell in whirling gusts down the steep hillside. As it happened, another big log drove by while he stood among the boulders, and remembering that the two girls were alone in the yacht, he launched the canoe, and sat still, just dipping the paddle, while the stream swept him down to the *Sorata*. When he boarded her she was swinging uneasily in a swirl of muddy current, and Anthea, who sat in the cockpit, appeared pleased to see him.

"One would almost fancy it was going to blow very hard," she said.

Jimmy laughed. "I believe it is; but we should be snug against anything in the little cove yonder with a rope or two ashore. I wonder whether you could sheer her for me while I break out the anchor?"

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The girl went to the tiller, and while Jimmy, standing forward, plied the little winch, the cable slowly rattled in. Then he broke out the anchor, and the boat slid astern until a cove, where dark fir branches stretched out over the still, deep water, opened up. Dropping the anchor, he turned to the girl.

"Starboard!" he said.

Anthea shoved over her tiller; but the *Sorata* did not swing into the cove as Jimmy had expected her to do, for a blast that set the pines roaring fell from the hillside and drove her out from the shore. Jimmy let more chain run, and stood still looking about him, when he felt the anchor grip. The sunlight had faded, obscured by ragged clouds, the tall pines swayed above him, and the *Sorata* had swung well out athwart the stream.

"Since I can't kedge her with this breeze, I'll take a line ashore and warp her in," he said.

It appeared advisable, for there were more pine-logs coming down, and he pitched a coil of rope into the canoe; but the rest, as he discovered, was much more difficult. Jimmy had been used to boats in which one could stand up and row, while a Siwash river canoe is a very different kind of craft. As a result, he several times almost capsized her, and lost a good deal of ground when a gust struck her lifted prow; so that some time had passed when the line brought him up still a few yards from the beach. He looked around at the *Sorata* with a shout.

"I want a few more fathoms," he called. "Can you fasten on the other line, Miss Merrill?"

He saw the girl, who moved forward along the deck, stop and clutch at a shroud, but that was all, for just then the dark firs roared and the water seethed white about him as he plied the paddle. The canoe turned around in spite of him, drove out into the stream, and, while he strove desperately to steer her, struck the *Sorata* with a crash. The boat lifted her side a little as he swung himself on board, and there was a curious harsh grating forward. Anthea, who stepped down into the cockpit, had lost her hat, and her hair whipped her face.

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"I think she has started her anchor," she said.

Jimmy was sure of it when he ran forward and let several fathoms of chain run without bringing her up, for the bottom was apparently shingle washed down from the hillside.

"We'll have to get the kedge over," he said.

He dropped unceremoniously into the saloon, where Miss Austerly lay on the settee, and tore up the floorings, beneath which, as space is valuable on board a craft of the *Sorata's* size, the smaller anchor is sometimes kept. He could not, however, find it anywhere, and when he swung himself, hot and breathless, out on deck, the yacht was driving seaward stern foremost, taking her anchor with her, while the whole Inlet was ridged with lines of white. Anthea Merrill looked at him with suppressed apprehension in her eyes.

"We must get a warp ashore somehow," he said. "I might sheer her in under the staysail."

The girl went forward with him, and gasped as they hauled together at the halyard which hoisted the sail; and when half of it was up, she sped aft to the tiller, and Jimmy made desperate efforts to shorten in the cable. There was another cove not far astern into which he might work the boat. The anchor, however, came away before he expected it, and, though he did not think it was the girl's fault, the half-hoisted sail swung over, and the *Sorata*, in place of creeping back toward the beach, drove away toward the opposite shore, where the stream swept over ragged rock. Jimmy, jumping aft, seized the tiller, and while the Inlet seethed into little splashing ridges the *Sorata* swept on seaward with the breeze astern. He stood still a moment, gasping, and then, while the girl looked at him with inquiring eyes, signed her to take the helm again.

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"I must get the trysail on her, and try to beat her back. We may be able to do it—I don't know," he said. "It's deep water along those rocks, and she'd chafe through and go down; otherwise I'd ram her ashore."

He spent several arduous minutes tearing every spare sail out of the stern locker before he reached the one he wanted, and it was at least five minutes more before he had laced it to its gaff, while by then there were only jagged rocks, over which the sea that washed into the open entrance to the Inlet seethed whitely, under the *Sorata's* lee. Jimmy glanced at them, and quietly lashed the trysail gaff to the boom before he turned to Anthea Merrill.

"I'm sorry," he said. "We couldn't stay her under the trysail with the puffs twisting all ways flung back by the trees. Besides, she'd probably drive down upon the reefs before I got it up. It's quite evident we can't go ashore there."

The girl glanced ahead, and her heart sank a little as she saw the long Pacific roll heave across the opening in big gray slopes that were ridged with froth. Then she turned to Jimmy, who stood regarding her gravely in the steamboat jacket, burst shoes, and man-o'-war cap, and a look of confidence crept into her eyes. She felt that this man could be depended on.

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"We shall have to run out to sea?" she asked.

Jimmy nodded, and she was glad that he answered frankly, as to one who was his equal in courage.

"There is no help for it," he said. "Still, she'll go clear of the shore as she is, and I don't think we need be anxious about her when she's under trysail in open water."

Anthea looked at him again, with a spot of color in her cheek.

"It may blow for several days," she said. "If I can help in any way—"

"You can," said Jimmy abruptly. "Go down now and fix Miss Austerly and yourself something to eat. You mightn't be able to do it afterwards. Then you can bring me up some bread and coffee."

Anthea disappeared into the saloon with her cheeks tingling and a curious smile in her eyes. She understood what had happened. Now that they were at close grip with the elements, Jimmy had asserted himself in primitive fashion, and he could, she felt, be trusted to do his part.

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CHAPTER VIII

JIMMY TAKES COMMAND

Darkness was closing down on the waste of tumbling foam, and the *Sorata* was clear of the shore, when Jimmy made shift to hoist the trysail reduced by two reefs to a narrow strip of drenched canvas. Then, while Anthea Merrill held the helm, he proceeded to set the little spitfire jib. However, he clung to the weather-shrouds, gasping and dripping with perspiration for the first few moments, because the struggle with the trysail had tried his strength. Indeed, Anthea, who stood bareheaded at the helm with her loosened hair whipping about her, wondered how he had contrived to do it alone in that strength of wind.

His figure, shapeless in the streaming oilskins, cut darkly against the livid foam as the *Sorata* swung her bows high above the sea, and then was almost lost in a filmy cloud as she plunged and buried them in the breast of a big comber. Suddenly, however, he dropped on hands and knees, and, crouching with one arm around the forestay, hauled the strip of canvas out along the bowsprit until once more a sea smote the *Sorata* and he sank into a rush of foam. The girl caught her breath as she waited until the boat swung her head out again, for it was very evident that the man alone stood between her and destruction.

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He swung into sight, clinging with an arm around jib and bowsprit until he staggered to his feet, and a strip of sailcloth that went aloft beat him with its wet folds amidst a frantic banging. Anthea scarcely dared to look at him as he struggled with the rope that hoisted it, and she gasped with relief when at last he came scrambling back and pushed her from the tiller.

"Thanks!" he said. "Go down and get Miss Austerly on to the leeward settee, and then try to sleep. The boat ought to lie-to dryly until the morning, but I can't leave the tiller."

Anthea just heard him through the turmoil of the sea, and did not resent the grasp he had laid on her shoulder. Quietly imperious as she usually was, it seemed only fitting that she should obey him then. She went down through the little companion, and Jimmy, pulling the slide to after her, settled himself for his long night-watch as darkness rolled down upon the sea. He was anxious, but not unduly so, for the boat was high of side and able; and a comparatively small craft will usually ride out a vicious breeze if one can keep her hove-to under a strip or two of sail, so as to meet the sea while not forging through it with her weather-bow. Indeed, after the first half-hour he felt somewhat reassured, and his thoughts went back to a subject which had occupied them somewhat frequently of late, and that, not unnaturally, was Anthea Merrill.

She was, he knew, the daughter of the man who was ruining his father, but that was an incident and no fault of hers. It was, he fancied, clear that she knew nothing about Merrill's business operations, and was unacquainted with one aspect of his character. In fact, it seemed to him that there was a painful shock in store for her when she made the discovery. He had never met a woman with so much that compelled his appreciation besides her physical beauty. Her quiet graciousness and courage had their effect on him, and he was sure, at least, that he would never feel quite the same regard for anybody else. Indeed, he admitted that she was a woman with whom he might have fallen in love had circumstances been propitious, but, as they certainly were not, he strove to assure himself that he had sense and will enough to refrain from thinking more of her than was advisable.

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These reflections were, however, fragmentary, for the boat required attention, and he fancied that a good deal of water was finding its way into her. The *Sorata* would not lie-to without somebody at the helm, and he could only leave the tiller lashed for a few minutes now and then while he labored at the little rotary pump. Once or twice when he did so, a foot of brine came frothing into the cockpit across the coaming, and he commenced to wonder how long the breeze would last, for he was becoming sensible that another twelve hours of it would probably be as much as he could stand.

In the meanwhile the night was wearing through, and at last a faint light crept up from the east across the waste of tumbling seas. They were not by any means mountainous, for as a matter of fact it is very probable that the biggest ocean sea scarcely exceeds forty feet between its trough and summit, but they rolled up out of the northwest in a continuous phalanx of steep, gray ridges crested with spouting froth that looked quite big enough. The drift whirled across them, and now and then wrapped the craft in wisps of filmy smoke, while Jimmy, with smarting and temporarily blinded eyes, trusted to the feel of the tiller. He was as wet as he could be, as well as stiff and cold, and it was with relief and some astonishment that he saw the saloon companion open, and

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Miss Merrill appear with a plate and a jug of steaming coffee.

Her skirt was woefully bedraggled, from which he surmised that there was more water than there should be in the saloon, and her hair was promptly powdered with glistening spray; but her face was quiet, and she sat down collectedly, huddling herself on a locker, where the after bulkhead of the saloon partly sheltered her. Jimmy dropped into the cockpit, and crouched there with the tiller against his shoulder, for nobody could have eaten in the face of that wind. Then he stretched out a hand for the coffee.

"I'm unusually glad to get it. It was very kind of you," he said.

Anthea smiled. "Why?" she asked. "Are you sure it wasn't selfishness? We couldn't take the boat home without you, and a man must eat if he has to go on with this kind of task."

Jimmy looked at her, and, finding no very apposite rejoinder, nodded. "Well," he said, "I suppose he must; but did you get anything for yourself or Miss Austerly? You can't live on nothing any more than I can. At least, that's the conclusion I've come to after what I've noticed in the mail-boat's saloons."

He was aware that he had made a slip, but fancied it had escaped his companion's attention, which, of course, displayed very little perspicacity. In the meanwhile, he got a turn of the weather tiller line round a cleat, and lowered himself further until he sat in the cockpit with several inches of water swishing about him.

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"Nellie is asleep at last. I did not awaken her," said his companion.

"That isn't all I asked. Did you get anything yourself?"

The girl said she had not done so, and for a moment there was the faintest suspicion of color in her face.

"Then you will share what you have brought with me," said Jimmy.

"There isn't a cup. I couldn't find one that wasn't broken. The fore-castle shelf has torn away."

"You couldn't have kept the coffee in it if you had. Take what you want before it gets cold," and Jimmy pointed to the jug.

Anthea raised it to her lips, and then pushed it back along the cockpit floor, while, though she had not meant to do so, she flashed a swift glance at her companion when he held it in his hand. As it happened, Jimmy looked at her just then, and she saw the little glint in his eyes. He felt that she had done so, and, while he would not have had it happen, let his gaze rest on her steadily while he made her a little inclination. Then he drank, and, after he had thrust the plate in her direction, broke off a portion of bread and canned meat; some of which crumbled and stuck to his wet oilskins.

He was quite aware that neither his attitude nor manner of eating was especially graceful, but that could not be helped, and he laughed when his companion clutched at the remnant on the plate. She smiled at him too, and he wondered why they were both apparently so much at ease. Still, it did not seem in any way an unusual or unfitting thing that he and this delicately brought up girl should make their meal as equals in the little dripping cockpit with a single plate and one drinking vessel between them. He felt that it was as a comrade she regarded him, in place of tolerating him from necessity, and he noticed that even under the very uncomfortable conditions she ate daintily.

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"Where are we?" she asked at last.

"About twenty miles to leeward of the Inlet, and perhaps eight off the shore. At least, I should like to believe we are. How is it you look so fresh, instead of worn out? Where did you learn to make yourself at home in a boat?"

"In Toronto," said Anthea. "I was there two years, and they are fond of yachting in that city. I once did some sailing in England too. What do you think of their boats? It is, perhaps, fortunate Valentine made the *Sorata* a cutter, as they generally do, instead of a sloop. You could hardly have handled her under the latter's single headsail last night."

"No," said Jimmy, "I don't think I could. If she had been rigged that way she would probably have gone under by now. Still, I don't see why you should expect me to know anything about English boats."

Anthea smiled as she looked at him. "Perhaps you don't, though you don't invariably express yourself as a man would who had never been away from the Pacific Slope."

"Well," said Jimmy reflectively, "it's not quite a sure thing that the way they talk in an English ship's fore-castle is very much nicer."

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"There are more places in a mail-boat than her fore-castle."

It seemed to Jimmy advisable to change the subject, and he made a little grimace as he glanced at the plate.

"I'm afraid I've cleaned up everything," he said.

Anthea laughed. "Which is quite as it should be. I can get more, and you can't. Still, perhaps you have left some coffee."

Jimmy was about to point out that there was no cup, but refrained, for it flashed on him that his companion was, of course, aware of this, and he gravely handed her the jug. What her purpose was he did not know, and indeed he was never clear on this point, though he fancied that she had one; but it was, at least, evident that she was damp and chilled, and needed the physical stimulant. The trifling act, it seemed, might equally be a pledge of camaraderie, or a recognition of the fact that they were for the time being no more than man and woman between whom all distinctions had vanished in the face of peril; but he seemed to feel it had a still deeper significance. He had once held her in his arms, and now they had shared the same plate and drunk from the same vessel.

Then the *Sorata* reminded him that she required attention, for a sea seethed on board her forward, and when it poured into the cockpit he swung himself back to the coaming. A minute or two later he stretched out his hand, and the girl drew in her breath as she glanced ahead, for a sail materialized suddenly out of the vapor. It was suggestively slanted, and a dusky strip that looked very small appeared beneath it when it swung high on the crest of a sea.

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"Siwashes," said Jimmy; "one of their sea canoes. They have to keep her running. She wouldn't lie-to."

The craft drew abreast of them, traveling wonderfully fast, and Anthea long remembered how she drove by the *Sorata*, hove half her length out of water, riding on the ridge of a big gray sea. She was entirely open, a long, narrow, bird-headed thing, and the foam she flung off forward seemed to lap over her after-half. A little drenched spritsail was spread from an insignificant mast, and four crouching figures with dusky faces were partly visible amidst the wisps of spray that whirled about her. One of them held a long paddle, and looked fixedly ahead; the others gazed at the *Sorata* expressionlessly until the craft swooped down between two seas. Jimmy saw his companion's hands clench on the coaming, and the color ebb from her face, and then she gasped as the little strip of canvas swung into sight again.

"Ah!" she said, "it's a trifle horrible to watch them; and what must it be to steer her? How many of us in the cities know what the struggle for existence really is?"

Jimmy nodded assent. "At least," he said, "the thing is tolerably clear to the men who live at sea. If that Siwash lost his nerve for a moment the next comber would swallow the canoe. After all, the sea knows no distinctions; white men and red men alike must face the strain."

"In the big mail-boats too?"

"Of course. I'm not sure it isn't a little heavier there. When you are traveling as fast as a freight train there is little time to decide how you will clear a crossing steamer, or to pick out green from yellow among a blink of sliding lights. The man who fails is very apt to hurl as much as fourteen thousand tons of hull and cargo into destruction, and, perhaps, two thousand passengers into another world, though some vessels now carry more than that. The owner seldom gets rich when he doesn't; and there is, after all, no very great difference between his lot and that of the Siwash, who stakes his life against the value of a few salmon or halibut."

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He broke off with a laugh. "Hadn't you better go back? You are getting very wet."

Anthea did so, and it was almost noon when she came up again. Jimmy still sat at the tiller, and his wet face looked a trifle worn; but the breeze had softened, and as the girl glanced round her, a shaft of sunlight fell suddenly upon the foaming sea.

"Yes," said Jimmy, "it's blowing itself out. I expect we'll be able to shake the reefs out of the trysail and beat up for the Inlet before it's dark. If it were necessary I would run her before it now."

"Wouldn't there be shelter in one of the inlets to leeward?" asked the girl, with a very natural longing to escape from the strain and turmoil.

"It's very probable," said Jimmy. "I dare say I could make one. Still, you see——"

He stopped, and Anthea flushed ever so slightly, for it was evident to her that she and her companion could not extend that cruise indefinitely in company with Valentine's hired man.

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"Of course!" she said. "Austerly will be horribly anxious. Well, if you think you could leave the tiller lashed, I have dinner ready."

"I believe I could. Still, it might be awkward to get back fast enough from the forecandle in case of necessity."

"I wonder," said the girl, "whether you have any very decided objections to sitting down with us in the saloon? If you have, it would make it necessary for Nellie or me to bring the things out to you."

Jimmy fancied that the last was an inspiration, and after a glance to windward went down into the saloon, which was very wet. Miss Austerly, who seemed to have stood the shaking better than he expected, reclined on one settee with her feet drawn up for the sake of dryness, and she smiled at him. He wondered when he saw how the little swing-table was set. Miss Merrill, finding

the crockery kept for charterers mostly smashed, had apparently come upon Valentine's enameled and indurated ware.

There was no restraint upon any of them during the meal. The fact that the breeze was undoubtedly falling would have been sufficient in itself to restore their cheerfulness, but Jimmy was also sensible of a curious exhilaration, and discoursed whimsically upon various topics besides the sea. In fact, he was astonished to find that he had been away an hour when at last he went back to the cockpit. The breeze was falling rapidly, and before Anthea prepared the supper, which was, as usual in that country, at about six o'clock, he had set the whole trysail, and soon afterward he got the reefed mainsail up. By midnight the *Sorata* was close in with the coast, working fast to windward through smooth water with her biggest topsail set, while a half-moon hung low in the western sky. The sea gleamed silver under it, and scarcely half a mile away dim hillsides and long ranks of somber pines half-veiled in fleecy mists went sliding by.

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The soft gleam of the swinging lamps in the saloon shone out in faint streams of colored radiance through the skylights, and, late as it was, Nellie Austerly nestled well wrapped up on a locker in the cockpit. She watched the long swell break away from beneath the bows in glittering cascades, and Jimmy fancied he knew what she was thinking when she gazed aloft at the tall spire of canvas that shone in the moonlight as white as the peak ahead of them. It was a nocturne in blue and silver, and if sound were wanted, the splashing at the bows and the deep rumble of the surf emphasized the softer harmonies of the night.

"You are not so very sorry we were blown off, after all?" he asked.

The girl smiled. "No," she said; "I managed to sleep through a good deal of it, and now I feel almost as fresh as if I had stayed ashore. Besides, this would make up for anything. One could almost wish we could sail south with the topsail up under the moonlight—forever. In spite of the bad weather, I have been so well since I came to sea."

"Just the three of us?" asked Jimmy unguardedly.

He saw the twinkle in the girl's eyes as she glanced at her companion, who sat close by.

"I wonder," she said, "whether you would like that, Anthea? I almost think I should."

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The moonlight sufficed to show the faint tinge of color in Anthea's face, but she laughed. "And what about your father?"

Nellie Austerly did not appear concerned. "It is very undutiful, for he must have been anxious; but I really can't help feeling amused when I think of him and Mr. Valentine being left on the beach to sleep in the Siwash rancherie. One understands they are rather dreadful places, and he is so horribly particular, you know."

Anthea said nothing further, and presently the two girls went below, but they were about again when, soon after six o'clock next morning, Jimmy beat the *Sorata* into the Inlet. Indeed, he left Anthea at the tiller while he went into the saloon to look for a piece of spun yarn which Valentine kept in one of the lockers. Nellie Austerly smiled at him as he opened it.

"I suppose we shall be in very soon, and I want to thank you now for bringing me back safe," she said. "Anthea, of course, can thank you for herself."

Jimmy felt a trifle embarrassed. "I really don't see why she should. I think the charter covers anything I have done."

The girl made a little whimsical gesture. "Does it? You are not a regular yacht-hand, really?"

"I am, at least, mate of a lumber-carrying schooner, which comes to much the same thing."

The twinkle in Nellie Austerly's eyes grew plainer. "I can be quite frank with Mr. Valentine and you, and perhaps it is because I like you both. You can make what you think fit of that. Still, I haven't asked you how long you have been on board the schooner, and one understands there are a good many opportunities for men—like you and Mr. Valentine—in this country."

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Jimmy was a little startled, for it almost seemed that she had guessed his thoughts, but he smiled.

"Valentine seems to have all he wants already. He is content with the sea."

The girl laughed. "Well," she said, "I don't think the sea would altogether satisfy him. But I must not keep you here; hadn't you better make sure Anthea isn't running us ashore?"

Jimmy went up, and found the *Sorata* was smoothly slipping by the climbing pines; and a little later her dory with three white men in it came sliding toward them as he hauled the topsail down.

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CHAPTER IX

MERRIL TIGHTENS THE SCREW

The *Sorata* went to sea again next morning, and one night a week later she bore up for Vancouver before a westerly breeze. A thin crescent moon had just cleared the dim white line of the mainland snow, and the sea glittered faintly in her frothing wake under a vast sweep of dusky blue. The big topsail swayed across it, blotting out the stars, and there was a rhythmic splashing beneath the bows.

Anthea Merrill stood at the tiller outlined against the heave of sea, for the night was warm and she was dressed in white. Nellie Austerly sat on a locker in the cockpit, and her father on the saloon skylights with a cigar in his hand. Valentine lay on the deck not far away, and Jimmy a little further forward.

"I suppose we will be in soon after daylight, and I'm sorry," said Nellie Austerly. "It has been an almost perfect cruise in spite of the bad weather. Don't you wish we were going back again, instead of home, Anthea?"

Jimmy roused himself to attention, for he would very much have liked to hear Miss Merrill's real thoughts on the matter; but she laughed.

"I don't think it would be very much use if I did," she said. "One can't go sailing always—and if you feel that that is a pity, you can think of the rain and the wind."

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"Ah!" said Nellie Austerly, "one has to bear so much of them everywhere. Sometimes one wonders whether life is all gray days and rain; but this trip has made me better, and, perhaps, if Mr. Valentine will take us, we will go back next year and revel once more in the sea and the sunshine—we really had a good deal of the latter."

Jimmy saw his comrade make a little abrupt movement, and guessed what he was thinking, for he too realized that before another year Nellie Austerly would in all probability have slipped away from the sad gray weather to the shores of the glassy sea where there is eternal radiance.

Then Austerly looked around, and his observation was very matter-of-fact, as usual.

"If circumstances are propitious, I should be glad to arrange it," he said. "I certainly think Mr. Valentine has done everything he could for us. Indeed, we owe it largely to him that this has been such a pleasant trip."

He appeared to expect some expression of approval, and Anthea laughed. "Of course. It's only unfortunate he couldn't arrange the weather."

"I wonder," said Nellie reflectively, "why you both leave Jimmy out?"

There was a certain suggestiveness in the girl's tone which Jimmy noticed, though he did not think her father did, and he wished it had been light enough to see Anthea Merrill's face; but unfortunately it was not. She appeared to disregard the question, and glanced in Valentine's direction.

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"Couldn't we have the big spinnaker up?" she asked.

Valentine hesitated a little. The breeze was moderately fresh and the *Sorata* traveling fast enough, while it is not a very easy thing to steer a craft running under the great three-cornered sail, which is apt to swing over in case of a blunder at the tiller.

"You could hold her steady before the wind?" he asked.

"If I don't, I will make my father buy you a new mast," said Anthea.

Valentine made a little gesture which was expressive of resignation. It was, he had discovered, singularly hard to say no to Anthea Merrill; but it seemed to him that the new mast might be needed if she ventured too far now. He and Jimmy between them got the great sail up and its boom run out, though it cost them an effort; and then Jimmy glanced aft with more than a trace of uneasiness at the white figure at the helm. The *Sorata* had now on each side of her a swelling mass of canvas that dwarfed the narrow strip of hull, and she swung each of them high in turn as she rolled viciously. Still, as far as Jimmy could see, the girl stood very composedly at the tiller. Then, as the great mainboom went up high above the sea, Valentine signed to him.

"You had better get out and steady it," he said. "It wouldn't need much to bring that boom over."

Jimmy crawled out on the slippery spar, and sat astride near the end of it, while Valentine made his way along the one beneath the spinnaker. Their weight checked the lifting of the sails in some degree, but for the first few minutes it seemed to Jimmy that they and their companions were hazarding a good deal. If the girl at the helm let the tiller swing a hand's-breadth too much when the *Sorata*, piling the froth about her, rushed up a dim slope of water, either mainsail or spinnaker would swing over, and the men on the booms would have no opportunity for attempting to obviate the unpleasantness that would certainly succeed it. In all probability they would be flung off headlong into the sea. Still, the sail did not come over, for the *Sorata* drove along straight before the wind, and once more Jimmy paid silent homage to the girl at the tiller.

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He could see her only dimly, a blurred white shape against the dusky sea, but he could imagine the little glow in her eyes and the way in which her lips were pressed together. He had seen her look that way when she sat beside him in the cockpit one wild morning as the *Sorata* plunged over the great Pacific combers, and it seemed to him that she was one who would face difficulties and perils of any kind as unwaveringly. Indeed, he was angry with himself for having fancied

there was any hazard at all in leaving her to steer the *Sorata* under spinnaker, for he felt that Anthea Merrill must necessarily be capable of carrying out anything she had undertaken.

So he swung contentedly with the lifting boom, now hove high above the dark water, now dropped down until his feet were almost in the streaming froth, while shadowy islets clothed with pines sprang out of the sea ahead, grew into solid blurs of blackness, and flitted by, until at last Austerly said that his daughter must go below. Then Valentine and Jimmy came in along the booms, stowed the spinnaker with some difficulty, and dropped the topsail too, for the dim mainland shore was black ahead when the rest left the deck to them.

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"That girl has quite excellent nerves," said Valentine. "Still, what I like about her is that she doesn't think it necessary to impress it on you. Her husband won't have much to complain of if she ever marries anybody, though I'm not sure that's certain."

"Not certain?" said Jimmy.

"No," replied Valentine reflectively. "A girl of her kind is apt to be particular. The man who pleases her would have to be quite straight, and it's scarcely likely he'd go to leeward either."

Jimmy fancied that his comrade was right, though he said nothing, for after all it was, as he compelled himself to admit, no concern of his. However, he sighed a little as he went down and crawled into his cot, leaving Valentine to feel his way along the dusky shore.

It was early next morning when they rowed Austerly and his two companions ashore, and the man shook hands with them on the wharf.

"I feel that I am indebted to both of you," he said with somewhat unusual diffidence. "In fact, I can't exactly consider that the attention you have shown my daughter is no more than one would expect—from the charter."

He seemed to feel that he was becoming involved, and went on abruptly. "She desires me to say that it would be a pleasure should either of you care to call at any time."

Jimmy left him to Valentine, and, when the latter had handed Miss Austerly into the waiting vehicle, saw that Anthea Merrill was looking at him.

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"If you don't mind my saying so, I think that was rather good of Austerly," she said. "You probably know his point of view, and I daresay it cost him an effort. I think your comrade should go. Nellie finds him amusing, and there is naturally not very much in her life that pleases her."

She stopped with a little soft laugh. "Mr. Wheelock—isn't it? I haven't the least difficulty in saying as much as Austerly did. Any time you or Mr. Valentine care to call I should be glad to receive you. Our house is always open, and anybody will tell you where it is."

Jimmy once more remembered that he had on a pair of burst canvas shoes, as well as old duck trousers cobbled with sail twine, and a man-o'-war cap that had grown shapeless with the rain. He also realized that his companion was quite aware of it too.

"I'm afraid it wouldn't be a very appropriate thing if I did," he said.

Anthea looked at him steadily. "Pshaw!" she said. "Still, you really can't expect me to urge you."

Perhaps it was a slight relief to both of them that Valentine signed to Jimmy just then. "They want this box," he said. "The rest of the things are to wait for the express wagon."

Jimmy, who turned away, heaved the box into the vehicle, and did not see the curious little smile in Anthea Merrill's eyes. In a few minutes she had driven away, and, he fancied, had passed out of his life altogether. He stood still on the wharf and sighed.

"Well," said Valentine, "where are you going now?"

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"Straight back to the schooner," said Jimmy. "I see her lying outside the steamboat yonder. You might bring my things across when you have straightened up the boat."

Valentine promised to do so, and Jimmy, who strode away, met Jordan, whom he had not expected to see there, on the water-front.

"What are you doing in Vancouver?" he asked.

"Looking after my patent rights—among other things," said Jordan. "The mill's shut down for two or three weeks anyway. Between the stone in the water and the new detergent the directors insisted on my using, the boiler has 'most turned herself inside out. Our people have their office here, as you know, and my agreement with them only stands for another month, while it seems that Merrill has been buying up their stock. I'm not sure his notions are going to suit me. You heard we had to break off your father's contract?"

"I hadn't, though I was afraid it would happen," said Jimmy, whose face grew a trifle grim. "That was Merrill's doing?"

"It was. I couldn't help the thing. But we can't talk here; won't you come along to my hotel?"

Jimmy glanced at his garments, and Jordan grinned. "Those things don't count for so much here," he said. "Anyway, there was a time when I tramped into the wooden cities along Puget Sound

looking way more like a dead-beat than you do now. Still, if that's going to worry you, can't you get a boat and take me for a sail?"

Jimmy was sorry that it was out of the question. He had spent only a few evenings with Jordan at the mill, but he liked the man, and was vaguely sensible that Jordan liked him. [Pg 104]

"Valentine and I have just run in, and I must see how the old man is getting along," he said. "After that I fancy I ought to go over to a ranch on the Westminster road, and look up my sister. I haven't seen her since I came home."

"Well," said Jordan, "I've nothing on hand until to-morrow. What's the matter with taking me? I'll hire a team somewhere and drive you. I can drop you at the ranch, and go on to Westminster."

They arranged it during the next few minutes, and then Jimmy was rowed off to the *Tyee*. Prescott met him as he climbed on board, and a glance at his face showed Jimmy that things had not been going well.

"You will be wanted," he said. "Your father has been getting very shaky since you went away, and I don't quite see how he's to hold on to the schooner, now that he has lost that lumber contract and has to face the carpenter's bill. Guess he's worrying over it. Hasn't got up the last three days, and the doctor don't seem to know what is wrong with him."

Jimmy went down into the little stern cabin with a sinking heart, and found Tom Wheelock lying propped up in his berth. He looked very old and haggard, and the perspiration stood beaded on his face, in which pale patches showed through the bronze.

"Glad you've got back, boy," he said. "You'll have to take hold soon—that is, if there's anything left to get a grip on. The old man's played out."

This, it seemed to Jimmy, was painfully evident, and though he contrived to hide it, a sense of dismay crept over him as he sat down. Tom Wheelock looked played out, and though his son was ready to take up his burden, he felt it would be heavy. He realized that through the compassion he felt, and then a sudden fit of anger against the man who had crushed his father came over him. The color darkened a trifle in his face, but he put a restraint upon himself. [Pg 105]

"You'll be about again in a day or two," he said cheerily. "Now, tell me all about it. But first of all, what is the matter with you?"

The old man looked at him with a curious little smile. "The doctor Bob brought off didn't quite seem to know, but I could have told him. Guess I'm done, boy. It's quite likely I'll crawl out on deck for a little while, but how's that going to count? Nobody's going to have any more use for your father, Jimmy, and when the month is up Merrill will take the schooner from him."

Jimmy clenched a big brown fist, but his voice was very quiet. "Well," he said, "I want to understand what has happened since I went away."

Wheelock reached out for the pipe that lay near him, and fumbled with it, spilling the tobacco with shaky fingers, until Jimmy quietly took it from him, and struck a match as he handed it back to him. The old man raised himself a trifle as he lighted it, and then laid a trembling hand on his son's arm.

"I guess I've worked as hard as most other men, but somehow I don't seem to have gone to windward as the rest did," he said. "Perhaps I was too easy with the money, and a little slack in other ways. Still, your blood's red, Jimmy, and there's a streak of hard sand in you. You got it from your mother; it was she who made me. Hard work don't count, boy. You want to get your elbows into the other people who're standing in your way. Well, I'm glad there's that streak of grit in you. You'll get those fingers on the throat of the man who brought your father down, and gripe the life out of him, some day." [Pg 106]

He broke off abruptly, and fumbled with his pipe, which had gone out again. "Let that go; it's fool talk, Jimmy. What do I want putting my trouble on to you? Guess you'll have plenty of your own, boy."

"I think I asked you to tell me what Merrill had done," said Jimmy.

"Kept us here under repairs while the lumber was piling up on the sawmill wharf. I 'most guess he'd fixed the thing with the boss carpenter. I was to bring all that the people at the Inlet cut for Victoria or Vancouver down fast as it was ready, or they were to let up on the contract; but Jordan would have made things easy if Merrill hadn't bought their stock and put the screw on hard."

"It wouldn't be worth his while to buy the stock for that."

"The thing's quite plain. He's playing a bigger game. Wants control of all that's going on along that coast, and its carrying. Guess I can't stop his getting the *Tyee*, and she's the second boat he has taken from me. Well, I may get a freight of ore in a week or two, and, it's quite likely, a load from a cannery—go up light—freight one way. How's that going to count, though, when there's the carpenter's bill to meet, and a big instalment on the bond with interest due?" [Pg 107]

"How much?" Jimmy asked, harshly.

He sat silent a while, with a hard, set face, when his father told him.

"Then he must have the vessel. Still, he'll have to sell her by auction," he said by and by.

"That won't count. When I've nobody to run the price up against him, it's quite easy for a man like Merrill to fix the thing. He'll get one of his friends to buy her in at 'bout half her value, and the bond don't quite call for that. It isn't everybody wants a vessel, and the few men who do fix these things between them."

Jimmy set his lips, and once more there was silence for a while. Then he looked up with a little abrupt movement. "There's a question in front of us to be faced—and I'm going to find the answer; but we won't talk any more about it now. I'm going over with Jordan this afternoon to see Eleanor. You can get along until to-night without me?"

Wheelock made a sign of concurrence. "I guess it's a thing you ought to do. Got a letter from her yesterday, and she was asking about you. Eleanor's like you. Take after your mother, both of you, and, if anything, the harder grit's in her. You have to remember, Jimmy, you can't afford to show a soft spot when you're fighting a man like Merrill."

He stopped a moment, with a sigh. "Guess he is too hard for your father. Won't you light me this pipe again? My hand's shaky."

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CHAPTER X

ELEANOR WHEELOCK

Jordan was driving a spirited team along the water-front when Jimmy came up from the wharf, and he smiled when the latter swung himself up into the light, four-wheeled vehicle. Jimmy was dressed tastefully in his English shore-going clothes, and now looked very much unlike a yacht-hand. He was well endued physically, and, though the bronze in his face and a certain steadiness of gaze betrayed his calling, there was an indefinite but unmistakable stamp upon him which he had acquired on board the big mail-boats, and perhaps also in a greater measure from his comrades on the battleship. Jimmy had certainly not cultivated it, and was, in fact, not aware that he possessed it, but his companion had already recognized it.

"Take a cigar, and light it before I let the team out. They look as if they could go," he said.

Jimmy did so, and then found it somewhat difficult to keep his seat as his comrade sent the horses through the city as fast as they could lay hoof to the ground, and out of it past the clustering wooden hovels in its less reputable quarter, and up the slope that led into the shadowy bush. Roads are not remarkable for their smoothness anywhere in that country, but it was evident that Jordan liked fast traveling and could handle a team. He laughed when Jimmy said so.

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"I come of farmer stock, and that's probably why I always had a notion of the sea," he said. "If you look at it in one way, the thing's quite natural."

"I suppose it is," said Jimmy. "Why didn't you go to sea?"

"It seemed to me one has mighty few chances of picking up money there, though I found out quite early that the poor man has no great show anywhere. It was a mortgage he couldn't pay off that broke up my father."

He stopped for a moment, with a little confidential gesture. "I guess that's why I wanted to do what I could for your father. In one or two ways he's very much like the man I buried back in Washington. He was straight—and it wasn't his fault if he didn't whale all the meanness out of me—but, when smartness means getting your grip on what belongs to somebody else, he was just a trifle slow. He worked hard, and gave every man a hundred cents' worth for his dollar—and that's quite likely why there was mighty little but a mortgage on the ranch when he died."

Jimmy was not astonished, in view of their short acquaintance, that his companion should tell him this. He was aware that reticence is not a prominent characteristic of the men of the Pacific Slope, and, besides this, there was a rapidly growing sympathy between himself and Jordan. Still, he sat silent, and his companion spoke again.

"I was about sixteen then, and I saw I had to make out differently," he said. "Well, somehow I've done it—looked on this life as a battle where the hurt man gets no mercy, and I've cleared quite a little money on my royalties—but now and then the memory of those old days on the ranch comes back to me. Then I feel that if ever it's necessary for me to get my knife into any kind of mortgage man, it will be red right to the hilt when it comes out again."

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The snap in his companion's dark eyes and the hardening of his lips were comprehensible to Jimmy, for he had once or twice been sensible of much the same feeling. Jordan had, as is usual in the land to which he belonged, expressed himself frankly, and perhaps a trifle crudely; but Jimmy recognized that it was with very genuine tenderness and regret he remembered the man he had buried long ago in Washington. He asked an abrupt question, which did not, however, altogether change the subject.

"Will you be here any time?" he said.

"I don't quite know. There's no reason I shouldn't tell you what I can, and I feel like talking now. I'm quite pleased to run that mill up the Inlet for our people, that is, while they leave me to fix things as I like them; but as I told you, Merrill has been getting his grip on the stock lately, and his views about the royalties on my patents don't quite coincide with mine. I've a couple of other notions that will save labor which our company has not bought up, and it's quite likely I'll turn them over to the Hastings people. In the meanwhile I'm not going to rush things, and it's probable I'll hang on until we've had the stockholders' meeting."

"Then it's Merrill who is standing in your way?"

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Jordan smiled dryly. "Now you understand the thing. Seems to me neither of us has any great reason to like that man."

Nothing more was said on that point, and by and by they left the scented shadow of the pines, and clattered across a wooden bridge which spanned the turbid, green Fraser, into a stretch of sunlit meadows and oatfields formed by the silt the great river had brought down. In due time they reached a wooden ranch flanked by shadowy bush, and Jordan, pulling the team up before it, glanced down the long white road that leads to New Westminster, a few miles away.

"I guess I'll go on to town, and come back for you," he said. "Still, you had better make sure you're at the right place first."

Jimmy got down, and a man who had apparently heard the beat of hoofs, commenced to throw down the split slip-rails which in Western Canada usually serve as gates.

"Yes," he said, when Jimmy spoke to him, "this is Forster's ranch. In fact, that is my name."

He was dressed in the bush-rancher's jean, but he had a pleasant face with a certain hint of refinement in it, and smiled when Jimmy told him who he was.

"Miss Wheelock's brother? Come right in and put your team up," he said. "It's not more than an hour or so until supper. Your friend will come with you?"

Supper is usually served at six o'clock in that country, and in no way differs from the other meals of the day; while nobody acquainted with its customs would have considered it an unusual thing for the rancher to extend the invitation to Jimmy's companion. Jordan once more glanced down the road to New Westminster, and, though none of them knew it, a good deal was to depend on the fact that he elected to stay.

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"Well," he said, turning to Jimmy, "I don't want to worry you, but the fact is, one of the lumber people yonder has been writing me about my gang-saw frame, and, after thinking the thing out last night, I'd sooner hold him off a while. I'd have to call on the man if I drove into town, and, after all, it might be wiser to keep clear of him."

"Then you had better get down," said Forster. "While Miss Wheelock talks to her brother you can walk round the ranch with me. I don't see many strangers, and I'm by no means busy."

Jordan got down, and, after spending an hour with Forster, was somewhat astonished when he was presented to Miss Wheelock in the big general room of the ranch. It was roughly paneled with cedar, very simply furnished, and had, as usual, an uncovered floor, while the sunlight that streamed through the uncurtained window fell upon the girl. She stood still a moment looking at him when she had acknowledged his greeting, and for once, at least, the sawmiller felt almost embarrassed, for Eleanor Wheelock possessed, as her brother did not, a somewhat striking personality.

Jimmy might have passed for a quiet Englishman; but his sister was typically Western in everything but speech—tall, wiry, and a trifle straight of figure, but with something that was almost imperious in her attitude. She had light hair like Jimmy's, but there was a reddish gleam in it, and her eyes which had a glint in them were of a paler blue, while her skin was of a curious colorless purity. Jordan could not analyze her features, but he felt that she was beautiful, and there was a suggestion of vigor about her that further attracted him. One would scarcely have called her domineering, but she had not, as her brother recognized, the quiet graciousness and composure which half-concealed Anthea Merrill's strength of character. Jordan, however, was not too discriminating. He liked vigor in any guise, and he noticed that one of the two little girls who had entered with her clung to her hand.

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"I think I passed you twice in Vancouver one day a month or two ago," she said.

Jordan made her a little inclination, and his Western candor was free alike from awkwardness or any hint of presumption.

"Then I didn't see you. If I had done so, I should certainly have remembered it."

Eleanor laughed, and turned to the others. "It's ten minutes since Jake called you. Will you sit here, Jimmy, with Mr. Jordan next to you? Mrs. Forster is away just now."

She moved to the head of the table, and the usual ranch supper of pork, potatoes, flapjacks, hot cakes, desiccated fruits, and green tea was brought in. Forster, who appeared to be a man of education, made an excellent host, but it was Eleanor and Jordan who led most of the conversation, and there was delicacy as well as keenness in their badinage. Almost an hour had

passed before the party rose, which was a very unusual thing in that country, for the Westerner seldom wastes much time over his meals. Then, as it happened, it was Jimmy who walked round the ranch with Forster, while Jordan sat on the veranda with Eleanor and the little girls while the shadows of the firs crept slowly up to it. They talked about a good many things, while each felt that they were just skirting a confidence, until the little girl who sat next to Jordan looked up at him gravely.

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"Why don't you go and see the cows with father and the other man?" she asked.

Jordan laughed, but he looked at Eleanor. "Well," he said, "for one thing, I guess it's a good deal nicer here."

Miss Wheelock met his glance with a directness which, had his disposition and training been different, he might have found disconcerting. She was, like himself, absolutely devoid of affectation, and he felt that she was quietly making an estimate of him. Still, there was not a great deal in his character that he had occasion to hide from any one, and the evident sincerity of his observation was in itself an excuse for it. It was characteristic of the girl that she let it pass, not with the obvious intention of ignoring it because that appeared advisable, but as though she had never heard it. When a thing did not appeal to Eleanor Wheelock, she simply brushed it aside.

"Have you met the Miss Merrill Jimmy mentioned?" she asked. "I almost fancy she is the girl I used to see now and then when I was in Toronto. What is she like?"

Jordan, who had met Anthea Merrill in Vancouver, told her as well as he was able, and Eleanor's lips set in a straight line.

"One could fancy you were not fond of Miss Merrill," he said.

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"I have never spoken to her; but I have no great reason to feel well-disposed toward anybody of that family."

"Ah!" said Jordan; "that means Jimmy has told you what Merrill is doing. I'm no friend of that man's either, but I'm not quite sure one could reasonably hold the girl responsible for her father."

"Especially when she's pretty? Still, she is his daughter, and must be like him in some respects."

Jordan's eyes twinkled. "Do you consider yourself like your father?"

Eleanor flashed a swift glance at him. "You are keener than I expected. In reality I am not like him in the least, though I don't know why I should trouble to admit it. In any case, I think the rule generally holds good."

She dismissed the subject abruptly, with a laugh. "After all, our affairs can't interest you. You can't have seen very much of my brother."

Jordan appeared to consider this. "I'm not sure that counts," he said. "I seem to have been a friend of Jimmy's quite a long while. There are people who make you feel that, even when it isn't so, although they may not consciously want to. One can't tell how they do it—but I think you have the power in you."

"I don't know," said Eleanor. "I am, however, by no means certain that I was ever very anxious to make friends with anybody."

"That's comprehensible. You would sooner they wanted to make friends with you, and if no one did, you would be sufficient for yourself."

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Eleanor looked at him with a chilly smile. "You have a certain penetration, but I don't know that there is any reason why I should confess to you. How do you come to know anything about Mr. Merrill?"

Jordan, who appeared to have no doubt as to her ability to understand him, in which he was warranted, told her.

"Well," she said, "suppose this man's influence is too strong for you, and you have to break your connection with the mill?"

"There are two or three other things I could turn to."

"One would suppose as much;" and Jordan took it as a compliment, which perhaps it was, especially as the girl had not said it with the least desire to gratify him. "Still, that is not what I mean. Would you try to find any means of retaliating?"

"If he afterward got in my way—that is, thrust himself between me and something I wanted to do—I would try all I could to get my foot on him, and then perhaps keep it there a little longer than was necessary."

"You would go no further?"

Jordan knew what she meant, though he could not grasp her purpose in pressing the point. "It wouldn't be business if I did. When a man starts out to make money he can't afford to load himself up with purely personal grievances. If another man tries to get the things you want you naturally have to fight, but it's wiser to grin and bear it when he's too smart for you. Still, there

are cases when the feeling that you would like to get even afterward is apt to be 'most too much for human nature.'

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"And in some respects you could be very human?"

Jordan turned to her with the twinkle still in his eyes. "Well," he said, "if I let any weakness of that kind master me in the present case, I should be very much like the black-tail deer that turned around on the man with the rifle. Still, one can't invariably be wise."

His manner was whimsical, but it seemed to Eleanor there was something behind it, for when he broke off a faint glint which she understood crept into his eyes.

"Sometimes accidents happen to the man with the rifle," she said. "In the meanwhile, I rather fancy Jimmy is making signs to you."

"Then," said Jordan gravely, "I'm not sure I'm much obliged to him. But before I go there's something I want to ask: would it be a liberty if I came back here with him some day?"

"You would like to come?"

"Of course. Why do I ask?"

Eleanor laughed. "That is what I was wondering. I almost think a man likely to get even with Mr. Merrill would do what he wanted. Anyway, you know the customs of the country as well as I do, and I scarcely think Forster and his wife would mind."

Jordan rose, and kissed the child he picked up and held high in his arms. "Well," he said, "since—Forster and his wife—wouldn't mind, I shall very probably come along again by and by."

He turned and went down the veranda stairway, while the little girl looked at her companion gravely.

"I like that man. He's nice," she said. "You like him too, don't you?"

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Eleanor was beckoning Jimmy, but the child went on. "Well," she said, "he thinks you nice, I know. I could tell it by the way he looked at you. Perhaps you didn't see him, but I did."

Eleanor laughed, for she had naturally noticed every glance Jordan had cast in her direction, and had understood it. That, however, did not count for very much with her. She recognized in Jordan something that pleased her, and she had a vague fancy that there were things he might be able to do for Jimmy and her father in the difficulties she foresaw. There was, she admitted reluctantly, after all, a good deal that a woman could not do; but in the meanwhile the feeling went no further. Then while Jordan and Forster harnessed the team, Jimmy joined her.

"You will have to stay in the Province, Jimmy. You can't go back to sea," she said. "Your father will need somebody beside him now."

Jimmy only smiled, but the girl made a little gesture of comprehension.

"Oh," she said, "I know how hard it is for you. You will have to give up your career."

"It can't be helped," said the man simply, "and I may make another here."

Eleanor laid her hand on his arm, and pressed it. "I knew you would face it like that. There's just one other thing. Hold on to that man Jordan; I think he will make you a good friend."

"You like him?"

"That," said Eleanor, "is quite another matter. Anyway, he is a man who could be depended on—and I think he could be firm on points where you might waver. You are a little too good-natured, Jimmy."

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Jordan drove his team up before they had said much more, and Forster shook hands with Jimmy as he stood beside the vehicle.

"From what your sister has told us, I dare say you are a trifle anxious about—things in general—just now," he said. "If it is any relief to you, I would like to say that Mrs. Forster and I think very highly of your sister, and that so long as she cares to stay with us we should be very glad to do what we can for her."

Jimmy thanked the rancher, and swung himself up into the vehicle, while Jordan turned to him as they drove away.

"They think very highly of her! They'd be—idiots if they didn't," he said. "Of course, I don't know if that's quite the kind of thing you appreciate from me."

Jimmy said nothing, as was usual with him when he was not sure what he felt, but Jordan went on.

"I never expected to find you had a sister like that," he said. "She's very different from you in many ways. One feels that's a girl with 'most enough capacity for anything.'"

Jimmy looked at him with a whimsical smile, and Jordan laughed.

"Now," he said, "I might have expressed myself differently. What I mean is that you're a good

deal more like your father than she is."

"Ah!" said Jimmy. "Well, perhaps you're right. In fact, the same thing has struck me occasionally."

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CHAPTER XI AT AUCTION

Jimmy went back to the ranch beside the Fraser once, but Jordan went without him several times, for Forster apparently found his company congenial. It happened that he contrived to see a good deal of Eleanor Wheelock during his visits, but neither of them mentioned this to Jimmy, who, indeed, would probably have concerned himself little about it had he heard of it, since he had other things to think about just then. Merrill had sent his father a formal notice that unless the money due should be paid by a certain time, the schooner would be sold as stipulated in the bond, and, though Tom Wheelock had expected nothing else, he apparently collapsed altogether under the final blow.

Jordan, who had just come back from Forster's ranch, arrived on board the *Tyee* while the doctor was talking to Jimmy, and, strolling forward, he sat down on the windlass and commenced a conversation with Prescott, with whom he had promptly made friends. In the meanwhile, Jimmy looked at the doctor a trifle wearily as he leaned on the rail.

"Perhaps my mind's not as clear as usual to-day, but these scientific terms don't convey very much to me," he said.

"In plain English, then," said the doctor, "it is general break-down your father is suffering from, though it is intensified by a partial loss of control over the muscles on one side of him. The latter trouble is, perhaps, the result of what one might call constitutional causes, but, as you seem to fancy, worry and nervous strain, or a shock of any kind, may have accelerated it or brought about the climax."

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"Well," said Jimmy hoarsely, "the cure?"

The doctor's tone was sympathetic. "To be quite frank, there is none. It is possible, even probable, that he may recover sufficiently to hobble about a little, but he will never be fit for any active occupation again."

"Ah!" said Jimmy, with a little indrawing of his breath. "Still, it is only what I expected, and I suppose I must face it. You are quite sure about that shock?"

The doctor looked at him curiously. "I want you to understand that it probably brought about the climax, though such things don't often happen in the case of a vigorous man. Your father has, I should fancy, in ordinary language, been losing his grip for several years. In his case the natural decline of physical strength has, perhaps, been accelerated by undue anxiety, and——"

He hesitated, and Jimmy made a quick sign of comprehension. "Oh, yes," he said, "I know. Still, I'm not sure that anybody could blame him, under the circumstances. Well, I think the thing that brought about the climax has been steadily preparing him to break down under it; but, after all, that does not concern you."

The doctor, who admitted this, gave him certain directions before he went away, and Jimmy descended to the little cabin where Tom Wheelock lay. He looked up and nodded when his son came in.

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"Well," he said, with a faint smile, "I guess by the names that doctor calls it, I've got enough to kill any man. Wouldn't talk quite straight, but I know as well as he does that I'm not going to worry you very long, and that's just as it should be. Merrill takes the schooner, and you'll go back to the blue water. I was never good for very much, anyway, after your mother had gone. She stood behind me and kept things going."

Jimmy sat down, and, much as he desired it, could think of nothing apposite to say. He felt that there are occasions on which one should speak clearly, but, as not infrequently happens, it was just then that he was usually dumb. Perhaps Tom Wheelock understood this, for once more he smiled as he looked at him.

"I wouldn't worry about it, Jimmy," he said.

Jimmy was still tongue-tied, but one result of his father's observations was that fierce anger commenced to mingle with his distress, and he felt his nature stir in protest. Merrill would take the *Tyee*—that could not be helped—but it seemed an insufferable thing that for the paltry value of the schooner he should have crushed this frail and broken man. Jimmy clenched a firm brown hand, and felt his fingers itch for a grip on the bondholder's throat.

There was silence for a while, intensified by the soft splash of ripples against the *Tyee's* planking,

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and Jimmy afterward remembered how his father's worn face showed up in the stream of light that shone down through the skylights into the shadowy cabin. He lay wrapped in old and dirty blankets, a worn-out and broken man who stood in the way of one who was stronger. He held an unlighted pipe in his limp and nerveless hand, and the cabin reeked with unsavory odors. It was unclean and wholly comfortless, and it seemed to Jimmy, who was fresh from the luxury of the mail-boats, almost horrible that the man to whom he owed his being should lie there in sordid misery. At last he straightened himself resolutely.

"There are several points to consider," he said. "The schooner will be sold—that's certain—and I must find a room for you ashore. It's fortunate that one difficulty can be got over. Men who can work seem to be in demand here just now, and when Merrill sells the *Tyee* there ought to be a few dollars over."

"There might be if we had anybody to bid against him and run the figure up, but we haven't. Anyway, Bob and I have been talking things over this morning. He has had 'most enough of the sea, and one of the C.P.R. men will put him on a soft thing on the wharf. Well, we're going to take one of the little frame-houses just back of the town between us. Not quite a mansion, Jimmy, but there are four rooms in it."

Jimmy felt inclined to groan, for he had seen the very primitive and unattractive dwellings in question, but he knew that rents are high in that city and money somewhat hard to earn anywhere. Still, it was in one way a relief to turn the conversation in this direction, and by and by he remembered that Jordan was awaiting him and went up on deck. The latter sat down and pulled out his cigar-case.

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"Take one, and then tell me what's troubling you," he said. "I'll own up that I got some notion out of Prescott."

Jimmy found it a relief to comply, and talked for several minutes while Jordan listened attentively.

"You have got to stay here," said the latter. "That's a sure thing; but there's not much sense in your notion of track-grading for the railroad or wharf-laboring. You wait a week or two, and I fancy I can suggest something by then that will suit you."

"I don't know why you should trouble about it," said Jimmy.

"We'll let that go;" and Jordan looked at him with a smile in his keen dark eyes. "Your sister and I have been talking about you. She feels that you ought to stay with the old man, too."

It did not occur to Jimmy that there was anything significant in this, for he was too anxious to concern himself about anything then except the question as to how he was to secure his father's comfort.

"I've been thinking about the auction," he said.

"So have I," said Jordan. "Now, I'm going to talk straight to you. I've invented one or two sawmill fixings; and they've brought me in some money, as you know; but I want considerably more, and I've always had a notion that it was business and not sawing redwood logs I was meant for. Well, Merrill wants me out of that mill, and it seems to me there's room for a big extension of the coast-carrying trade of this country. That's Merrill's notion too. I once thought of buying this schooner—that is, wiping out your father's loan—and putting you in command of her. Now, don't get hold of it the wrong way—it was the money there might be in it I was after."

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He smiled as he saw the faint flush on Jimmy's face. "Then I fancied there might be more in steam, and that since Merrill wants the *Tyee*, I'd let him have her—at a figure. Anything she brings over and above the bond goes to your father. Well, I'll put on a broker to bid for her who knows his business. If I have to take her I guess I could get my money back by sailing her, and, anyway, the broker will run Merrill up. You couldn't do it, because you'd be asked for security that you could put up the money. Now, that's about all, except that I want you not to take hold of anything that may be offered you until the auction's over and you have had a talk with me. I've got to go back to the mill to-morrow for a week or two."

"I don't want to be ungracious, but there is no reason why you should burden yourself with my affairs."

"No," said Jordan dryly, "I guess there isn't. I'm out for money, and that's why I figure that a man who knows as much about the sea as you do might be of some use to me. You'll promise, anyway?"

Jimmy did so, and felt that he had done wisely when his comrade went away. There was, after all, no reason why Jordan should not befriend him if he wished to, and he had a curious confidence in the man. It was, however, two or three weeks later, and only a few minutes before the auction which was to be held in a room ashore, when he saw him again. He did not know that Jordan, who had arrived in the city two days ago, had spent most of one of them at Forster's ranch. Jimmy, who had promised Tom Wheelock to attend the sale, was walking up and down the street waiting for the time announced, when Jordan strolled up to him with a cigar in his hand.

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"Had to come down to see our people here," he said, which was, as it happened, correct enough. "Went round this morning and saw that broker man. He's coming along, and if it will be any relief to you I'll hand you on his bill. Of course, I could have made my own bid, but these fellows know

the tricks of the game, and I'm not ready yet for a clean break with Merrill. Now, we might as well walk in."

They passed through part of a big stone building into a large room where a group of city men were talking together, for there were timber lands and ranching properties to be sold that afternoon as well as the schooner. It was very hot, and Jimmy found the waiting difficult to bear as he listened to the hum of voices and glanced at his watch, until at last the auctioneer sat down at a raised table. He hastily read out particulars of the vessel as well as his authority to sell her, and then smiled at the assembly.

"Now," he said, "we'll get right down to business. Most of you have seen the vessel, the rest of you have heard about her, and all you have to do is to make me a reasonable bid. There is no reserve on her."

Jimmy felt his face grow a trifle hot with anger. The *Tyee* had made his father's living, and, since anything she might bring in excess of the loan on her would belong to him, it did not seem fitting that she should be flung in this casual fashion on the hands of palpably indifferent purchasers. The result of that sale was of vital interest to him and Thomas Wheelock, and he glanced inquiringly at Jordan.

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"My man has not come," said the latter tranquilly. "It's a game he's accustomed to, and when he's wanted he'll be here. That's one of the new cannery men starting the bidding. Their inlet's a difficult place to make, and the steamboat men don't care about calling there except for big loads. It's significant that he should think of buying her."

Jimmy did not understand why it should be so, but his face grew hard at the laughter when the man made a nominal bid. There was silence for almost a minute, and he felt a little thrill of dismay run through him, for if the *Tyee* went at that figure it would leave his father still heavily in debt.

"The anchors and cables are worth more," said the auctioneer. "Is there nobody willing to raise him fifty dollars?"

One of the men nodded. "I'll go that far," he said. "Still, I don't know where I could get it back for her."

Somebody offered ten dollars more, another man twenty, and there was languid bidding until the price had almost doubled; but then it stopped for a few moments, and Jimmy saw his companion glance somewhat uneasily toward the door.

"I'm beginning to wonder what's keeping my man," he said.

"If he doesn't come soon he might as well stay away altogether," said Jimmy, who turned in tense suspense and watched the hot faces of the men about him.

The price then offered would just clear the debt, but there were many things his father needed, and Jimmy had then only a few dollars in his pocket, which he had earned by stacking dressed lumber at a sawmill.

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"Gentlemen," said the auctioneer, "I don't feel warranted in letting her go at the figure. She'd bring you half as much again to-morrow if you sailed her over to Victoria."

"I'll raise it ten dollars," said somebody, and the bidding commenced again more indifferently than ever. Five, ten, twenty dollars were offered, and then five again.

Jordan touched Jimmy's arm. "That's Merrill's man—I've been trying to spot him—and I guess the cannery man would go up a hundred or two still, by the way he's watching him. Nobody else seems to want her, and it's quite likely they'll crawl up by tens. Sit still, while I run around and find out what's the matter with my broker."

He slipped out, but he was back within a few minutes, flushed in face, and thrust a strip of paper into Jimmy's hand.

"I think that makes the thing quite plain," he said.

Jimmy glanced at the paper. "Got a wire last minute, and sent over to your hotel, but didn't find you in," he read. "Had to go out unexpectedly on the Sound steamer."

"He stopped your putting another man on?" he said.

"Yes," said Jordan, with a snap in his dark eyes. "Knew he was going all the while. Played me for a sucker. Well, I guess I was one, or I wouldn't have given him an option of selling me to Merrill."

"Selling you?"

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"Exactly. I might have known it's quite hard for an outsider to kick against the people who boss these things. Still, since Merrill knows, there's no reason why I should keep my knife in the sheath. Raise them a hundred dollars. I'll stand sponsor."

Jimmy did not stop to consider. He knew that every dollar the schooner brought now would go into the pockets of his father, and that was enough for him.

"I'll make the figure one hundred dollars more," he said.

The man Jordan had pointed out as Merrill's agent leaned forward and whispered something to the auctioneer, whereupon the latter turned to Jimmy with a deprecatory air.

"The terms are strictly cash," he said. "I presume you are in a position to put down the bills or a bank draft if you got her? I have, of course, the pleasure of these other gentlemen's acquaintance."

Jimmy felt Jordan, whom he had seen take out a wallet and a fountain-pen, thrust something into his hand. He glanced at it before he faced the auctioneer.

"I don't know how far that was admissible or inspired," he said. "Anyway, it doesn't matter. This draft should, I think, speak for itself."

The auctioneer apparently waited for him to take it across, but Jimmy quietly sat down.

"If you will send your clerk," he said.

The clerk came forward, and a trace of amusement and awakening interest crept into the faces of the rest.

"That's satisfactory," said the auctioneer. "The signature in question is quite sufficient. I'll record your bid. Will anybody raise it?" [Pg 130]

Then the men became intent, and two of them went up by forties. Jimmy glanced at his companion, who nodded.

"Go right ahead. Merrill and the other man want her," he said.

A few minutes later, to Jimmy's astonishment, Forster came in and stood beside them.

"What's the figure?" he asked, and, when Jordan told him, "Is she worth it?"

"Yes," said Jimmy; "you could go up at least five hundred dollars further."

"Ten advance," said Forster to the auctioneer, and then turned to Jordan. "I suppose you're not set on getting her?"

Jordan smiled, and Forster made a little whimsical gesture. "I understand. Doing much the same thing myself. Miss Wheelock and my wife are outside. I've been hanging round in the vestibule until it seemed convenient for me to take a hand in."

Jimmy said nothing, but when he looked around a few moments later he was somewhat astonished to see that Jordan's place was empty. His comrade was, in fact, hastening down the street to where Forster's light wagon stood outside a big dry-goods store. He went in and came upon Eleanor Wheelock, standing very straight and slim in her long white dress. She turned and looked at him with a curious little smile.

"Have you come to tell me that Forster is taking unnecessary trouble in this affair?" she said.

Jordan was not readily disconcerted, but he showed a momentary trace of embarrassment. [Pg 131]

"No," he replied, "I haven't. I'm open to admit that I'm not quite as smart as I thought I was. My man didn't turn up. In fact, he sold me to Merrill."

Eleanor still looked at him, and his tone became deprecatory. "You're not pleased?"

"No," said the girl, with a faint flush in her cheeks. "I like my friends to be successful."

Jordan winced perceptibly. "I won't fail next time."

"Are you warranted in thinking there will be another time?"

"I guess so. I don't know that I deserve it, but you won't be too hard on me?"

Eleanor saw the gleam in his eyes. "It will depend. Where is Jimmy?"

"Bidding against Forster and the rest for the *Tyee*."

"Ah!" said Eleanor, and for a moment her face softened. "I don't know why you didn't tell me that earlier. Hadn't you better go back and see that he doesn't get her?"

"I don't care if he does," said Jordan; "that is, as long as he gives me half an hour of your company."

Eleanor laughed. "Leaving out the compliment, what would you do if Jimmy bought her for you?"

"Run her against the first vessel Merrill put on a trip she was good for, if I had to carry freight for nothing."

The girl turned and glanced at him again, and a hard glint crept into her eyes. She looked imperious, forceful, and vindictive then, but the man felt a thrill run through him, for he knew his answer had pleased her. [Pg 132]

"Ah!" she said; "for that I could forgive you many a failure. Still, you must go back and look after Jimmy. We shall not go away until we hear what you have done."

Jordan reluctantly turned away, and, as it happened, met Jimmy coming out of the auction-room with perfect satisfaction in his face.

"I feel that I owe you a good deal. In fact, I'm afraid I can't express my gratitude as I ought," he said. "Merril's man has got her, but I have a clear thousand dollars to hand over to my father. Still, there's something that puzzles me. What brought Forster here?"

Jordan laughed. "Your sister."

"Eleanor?"

"Of course!" said Jordan dryly. "No doubt, because she is your sister, you don't credit her with any useful capacity."

"Eleanor is clever," said Jimmy reflectively. "Still, there are subjects girls know nothing about—and, anyway, there was Mrs. Forster's attitude to consider. It's hardly in human nature that she should be pleased to see her husband staking his money to please her children's teacher."

"Exactly! That is what made the thing cleverer. She has Mrs. Forster's good-will too."

"Then," said Jimmy decisively, "she must be a very kindly lady."

"Or your sister a very capable young woman. You seem to find it a little difficult to recognize that."

Jimmy dismissed the subject with a little gesture. "Well," he said, "I'm almost bewildered. The thing was so simple. Why didn't Merrill think of it?"

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"I have no doubt he did. Still, you saw what the little man has to expect if he makes a bid. On thinking it over, it seems to me that Merrill trusted to my broker. He figured I'd back down once I realized that he knew my game and was a match for me. There are big men like him who live by bluff, and everybody makes way for them, but they're apt to show themselves very much the same as other people when you face them resolutely. It's just like putting a pin in a bubble."

Then Forster joined them while his wife and Eleanor came out of the store, and a few minutes later the girl and Jordan walked behind the other three as they turned toward the hotel where the wagon had been sent. Eleanor smiled at her companion.

"We are indebted to you, after all," she said, and there was a faint but suggestive something in her voice which satisfied Jordan.

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CHAPTER XII

THE "SHASTA" SHIPPING COMPANY

Two or three weeks had slipped away since the sale of the *Tyee*, when Jimmy Wheelock, who had been specially requested to do so, called at Forster's ranch. He did not know why his presence was required, and when he arrived was somewhat astonished to find Jordan, Valentine, and a man he had not met, sitting with his host about a little table in the big general room. A decanter and a box of cigars stood on the table, but the attitude of the men suggested that it was business that had brought them there. Jordan, who was talking animatedly, looked up when Jimmy came in.

"You're not quite on time," he said.

"For which I must make excuses;" and Jimmy turned to Forster. "The fact is, I might not have got here at all if the American skipper whose new mizzen-mast I'm helping to fit hadn't run out of wire-rigging. I couldn't well afford to offend a man who considers my services worth three dollars a day."

The man he had not met made a little sign with his hand. "It's an excuse that will pass in this country. Sit right down. Jordan insisted on having you here. Got any money to spare?"

"About forty dollars," said Jimmy.

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The other man smiled. "That won't go very far. Well, we can consider ourselves a quorum, and Mr. Jordan will go ahead."

"One moment," said Forster. "Mr. Leeson, Jimmy. Help yourself—you see the cigars."

Jimmy sat down, and glanced at the gentleman who had previously addressed him. He fancied he had heard Jordan mention him as one interested in the then somewhat decadent sealing industry, but there was not very much to be gathered from his appearance. He was plainly dressed, and elderly, and had a lean, expressionless face. It was seamed with little wrinkles, his figure was spare, and he leaned forward with an elbow on the table as if it were too much trouble to hold himself upright. In the meanwhile Jordan recommenced.

"I'll be quite frank with you as to how I'm fixed, because it will help you to understand how I got on the track of the notion," he said. "Merril has now a controlling interest in the coast mill, and I walked out because I couldn't agree with him. Well, I have some money laid by as well as my royalties, and I'm undertaking a few machinery agencies, and starting as mill expert in Vancouver. In fact, I'll sell you an American stump-puller, Mr. Forster, that will save you about half you're spending on grubbing out those fir-roots by hand labor."

"Another time!" said Leeson, with an appreciative grin. "Keep to the shipping business."

Jordan made a little gesture of resignation. "Well, as I told you already, there's a good deal of odd freight to be moved up and down this coast, and there would be more if there were better facilities. I hear of ships held up because the salmon-packers can't get their cases down, and men in Vancouver Island feeding fruit to hogs, and cutting good oats for green fodder because they couldn't put them on the market if they thrashed them. What's more, Mr. Merrill has heard about it, too, and he's an enterprising man. Ran me out of that West Coast mill because I wouldn't come down on my royalties—him!"

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"Off the track again!" said Leeson. "Merril has bounced a good many men out of things, but if I'm to put any money into this venture, I must have a better reason than that you want to get even."

"You'll get it," and Jordan's dark eyes snapped while his face grew animated. "What Merrill thinks safe is good enough for us. He has been working up a notion of a coast shipping combine, one that's to be all Merrill's, and he has two or three schooners and a big unhandy lump of a coal-eating steamer. He got her cheap, like the rest of them. Some of us know how he did it."

He glanced at Jimmy sharply before he went on again. "Now, I've been considering his programme, and he's taking hold the wrong way—screwing top freights out of everybody for a bad service, cutting down wages, and running his boats with cheap men who are going to learn to hate him. Well, with a little handy steamboat that would crawl in wherever there was a beach the ranchers could haul their stuff down to, and a policy of general conciliation, one could cut the ground right from under him."

"Quite sure of that?" said Leeson. "Without his finding it out?"

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"Without his finding it out—until we've got the trade;" and Jordan's eyes snapped again. "We're going to oblige people, and make our connection with the ranchers and small cannery men a personal thing. When he offers a big rebate it will be a little too late; and, anyway, we can carry freight as cheap as Merrill."

"How are you going to make it a personal connection?" asked Forster.

"The thing's quite easy. I'm going to send round a man who already knows most of those ranchers to take them up fruit packing-boxes and statistics of produce prices. He'll fix it up with them for the boat to crawl in anywhere for a few jumper loads. Merrill can't do it with his schooners or the big steamer. I guess a rancher would sooner face a high freight than feed the stuff to hogs, or haul it thirty miles over a bush-trail to the Dunsmore road. Then I'm going to have a good-humored skipper who'll bring the men off and make friends with them, but one with grit enough to shove the boat round on time when she has a perishable freight in a gale of wind. She's to be just the right size, and, to save us coal, a modern tri-compound."

"The three things seem essential. The last two certainly are," said Forster, with a suggestive smile. "I guess it's scarcely necessary to ask whether you have any idea how to obtain them?"

Jordan laughed, and proceeded to astonish his companions, which was, however, a habit of his.

"Got them all," he said. "The steamboat's lying down the Sound, and I hold a week's option on her. Jim Wheelock would go in command of her, and Mr. Valentine can sail as soon as he's ready in the *Sorata*, and crawl into every inlet from which he can reach half a dozen ranchers. I'll have ready for him four or five tons of cut box frames that will only want nailing, and they'll go into his saloon. He'll have everything fixed before Merrill knows we've despatched him."

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Jimmy glanced at Valentine's face, and broke into a soft laugh, though he had been at least as far from expecting this proposition as his companion seemed to be. Jordan looked at them both, and nodded tranquilly.

"You'll go?" he said, and then laid a sheet of paper on the table. "Here's my notion of costs, capital, salaries, and general expenses. Kind of prospectus. Shows the usual twenty-per-cent. profit—only we're going to make it."

It was quite clear that he meant it, for this was a man who had a full share of the optimism which characterizes most of the inhabitants of the Pacific Slope. He smiled reassuringly at his companions; but there was silence for several minutes while Leeson examined the paper and then passed it to Forster. Jimmy, who felt that his opinion would not be particularly valuable, and had noticed the little smile in Valentine's eyes, sat still, looking out through the open window at the shadowy bush beyond Forster's orchard.

It cut, vague and black and mysterious, against the wondrous green and saffron glow of the sunset, and the little trail that wound away into it had just then a curious interest for him. He wondered where it led, and how long it wandered through the dim shadow before it came out again into the garish brilliancy. The thing seemed an allegory, for when he came into that country

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and flung his career away he had felt lost and adrift, without a mark to guide him, while now Jordan and those others were about to set his feet on the trail. It must lead somewhere, as all trails resolutely followed do, though now and then they plunge into tangles of morasses where the rotting pines fall or climb the snow-barred passes of towering ranges. He had a curious confidence in the daring American. Still, he felt that in all probability there was a long and difficult march in front of him and the little party then sitting in the slowly darkening room of Forster's ranch. It was Leeson who spoke first.

"There are men who would call the whole thing crazy, and they'd have some reason for doing so," he said. "Most of us know what Merrill is."

It was evident that his opinion carried weight, and Jimmy, who felt a growing tension, saw the sudden, eagerness in Jordan's face.

"No," he said, "that's just where you're wrong. We know what he pretends to be; and if a man puts up a big enough bluff, most people back down and don't ask him to make it good. You see the point of it?"

Leeson made a little half-impatient gesture. "What d'you figure on putting in, Mr. Jordan?"

"Ten thousand dollars."

Leeson said nothing, but glanced at Forster wrinkling his brows.

"I might manage five thousand," said the rancher. "I haven't found clearing virgin bush a very profitable occupation, and I want more than the interest I'm getting from the bank. Mr. Jordan has naturally talked over the thing with me before, and I fancy his scheme is workable; but, as I don't know a great deal about these matters, I'd very much like to hear what your opinion of it is."

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He glanced inquiringly at Leeson, and it was evident to Jimmy that the success or failure of the project depended on what the latter said. He sat silent again for almost a minute, drumming on the table.

"Well," he said, "you'll be told it's a fool game. Most of the men in Vancouver City would consider that a sure thing—but I'm putting in fifteen thousand dollars."

Jimmy saw his comrade's face relax and a little exultant sparkle creep into his eyes, while he felt his own heart beat a trifle faster. Then Valentine, who had not spoken yet, turned to the rest. "In that case I guess we can consider the thing feasible," he said. "If the sum isn't beneath your notice, I'll venture a thousand dollars."

"What has given you a hankering after twenty per cent.?" asked Jordan. "It is not so very long since you told me that the sea, which cost nothing, was enough for you."

Valentine laughed. "I rather think it's the occupation that appeals to me. Charterers have a trick of treading on one's toes occasionally, and I don't think I should take kindly to business as it appears to be carried on in the neighboring city. One can, however, talk to the bush-ranchers intelligently. In any case, I shouldn't regard that twenty per cent. as a certainty."

Jordan grinned good-humoredly, but there was a twinkle of keener appreciation in Forster's eyes. "There is a good deal the bush can teach the man who wants to understand," he said. "I dare say you are right, Mr. Valentine."

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"Well," said Jordan dryly, "the only use I ever had for the bush was as a place for growing saw-logs; but while talk of this kind has nothing to do with business, there's something I want to mention. I met Austerly not long ago, and he wants to see you and Jim Wheelock when you can make it convenient, Valentine. Now, if you'll keep quiet a few minutes, I'll get on a little."

He went on for a considerable time, with features hardening into intentness and dark eyes scintillating, and when at last he stopped, Leeson made a sign of concurrence. Then questions were asked and answered, and afterward Forster, who passed the decanter to his guests, stood up.

"Since Mr. Jordan fancies he can raise another few thousand dollars privately if it's wanted, we can consider the affair arranged," he said. "Here's prosperity to The *Shasta* Steam Shipping Company!"

It was growing dusk when they drank the toast in the big shadowy room, and, as he glanced at his companions, Jimmy was momentarily troubled with a sense of his and their insignificance. There were only four of them, and none of them, with the possible exception of old Leeson, were men of capital, while he had an uneasy feeling that in view of Merrill's opposition it was a very big thing they had undertaken. Leeson set his wine-glass down and shook his head.

"We're going to have to fight for it," he said.

Then the group broke up, and Jimmy, who strolled away to ask for Mrs. Forster, saw nothing of his sister or, as it happened, of Jordan either, until the rancher's hired man brought his comrade's team up. Jimmy drove home with him, but Jordan was unusually silent as the team swung along the dim, white road. Once, however, he appeared to rouse himself.

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"Yes," he said, though Jimmy had not spoken, "old man Leeson is right; we will have to fight for it."

Still, I have put my pile in, and we have got to win."

He glanced in Jimmy's direction, but the latter said nothing and it was too dark to see his face. "Just got to win," he said again, as he shook the reins. "It has been a pull up grade since I was sixteen, but somehow I got the things I set my mind on, one by one. Perhaps Valentine would tell you they weren't all worth while, and he might be right about some of them, but a man has to be what he was born to be—and now I know there's nothing on this earth worth quite so much as what I'm fighting for."

Still Jimmy did not understand, and therefore, as was usual with him in such cases, made no observation, and his comrade laughed curiously when he complained of the jolting instead as he essayed to light a cigar.

"Well," said Jordan, "you'll go down the Sound and see about bringing the *Shasta* up just as soon as you're ready."

Jimmy went next day, and Valentine, who went alone to Austerly's, sailed for the West Coast on the following day. It was two weeks later when Jimmy came back with a little two-masted steamer of 250 tons or so. She was not by any means a new boat, nor were her engines especially [Pg 143] powerful, and, after finding out her various complaints during the sheltered voyage down the Sound, Jimmy had hoped to spend a week or two overhauling her before he went to sea. This, however, was not to be, for he had hardly brought her up near the wharf when Jordan came off, and found him sitting wearily on the bridge, begrimed all over and heavy-eyed.

"Well," he said, "you look considerably more like the played-out mariner than the wedding guest. What has been worrying you? Anything wrong with her?"

"A good many things," said Jimmy. "If I went through the list I should probably scare you. She has evidently been lying-up for a while, and that is apt to have its effect on any steamboat's constitution. I've had no sleep all the way up, and spent most of the time in manual labor when I wasn't at the helm. The men I have—and they're a tolerably decent crowd—naturally expected to rest now and then."

"What's the matter with your engineer?"

"Nothing, except that he's played-out—and I don't wonder. He'll be fast asleep by now, and I don't think I'd worry him if I were you."

Jordan looked suddenly thoughtful. "Now be quick. Is this boat fit to go to sea, or has that blamed surveyor swindled you and me?"

"She's sound. That is, she will be when we've had a month in which to straighten her up, or have had a carpenter and foundry gang sent on board her."

Jordan's face showed his relief. "Well," he said, "you have got to take the month at sea. You start to-night, and can do what's wanted when you have the opportunity. There's another thing. We have arranged for a kind of inaugural banquet, and you'll have to straighten her up a little. I'll [Pg 144] send you down some flowers and things."

Jimmy gazed at him in drowsy consternation. "If your guests expect anything fit to eat, you had better send the banquet too. Who in the name of wonder are you bringing here?"

"Eleanor—that is, Miss Wheelock. Austerly and his daughter. I believe Valentine invited them. Forster and Mrs. Forster, and old man Leeson too. You have got to brace up and face the thing."

"I'm going to sleep," said Jimmy, with a gesture of resignation. "You'll take these papers to the respective offices, and I may be able to talk sensibly during the afternoon. But what made you want to bring Eleanor and Mrs. Forster here?"

Jordan laughed, and laid his hand on his comrade's shoulder. "I'll tell you later; you're too sleepy now. In the meanwhile, I'll get round and fix things generally."

He went away in a few minutes, and Jimmy, dragging himself into the little room beneath the bridge, flung himself down in the skipper's berth, dressed as he was.

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CHAPTER XIII

THE "SHASTA" GOES TO SEA

It was a still, clear evening when Jimmy stood at the *Shasta's* gangway waiting to receive his guests. She lay out in the Inlet, and he could see the two boats sliding across the smooth, green water with a measured splash of oars, while the voices of their occupants reached him faintly through the clatter of a C.P.R. liner's winches and the tolling of a locomotive bell ashore. A thin jet of steam simmered about the *Shasta's* rusty funnel, and she lay motionless on the glassy brine, with cracked and splintered decks, and what paint a long exposure to rain and sun had not

removed peeling from her. Jimmy had had no time to spare for any attempt at decoration during the voyage down Puget Sound. Indeed, he and his engineer felt thankful they had succeeded in bringing her round at all.

By and by the first boat ran alongside, and, because she belonged to the *Shasta*, Jimmy was relieved to see that there was, after all, not a very great deal of water in her, though his guests sat with their feet drawn up. There were several of them: Jordan, who wore among other somewhat unusual garments a frock-coat, and was talking volubly; Eleanor, in elaborate white dress and a very big white hat; old Leeson, Forster and his wife. Jimmy helped them up with difficulty, for the *Shasta* was floating high and light and had not been provided with a passenger ladder. Something in his sister's face perplexed him when at last they stood on deck. Eleanor was quieter than usual, and when she looked at him there was a trace of color in her cheeks he could not quite account for.

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"You seem almost astonished to see me," she said. "Even if I hadn't wanted to come, Charley would have insisted on it."

Jimmy gazed hard at both her and Jordan, and noticed that Mrs. Forster seemed a trifle amused.

"Charley?" he said.

"Of course. Hasn't he told you?" said Eleanor; and though she laughed, there was diffidence and pride in her eyes when she glanced at the man beside her. It was also, her brother felt, rather more than the pride of possession.

"I must explain," said Jordan. "When I came off this morning, Jimmy was too sleepy to be entrusted with any information of the kind. Still, I quite think I deserve a few congratulations."

Jimmy looked at him with a faint wrinkling of his brows, and then involuntarily turned toward the rest of the company.

"Well," he said, "I suppose it's only natural, though of course I never expected this."

Mrs. Forster laughed outright. "Then everybody else did, and ventured to approve of it."

Jimmy stretched his hand out, and grasped that of his comrade slowly and tenaciously. "After all, there is nobody I should sooner trust her to, and I don't think you could have got anybody more—capable, generally," he said. "Eleanor, you see, is cleverer than I am."

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Eleanor Wheelock naturally understood her brother, and there was whimsical toleration in her smile, while the little twinkle grew more pronounced in Jordan's eyes. He was a shrewd man, and had already formed a reasonably accurate notion of Jimmy and Eleanor Wheelock's respective capabilities.

"Thank you!" he said. "The other boat should be almost alongside."

He moved aft with Eleanor and the rest of the guests, while Jimmy, who had not quite recovered from his astonishment, was leaning on the rail when another boat slid around the *Shasta's* stern. He recognized Austerly and his daughter on board her, and then felt his heart beat and the blood creep into his face, for Anthea Merrill was sitting at Miss Austerly's side. He had not seen her since he stood one morning on the wharf in the man-o'-war cap, but he had thought of her often, and now, though his pleasure at seeing her almost drove out the other feeling, it seemed unfitting that she should be there to take her part in sending out the steamer that was, if the *Shasta* Company could contrive it, to bring to nothing her father's scheme. The boat was alongside in a few moments, and when her occupants reached the deck Austerly shook hands with Jimmy.

"I must offer you my congratulations on being in command," he said. "My daughter seemed to fancy we should be warranted in bringing Miss Merrill."

Anthea smiled at Jimmy. "Yes," she said, "I wanted to come; but of course if it was presumptuous, you can send me back again."

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"I think you ought to know there is nobody I should sooner see;" and Jimmy, who was not so alert as usual that evening, looked at her too steadily.

Anthea met his gaze for a moment, and then, considering that she was a young woman accustomed to hold her own in Colonial society, it was, perhaps, a trifle curious that she slowly looked away. None of the others noticed this, except Miss Austerly, and she kept any conclusions she may have formed to herself. Then, though it seemed to come about naturally without anybody's contrivance, Austerly and his daughter joined Jordan, and for a few minutes Anthea and Jimmy were left alone. The girl leaned on the rail looking across the shining water toward the great white hull of the Empress boat lying, immaculate and beautiful in outline, beneath the climbing town. Then she turned, and Jimmy felt that he knew what she was thinking as her eyes wandered over the little rusty *Shasta*. Though he had not spoken, she smiled in a manner which seemed to imply comprehension when he looked at her.

"Yes," she said, "there has been a change since I last saw you—and I am glad you are in command. One can't help thinking that you must find this, at least, a trifle more familiar."

"At least?" said Jimmy.

Anthea nodded, and her eyes rested on the big white mail-boat again. "I think," she said, "you

quite know what I mean."

Once more Jimmy's prudence failed him. "Well," he said, "it is rather a curious thing that even when you don't express it I generally seem to. I don't know"—and he added this reflectively—"why it should be so."

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"I think that is rather a difficult question—one, in fact, that we should gain nothing by going into. How long are you going to command the *Shasta*?"

"Until——" and Jimmy, who had not quite recovered from his exertions during the voyage, stopped abruptly. He could not tell his companion that he expected to sail the dilapidated steamer until she had wrested away a sufficient share of the trade her father was laying hands upon to enable Jordan to buy a larger one.

"I don't quite know," he added. "Anyway, I was very glad to get her. It is pleasanter to take command than to carry planks about the Hastings wharf ashore."

"You were doing that?" and for no very ostensible reason a faint tinge of color crept into his companion's face. Labor is held more or less honorable in that country, but, after all, Anthea Merrill was a young woman of station.

"It must have been a change," she said a moment later.

"From the lumber schooner, or Valentine's *Sorata*?"

Anthea looked at him with a sparkle in her eyes. "Pshaw!" she said. "Are you going to masquerade always, or do you think I am quite without intelligence?"

Then she turned, and pointed to the beautiful white Empress boat. "When are you going back again?"

Jimmy understood her, and made no further disclaimer. Still, his face grew somewhat hard, and he moved abruptly.

"I don't quite know," he said. "Very likely I shall never go back at all. Circumstances are rather against me."

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"And can't you alter them?"

Jimmy drew in his breath, and unconsciously straightened himself a trifle. The girl stood close beside him, looking at him—not as one who asked a question, but rather as though she had expressed her belief in his ability to do what he wished. The confidence this suggested sent a thrill through him, and her quiet graciousness—which, though she addressed him as one of her own world, was not without its trace of natural dignity—and her physical beauty set his heart beating.

"I can try," he said simply. "There are, however, difficulties."

"Of course!" and Anthea smiled. "There generally are. Still, if one is resolute enough, they can usually be got over."

Jimmy said nothing. He was not, after all, especially apt at conversation, and he could not tell her that among all the difficulties he might have to grapple with, the greatest was probably her father.

Just then, as it happened, Jordan turned and called to them, and, moving aft, they descended to the little stern cabin with the rest. It was draped with the least faded flags from the signal locker; the table glittered with glass and silver, and was set out with great bouquets of flowers. The ports were wide open, and the cool evening air, fragrant in spite of the city's propinquity with the smell of the Stanley pines, flowed in. Eleanor Wheelock looked around with a smile of appreciation, and then turned to Jordan.

"Oh," she said, "it's pretty! You have done it all. Jimmy would never have thought of that. But why are both those flags there?"

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Jordan glanced at the two big crossed flags that streamed down upon the settee in the vessel's counter. They were new, and athwart the broad red and white crosses gleamed the silver stars.

"Well," he said with a little smile, "I don't know any reason why they shouldn't be there side by side. It seems to me there'd be peace on earth right off if they always hung that way, if only because all the rest of the world would be afraid to break it. You have heard of the first message we sent your folks in the Old Country over the Atlantic cable. Besides, the thing's symbolical of another alliance that's not only to be wished for, but going to be consummated."

Eleanor blushed becomingly amidst the approving laughter, and, as she stood there in the gleaming white dress and big white hat, with the clear color in her cheeks, it seemed to Jimmy that he had never seen his sister look half so captivating. In fact, he was almost astonished that it had not occurred to him before that Eleanor was so exceptionally well-favored. The quiet and somewhat plain-featured Mrs. Forster, and Austerly's sickly daughter, served as fitting foils for her somewhat imperious beauty. Then, as she glanced in his direction, Jimmy moved a pace or two, and Anthea came out of the shadow.

"My sister Eleanor—Miss Merrill," he said.

There was a brief silence which Jimmy, at least, found embarrassing, for it seemed to him that everybody was watching the two girls with sudden interest. He also felt that when Anthea Merrill moved forward, Eleanor, as it were, receded into second place against her will. His sister was wholly Western, tall, and somewhat spare, with the suppleness of a finely tempered spring rather than that of the willow in her figure. Her quick glance and almost incisive speech matched her bearing. One could see that she was optimistic, daring, strenuous; but with Anthea Merrill it was different. There was a reserve about her, and a repose in voice and gesture which in some curious fashion made both more impressive. She was also a trifle warmer in coloring and fuller in outline, and stood for, or so it seemed to Jimmy, cultivated ripeness as contrasted with his sister's vigorous and brilliant crudity. Quite apart from this, he had noticed Eleanor's brows straighten almost imperceptibly, and the slight hardness that crept into her eyes. The others apparently did not see it, but her brother understood those signs.

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"Miss Merrill! What does she want here?" said old Leeson, who usually spoke somewhat loudly, in what he evidently fancied was an aside, and it seemed to Jimmy that his sister's eyes asked the same question.

Anthea, so far as he could see, did not notice this, and it was she who spoke first.

"I almost fancy I have met you somewhere, Miss Wheelock, though I do not think it was in Vancouver," she said. "Toronto is rather a long way off—but I wonder whether you were ever there?"

"I was," said Eleanor. "I also saw you, though I never spoke to you. Under the circumstances, it was, however, hardly to be expected."

"No?" said Anthea, with a note of inquiry in her voice; and, though Eleanor smiled, there was no softening of her eyes.

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"I was being trained to earn my living, and my few friends belonged to a very different set from yours."

Jimmy was not pleased with his sister. She had spoken quietly, indeed more quietly and indifferently than she usually did, and Anthea Merrill had not shown the least resentment; but he felt that there was a sudden antagonism between the two women. It was therefore a relief to him when the steward appeared with the dinner, most of which Jordan had wisely had sent from a big hotel, and they sat down at the table.

It was a convivial meal. Jordan talked volubly, and there was a sparkle in most of what he said; Forster and Austerly were quietly jocular; and Eleanor, who sat next their host at the head of the table as his bride-elect, played her part in a fashion that pleased them all. Other things had also their effect upon the company. There was the love-match between the man who had staked every dollar he could raise to send out that little rusty steamer, and the beautiful penniless girl, as well as the presence of the daughter of the man who, they felt reasonably sure, would endeavor to crush him by any means available. As it happened, Anthea Merrill talked quietly, and apparently confidentially, to Jimmy most of the time, and even old Leeson, who grinned at them sardonically, seemed to feel that the situation was rife with dramatic possibilities.

By and by the light commenced to fade, but Eleanor's white dress still gleamed against the dull blue and crimson of the crossed flags; and in after-days, when there was anger between them, Jimmy liked to remember her sitting there at Jordan's side to speed him on the *Shasta's* first voyage. She made a somewhat imposing figure in the little dusky cabin, and what she said struck the right note in the inauguration of that venture, for she was optimistic and forceful in speech and gesture—and Anthea now sat in the shadow.

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At last old Leeson rose with a little dry chuckle. "I don't know whether speeches are expected," he said. "Still, I guess there's one toast we ought to honor, and that's the engaged pair. Anyway, it's one that's especially fitting to-night, since it seems to me that if it hadn't been for Miss Wheelock we wouldn't have been here, with steam up, on board the *Shasta*."

There was a little good-humored laughter, but Leeson, who appeared unconscious that his observations were open to misconception, proceeded calmly.

"Now," he said, "in a general way, the less women have to do with business the better; but in Miss Wheelock we have an exception. If it hadn't been for her, Forster would not have put five thousand dollars into the *Shasta*, and if he hadn't made the venture, it's quite likely I wouldn't either. It's quite a big one for people of our caliber, but we have a live man to run the thing, and he will have a wife as smart as he is standing right behind him. Well, we'll wish the pair of them long life and happiness."

Jimmy rose with his companions, but he was conscious that Anthea was regarding his sister with grave inquiry. Then Jordan made his reply conventionally, and afterward stood still a moment looking at his guests, until with a little abrupt gesture he commenced again.

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"Mr. Leeson's right: it is a big thing we have on hand," he said. "We're going to fight and break a monopoly, and, if all goes as we expect it, put money into our pockets. But in one way that's only half of it. I want you to think of the honest effort, the best thing a man has to offer, that is being wasted in this country. Can't you picture the bush-ranchers hauling produce thirty miles over a trail a city man wouldn't ride a horse along to the railroad, and watching fruit 'most as good as we can raise in California rotting by the ton? I want you to think of the oat crops cut green and

half-grown, and the men who raised them mending their clothes with flour-bags and measuring out their groceries by the cent's worth, after spending half a lifetime chopping out the ranch. It's wrong—clean against the economy of things. We want every pound of whatever they can send us. We have mines and mills and money, but in this Province our food is bad and dear. While every man depends on his neighbor, the greatest thing in civilization is facility of transport."

He stopped a moment for breath, and the keen sparkle in his dark eyes grew plainer. "Well, we're going to provide it, and do what we can for the men with the axe and the grub-hoe. Some day this great Province will remember what it owes them. Here it's man against nature, and the fight is hard, while we'll do more than put money in our pockets if we make it a little easier. We want a fair deal—and we'll get it somehow—but we want no more; and if we can hold on long enough, it won't be only those who sent her out who will say, 'Speed the *Shasta*!'"

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He stopped amidst acclamation, for his mobile face and snapping eyes had amplified his words, and, while he handled his theme clumsily, there was, at least, no mistaking the strident ring of the dominant note in it. In that country it was, for the most part, man against nature, and not man against man, and the recognition of the fact was in all who heard him. There men wrung their money from rocky hillside and shadowy forest with toil almost incredible, creating wealth, and not filching it from their fellows; but nature is grim and somewhat terrible in the land of rock and snow, and all down the great Slope, from Wrangel to Shasta, the battle is a stern and arduous one. So there was a little kindling in the listeners' eyes, and the women also raised their glasses high as they said, "Speed the *Shasta*," knowing that this was in reality but a part of what they felt.

Then Eleanor rose, and the company, scattering for the most part, went back on deck, where it once more happened by some means that Anthea Merrill and Jimmy found themselves some distance from any of the rest. The girl looked up at him with a little smile.

"Well," she said, "what did you think of Mr. Jordan's observations?"

Jimmy laughed. "My opinion wouldn't count. I couldn't make a speech for my life."

"No?" said Anthea. "Still, you can hold a steamer's wheel, and perhaps under the circumstances that is quite as much to the purpose. In any case, while your comrade was a little flamboyant, which is much the same thing as Western, I think he meant it. After all, if we parade our sentiments, we generally act up to them."

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"Jordan," said Jimmy, "seems to have quite a stock of them."

"And I understand he has put every dollar he has into the venture. Still, I suppose he did it cheerfully; and you may find it necessary to bring those bush-ranchers' produce down against a gale of wind."

There was a smile in her eyes as she looked at him, but in spite of that Jimmy felt his face grow slightly warm. It was not, however, altogether because Anthea noticed it that she changed the subject.

"There was one point that wasn't quite clear to me. Why did he say you were going to break up a monopoly?"

Jimmy wished she had asked him anything else, for he had already decided that Miss Merrill knew very little about her father's business.

"Well," he said awkwardly, "that's rather a difficult thing to answer. You see, he mentioned a monopoly——"

"He certainly did."

"Then, to begin with, there is the Dunsmore road. They naturally couldn't handle produce as cheaply as we could, and, anyway, it isn't of much benefit to the ranchers who can't get at it."

"To begin with?" That implies more than one, which is, one would fancy, the essential point of a monopoly."

"Perhaps it is," said Jimmy vaguely. "Still, when we get our hand in, there will be three."

Anthea may have had her reasons for not pressing the question then, for she laughed. "Of course!" she said. "Three monopolies. Well, I suppose one must excuse you. You can hold a steamer's wheel."

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Jimmy, on the whole, felt relieved when the others sauntered in their direction, and was less grieved than he might have been under different circumstances when Austerly drew Miss Merrill away. He had felt once or twice before, during discussions with his sister, that keen intelligence is not invariably a commendable thing in a woman. After that, Jordan had a good many instructions to give him, and by the time they had been imparted the rest were clustering around the gangway; while five minutes later Jimmy leaned on the rail watching the boats slide away toward the dusky city. Then he climbed to his bridge, and the windlass commenced to rattle, but he did not know that Anthea Merrill, who heard his farewell whistle, kept the others waiting on the wharf a moment or two while she watched the *Shasta* slowly steam out to sea.

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CHAPTER XIV IN DISTRESS

The clear night was falling when Jimmy leaned on the bridge-rails as the *Shasta* steamed out of the Inlet beneath a black wall of pines. Over her port quarter the pale lights of the climbing city twinkled tier on tier, with dim forest rolling away behind them into the creeping mist. Beyond that, in turn, a faint blink of snow still gleamed against the dusky blueness of the east. All this was familiar, but he was leaving it behind, and ahead there lay an empty waste of darkening water, into which the *Shasta* pushed her way with thumping engines and a drowsy gurgle at the bows. It seemed to Jimmy, in one sense, appropriate that it should be so. He had cut himself adrift from all that he had been accustomed to, and where the course he had launched upon would lead him he did not know.

That, however, did not greatly trouble him. His character was by no means a complex one, and it was sufficient for him to do the obvious thing, which, after all, usually saves everybody trouble. It was clear that Tom Wheelock needed him, and he could, at least, look back a little, though this was an occupation to which he was not greatly addicted. He understood now how his father, who had perhaps never been a strong man, had slowly broken down under a load of debt that was too heavy for him, though the nature of the man who had with deliberate intent laid it on his shoulders was incomprehensible. Jimmy, in fact, could scarcely conceive the possibility of any man scheming and plotting to ruin a fellow-being for the value of two old schooners. The apparently insufficient motive made the thing almost devilish. Merrill, he felt, was outside the pale of humanity, a noxious creature to be shunned or, on opportunity, crushed by honest men.

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Then he wondered for a moment whether the bondholder's daughter had inherited any portion of her father's nature, and brushed the thought aside with a little involuntary shiver. The thing was out of the question. One could, he felt, perhaps illogically, be sure of that after a glance at her; and then he straightened himself with a little abrupt movement, for it was very clear that this was, after all, no concern of his. He had never met any woman who had made the same impression on him that Anthea Merrill had done, but he had already decided that he had sense enough to prevent himself from thinking of her too frequently; and it was evident that if he had not he must endeavor to acquire it.

He strove to divert his thoughts, and listened to the flow of language that rose through the open skylights from the *Shasta's* engine-room. Taken together with the pungent smell of burning grease and a certain harsh thumping, it suggested that things were not going well down there. Then, looking forward, he watched the black figure of the look-out on the fore-castle cut sharp and clean against the pale gleaming of the western sky as the bows swung over the long heave with a rhythmic regularity, for the *Shasta* was drawing out into open water now. She was making eight knots, he fancied, with mastheads swaying athwart the stars, and a long smoke-trail that was a little more solid than the dusky blue transparency streaking the sea astern of her. Jimmy pulled out his pipe when a faint cold breeze fanned his cheek, and lighted it contentedly, for a steamboat travels fastest in smooth water when what moving air there is blows against her, and there was every sign of fine weather.

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It lasted several days, and the *Shasta* stopped only twice at sea: once to cool a crank-pin, and again for a longer while because there was something wrong with her condenser. In due time she crept into a deep, mountain-walled inlet where the little white *Sorata* lay, and Jimmy gazed in astonishment when he saw the piled-up produce on the strip of shingle beach between still, green water and climbing forest. He was even more astonished when certain bronzed men in battered wide hats and soil-stained jean came off, and conveyed him almost by force to the rude banquet laid out in a little frame hotel. Hitherto they had hauled the few goods they put on the market rather more than eight leagues along an infamous trail which for a part of that distance led over a mountain range.

Jimmy feasted that day, for the banquet was repeated with very little variation three times over, and his last speech was very much to the purpose as well as characteristic of him.

"Boys," he said, "we've steam up, and in view of the freight we're charging you Wellington coal is dear. Besides, even to oblige you, I really couldn't eat anything more."

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They paddled him off in state in a big Siwash canoe, and their shouts rang far across the silent pines when the little rusty *Shasta* crawled away into the evening mist; while long after it had hid her from their sight, Jimmy, standing on his bridge, heard the faint wail of the pipes. There was, as usual, a North Briton among them, and the wild music of another land of rock and pine and inlet six thousand miles away crept up the screw-torn wake in elfin fashion. Jimmy, at least, knew the burden of it: "Will ye no' come back again?"

His blood tingled a little as he listened. They had held out their hands to him, and made him one of them, and it was, he vaguely felt, a thing to be proud of, for there was a certain greatness in these simple, all-enduring men. They grappled with giant forests and rent stubborn rocks, clearing the way for thousands yet to come, with limbs that ached from the axe stroke and hands that bled upon the drill. They feared nothing, and looked for nothing except the prosperity which they would hardly share, but which would surely come; and all down the long Slope their kind are perfecting a manhood that is probably worth more than all the gold, silver, iron and wheat raised

beneath the Beaver or the Stars.

It was the same at the next inlet, for that trip was very much of the nature of a triumphal procession, only that as yet the battle was not won; and when at last the *Shasta* turned her bows southward, she was full to the hatches and deep in the water. As it happened, she met a strong southwester, which piled the long Pacific heave upon the reefs to port in big foam-crested walls, and after the first twelve hours of it there was scarcely a dry inch on board her. She went into it with dipping fore-castle that swung up again veiled in cataracts of white and green until her forefoot was clear, and, with complaining engines, made scarcely four knots an hour. There were inlets that offered her shelter, but hour by hour Jimmy, clinging, battered by flying spray, to his reeling bridge, drove her ahead. The time for making speeches, at which he did not shine, had gone, and it was now his business to keep the promise he had made the ranchers, that he would not lose an hour in conveying their produce to the market. That, at least, was a thing he could do, and, though his drenched limbs grew stiff and his eyesight dim, he did it with the dogged thoroughness of his kind, standing high in the stinging drift as he drove her, swept and streaming, at the tumbling seas. He, too, was one of the enduring toilers, and, like the invincible men with the axes who had recognized the stamp he bore, he found a certain grim pleasure in the conflict.

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It was toward dusk on the second evening when they steamed into sight of a little schooner, which showed as a gray smear of slanted canvas scarcely distinguishable from the crag a couple of miles to lee of her. Jimmy wondered what she was doing there in that weather with only one jib and a reefed boom foresail set, until his glasses showed him that her mainmast was broken off. That made the thing clearer, and in case more should be wanted, a flag fluttered aloft and blew out half-way up her foremast upside down. It was an appeal that is very seldom made in vain at sea, and meant in that particular case that she would be ashore in an hour or two unless somebody towed her off.

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Jimmy closed his glasses with a snap, and hailing a very wet seaman sent him for the engineer. The latter climbed to the bridge, and nodded when he glanced at the vessel.

"Well," he said, "you'll have to take them off. She's not going to claw off shore without her mainsail. There would be a little money in the thing if we could tow her, but we can't. I'm taking steep chances of bringing the engines down about my head by shoving her into it as I'm doing."

As though to give point to the speech, the *Shasta* flung her stern high just then, and shook in every plate as with a frantic clanging the engines ran away. Then she put her bows in, and dim crag and wallowing schooner were blotted out by a cloud of spray.

"We have got to try," said Jimmy quietly. "There's a point that would give us shelter twenty miles away."

"Twenty miles!" and the engineer, from whose blackened singlet the water streamed, laughed scornfully. "It's 'bout as likely we'd tow her to Honolulu. Still, I guess you're skipper."

Jimmy nodded. He had not troubled to impress the fact upon his crew, but he invariably acted on it. "You had better raise a little more steam," he said; "it is very likely that we'll want it."

Then, as the dripping engineer vanished from the bridge, he seized the whistle lanyard, and signed to the man behind him who gripped the wheel. A deep blast rent the turmoil of the sea, and the *Shasta*, swinging around a trifle, rolled away to the rescue. It was some twenty minutes later when she stopped, and lay plunging head to sea with the little wallowing schooner close to lee of her. The light was going, but Jimmy could see a shapeless figure that clung to her rail gesticulating with flung-up arm. The wreck of a boat, apparently smashed by the falling mast, lay across her hatch, and there was another half-seen man at her wheel. Jimmy stood still for a few moments with his hand on the telegraph, and he was glad to remember that there were several former sealing-schooner hands among his crew, for what they do not know about boat-work is worth no man's learning.

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He let the *Shasta* swing a little to give them a lee on one side of her, and while the sea smote and spouted in green cataracts across her weather-rail they swung a boat over, and two men, one of whom was a Siwash, dropped into her. That was enough to steer her while she blew to windward, and Jimmy dared risk no more. They got her away, apparently undamaged, and he sent the *Shasta* slowly ahead when she plunged over a seatop veiled in a cloud of spray. It would be beyond the power of flesh and blood to pull that boat back, and the *Shasta* swung in a wide half-circle to leeward of the schooner. Her crew had evidently tried to heave her to, but without her after-canvas she had fallen off again, and was forging ahead with the *Shasta's* boat smothered in foam beneath her rail. She was going to leeward bodily, and Jimmy fancied she was about a mile nearer the crag than when he had first seen her. It was evident to everybody that he had no time to lose.

He shouted with arm flung up, and, though it was doubtful whether anybody heard him, the schooner's boom foresail came thrashing down, and two men who leapt upon her rail fell into the boat. Then he thrust down his telegraph, and, as the *Shasta* forged by, the boat drove down on her. She struck the steamer's hove-up side with a crash that stove several strakes of planking in, and men jumped for the flung-down lines as she filled. They scrambled up them, four in all, and, for one of them had hooked on the davit falls, the *Shasta's* winch banged and rattled as they hove the boat in with the water streaming out through her shattered side at every roll. The men had, however, brought a rope with them, and the winch next hove the schooner's stoutest hawser off.

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It was made fast, and rose splashing from the sea when Jimmy touched his telegraph again, while, when at last the schooner fell into line astern, a very wet man clambered to the bridge.

"Are you fit to pull her out?" he asked.

"I don't know," said Jimmy; "I'm going to try. How did you get so far inshore, and have you left anybody to steer her?"

The man made a vague gesture. "Mainmast went beneath the hounds. She's been driving to leeward since, and she'd have been ashore in another hour if we hadn't fallen in with you. The old man's at her wheel. Built her himself 'most fifteen years ago, and nothing would shift him out of her."

Jimmy glanced astern, and for a few moments saw a gray face of rock loom out of the haze with the sea spouting dimly white at its feet. Then a thicker fold of vapor rolled about it, and the daylight faded suddenly. He could scarcely see the schooner lurching along behind them with jib still set, though the sail thrashed now and then. Indeed, his eyes were growing very heavy, and he realized that after forty-eight hours' continuous watching he could not keep himself awake much longer. A simple calculation showed him that it would be daylight again before he could put his helm up and run for shelter, when it would be imperatively necessary for him to be on his bridge; and calling his Scandinavian mate, he left the *Shasta* in his charge.

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"Keep her going as she's heading now," he said. "You'll see I've headed her up a few points to allow for the leeward drag of the tow. You can call me in a couple of hours, or earlier if there's any change in the weather."

He clawed his way down from the bridge to the little room beneath it, and shed only his streaming oilskins before he flung himself into his bunk. He was asleep in two or three minutes, and slept soundly while the water oozed from his wet garments, until he was roused by a shouting. Then his door was flung open, and a man thrust his head in.

"Mr. Lindstrom figures you'd better get up," he said. "The tow has parted her hawser, and gone adrift."

Jimmy was out of his bunk in a moment, and in a few more had scrambled to his bridge. Lindstrom, the Scandinavian, shouted something he did not hear, but that did not very much matter, for the one question was, where was the schooner, and Jimmy was tolerably certain that nobody knew. His light had been burning, and for the first few moments he could see nothing but blackness, out of which there drove continuous showers of stinging spray. Then he made out the filmy cloud it sprang from at the *Shasta's* bows, and swept his gaze aloft toward the pale silver streak above her mastheads, which showed where the half-moon might come through. As he did so, the Scandinavian gripped his shoulder, and he saw a red twinkle widen into a wind-blown flame low down upon the sea. Now he could, at least, locate the tow.

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"Did you get a sight of the beach? How far were we off?" he shouted.

"A low point," said Lindstrom, "which I do not know. One mile, I guess it, and we head her out more off shore."

Jimmy was a trifle startled. Though the water is deep along that coast, a mile leaves very small margin for contingencies, and he fancied that the tow, blowing to leeward, would cover it in half an hour. In that case there was not the slightest doubt as to what would then happen to her. She might, perhaps, last five minutes as a vessel, for the reefs are hard and there is a tremendous striking force in the long Pacific seas. Another point was equally clear. He had some twenty minutes in which to overhaul the schooner and take her skipper off, and no boat to do the latter with. If he failed to accomplish it in the time, it was very probable that the *Shasta* would go ashore, and he did not think that any one would escape by swimming. Still, he meant to do what he could, and once more he set the whistle shrieking as he shouted to the helmsman.

The *Shasta* came round, and drove away into the darkness, for the light had died out again and there was nothing visible ahead but the dim white tops of frothing seas. Five minutes passed, and Jimmy felt the tension, for they were steaming toward destruction, and it was quite possible that they might run past the schooner or straight over her. Then a shaft of moonlight struck the climbing pines high up in front of him, and it seemed to him that he was already almost under them. He set his lips, and clenched the hand he would not raise in warning to the helmsman while the pale watery moonlight crept lower and lower. It rested for a moment on a fringe of creaming foam where the rock met the water, and then a hoarse shout went up, for as it swept toward him they saw the schooner.

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She was not far ahead of them, with jib thrashed to ribands and the sea streaming from her swung-up side. Jimmy thrust down his telegraph and shouted to Lindstrom, who dropped from the bridge as they drove past her stern. Then, as he raised his hand, the man behind him gasped as he struggled with his wheel, and the *Shasta*, stopping, lay rolling wildly beneath the schooner's lee, while a shadowy figure gesticulated to those on board her from her spray-swept rail. Jimmy glanced shoreward over his shoulder toward the tumbling surf, and decided that he had at most five minutes to take that man off. After that it would probably be too late for all of them.

Mercifully the moonlight still streamed down, and he waited with lips set and hands clenched on the telegraph while the schooner, being lighter, drove down upon the *Shasta*. One blow might

make an end of both of them, but something must be hazarded, and he spared a glance for the wet men who crouched upon the *Shasta's* rail with lines in their hands. He had smashed one boat not long ago, and the second and smaller one had been damaged a week earlier, bringing a Siwash to take them up a certain inlet off an unsheltered beach.

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The schooner was very near them, and, if he stayed where he was, would come down on top of the steamer in another minute or so. Then Lindstrom sprang out of the galley with a blue light in his hand, and its radiance blazed wind-flung and intense on the narrowing gap of foam between the two wildly rolling hulls. There was a hoarse shouting, and, though he might not have heard the words, it was evident that the man on board the schooner realized what he was expected to do. Jimmy set his lips tighter as he pressed down the telegraph to slow ahead.

The *Shasta's* propeller thudded, and as the schooner reeled toward her she commenced to move, and a black figure plunged with flung-up hands from the latter's shrouds. It struck the seething water, and vanished for a moment or two, while men held their breath and strained their eyes. Then there was a hoarse clamor, and lines went whirling down from the *Shasta's* rail. In the midst of it black darkness succeeded, as Lindstrom's light went out. Jimmy gasped, wondering when the schooner would strike them, while he clenched his hand on the telegraph. There was faint moonlight still, but it did not seem to touch the schooner, for his eyes were dazzled by the blaze of the blue light.

A moment later another shout rang out. "He has hold! Get down! Can't you stop her, sir?"

Jimmy, knowing what the hazard was, pressed his telegraph, and held his breath until a harsh voice rose again.

"I have a grip of him," it said. "Heave! We've got him, sir. Go ahead; she's coming down on the top of us!"

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Jimmy moved his hand, and the gong clanged out "Full-speed" this time, while, glancing to windward, he saw the black shape of the schooner hove-up apparently above him. Still, quivering all through, the *Shasta* forged ahead, and he leaned on the rails, for now that the tension had slackened he felt curiously limp.

"The man's all right?" he asked.

Lindstrom, who climbed half-way up the ladder, said that he did not seem to have suffered very much, and Jimmy, looking around, saw nothing of the schooner, for there was sudden darkness as the moon went out.

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CHAPTER XV

ELEANOR'S BITTERNESS

It was in a state of quiet contentment that Jimmy stood on his bridge, as the *Shasta* steamed past the Stanley pines into sight of the clustering roofs of Vancouver. His first voyage had been an unqualified success in every respect, and it was clear that the *Shasta* had done considerably more than cover her working expenses. This was in several ways a great relief to him, since it promised to obviate any difficulty in providing for his father's comfort, and also opened up the prospect of a career for himself. Jordan had assured him before he sailed that they would have no great trouble in raising funds to purchase another boat if the results of the venture warranted it. He had also said that since one thing led to another, there was no reason why the *Shasta* Company should not run several steamers by and by, in which case Jimmy would naturally become commodore-captain or general superintendent of the fleet.

As it happened, Jordan was the first person Jimmy's eyes rested on when he rang off his engines as the *Shasta* slid in to the wharf, and he climbed on board while they made her fast. It, however, seemed to Jimmy that his movements were less brisk than usual, and he was also dressed in black, which was a color he had once or twice expressed himself in his comrade's hearing as having no use for. He came up the bridge-ladder quietly, in place of scrambling up it in hot haste, which would have been much more characteristic, and Jimmy noticed that there was a difference in his manner when he shook hands with him. The latter's satisfaction commenced to melt away, and a vague disquietude grew upon him in place of it.

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"Everything straight here?" he asked, veiling his anxiety.

"Oh, yes," said Jordan; "that is, in most respects. We have an outward freight—Comox mines—for you. You'll take her up the Straits that way when you go back again. You seem to have her full."

"I had to leave a good many odds and ends behind, and the ranchers expect to have more produce for us in a month or two. One or two of them were talking about baling presses and a small thrashing mill. I've an inquiry for the plant, which you can attend to. Another fellow was contemplating putting on some Tenas Siwash to see whether there was anything to be made out

of hand-split shingles, and several more were going to plant every cleared acre with potatoes for Victoria. I'm to take up two of your mechanical stump-grubbers as soon as you can get them. If we can keep them pleased, we'll get all their trade."

Jordan nodded, without, however, any sign of the eagerness Jimmy had expected. "Well," he said, "that's quite satisfactory so far as it goes. Still, there are troubles that even the prospect of piling up money can't lift one over."

"Of course!" said Jimmy, who looked at him with sudden sympathy. "Still, I fancied you told me you had no near relatives. What are you wearing those clothes for?" [Pg 174]

His comrade laid a hand on his shoulder. "It's a thing I shouldn't have done on my own account. I did it—steady, Jimmy, you have to face it—to please your sister."

"Ah!" said Jimmy, with a sharp indrawing of his breath, and leaned on the bridge-rails for a moment or two. His lips quivered, and Jordan saw him clench his hard brown hands. Busy wharf and climbing city faded from before his eyes, and he was sensible only of a curious numbing stupor that for the time being banished grief. Then he felt his comrade's grasp grow tighter.

"Brace up!" said Jordan. "It's a thing we have, all of us, to stand up under."

Jimmy straightened himself slowly, while the color paled in his face.

"When did it happen—and how?" he asked.

"Last night. The doctor had been round once or twice since you went away, and I understood from what Prescott said that he was getting along satisfactorily—that is, physically."

Jimmy said nothing, but looked at him with hard, questioning eyes.

"Well, it appears he was worrying himself considerably. Told Prescott it was a pity he couldn't die right away. Nobody had any use for him, and he didn't want to be a burden. Seems he went over it quite often. The doctor had cut him off from the whisky."

He stopped, with evident embarrassment and pain in his face; but Jimmy's eyes never wavered, though a creeping horror came upon him. In spite of the difficulty he had in thinking, he felt that he had not yet heard all. [Pg 175]

"Go on," he said in a low, harsh voice.

"I don't think I could have told you, only it would have fallen on Eleanor if I hadn't, and she has as much as she can bear. You'll keep that in mind, won't you, Jimmy? He got some whisky—we don't know how—one of the wharf-hands who used to look in bought it for him, most probably. Prescott had to go out now and then, you see."

He stopped for a moment, and made a little gesture of sympathy before he went on again.

"Somehow he fell over the table, and the kerosene lamp went over with it too. When one of the neighbors who heard him call went in nobody could have done anything for him."

The last trace of color ebbed from Jimmy's face, and he stood very still, with set lips and tightly clenched hands. Then he turned aside with a groan of horror.

"Lord!" he said hoarsely. "That, at least, might have been spared him."

In another moment he swung around on his comrade almost savagely, with a bitter laugh. "And you want to marry my sister Eleanor?"

"Yes," said Jordan; "just as soon as it can decently be done. Jimmy, you daren't blame him."

"Blame him!" and Jimmy's voice was strained. "If I had had his load to carry and felt it as he did, I should probably have gone under long ago."

He leaned heavily on the rail for a minute or two, and then, apparently rousing himself with an effort, turned toward his comrade. "As you say, I must stand up to it. How is Eleanor bearing it?" [Pg 176]

"Quietly—too quietly. I'm 'most afraid of her. She's here—I went over to Forster's for her. Insists on staying in the house. I'll send somebody around with your papers, and then go along with you."

Five minutes later they went ashore together, and it was falling dusk when they reached a little four-roomed frame-house which stood near a row of others of very much the same kind amidst the tall fir-stumps which straggled up a rise on the outskirts of the town. It was such a one as the few wharf and sawmill hands who were married usually lived in—comfortless, primitive, and rickety. Jimmy remembered how he had determined when he sailed south with the *Shasta* full to the hatches that his father should not stay another month in it.

He was almost startled when his sister led them into the little general room, for it was evident that there had been a great change in her. That, at least, was how he regarded it then, but afterward he understood that it was only something which had been in her nature all the time making itself apparent. He did not remember whether she kissed him, but she sat down and looked at him with the light of the lamp upon her, while Jimmy, who could find nothing at all to say, gazed at her.

Eleanor had already provided herself with somber garments, and they emphasized the severity of contour of her supple figure. They also forced up the pallor of her face, which was relieved only by a faint blotch of color in either cheek, and, in spite of this, in a curious fashion made her beautiful. Jimmy had hitherto admitted that his sister was pretty, but, as he recognized, that word was not the right one now. She was imperious, dominant, a force embodied in a woman's shape, and her brother was vaguely conscious that he shrank a little from her. Eleanor did not seem to want his sympathy. The coldness of her face repelled him, the fastidious neatness of her gold-bronze hair appeared unnatural, and her pale-blue eyes had a hard glitter like that of a diamond in them. It was evident that in place of being crushed, she was filled with an intense suppressed virility. Indeed, there was something in her appearance and manner that was suggestive of a beautifully tempered spring, one that would fly back the moment the strain slackened, and, perhaps, cut deep into the hand that compressed it. It was the girl who spoke first, and her voice had a certain incisive quality in its evenness.

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"Charley has told you," she said; "I can see that by your face. He insisted on doing so to save me. Well, I am grateful, Charley—that is, as grateful as I am capable of being—but I will not keep you."

Jordan looked disconcerted. "Can't you let me stay? There are one or two ways in which I could be of service."

Eleanor made a little imperious sign, and, though Jimmy once more found it difficult to realize that this woman, whose coldness suggested a white-heat of passion, was his sister, he was not altogether astonished when Jordan slowly rose.

"Then I'm going no farther than the first fir-stump that's low enough to make a seat," he said. "If I'm wanted, Jimmy has only to come out and call."

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He went out, and Eleanor turned to her brother. "I am afraid Charley is going to be sorry I promised to marry him," she said. "Still, I think I am fond of him, or I might have been, if this horrible thing hadn't come between us. It is horrible, Jimmy—one of the things after which one can never be quite the same. I have a good deal to say to you—but you must see him."

Jimmy made a sign of concurrence, and his sister rose. "First of all, there is something else. It is a hard thing, but it must be done."

She turned to a cupboard, and, taking out a bottle of corn whisky, laid it before him with a composure that jarred on the man. Her portentous quietness troubled him far more than a flood of tears or a wild outbreak would have done. Then she laid her finger on the outside of the bottle, as though to indicate how much had been taken out of it.

"I think that accounts for everything," she said. "Still, he was driven to it. I want you to remember that as long as you and the man who is responsible live. Prescott knows, and Charley—I had to tell him. But nobody else must ever dream of it."

"Of course you had to tell Charley," said Jimmy hoarsely. "Still, the inquest?"

A scornful glitter crept into Eleanor's eyes. "That you will leave to me. I have been drilling Prescott as to what he is to say, and if they question Charley, who got here before the doctor when Prescott sent for him, he will stand by me."

Jimmy looked somewhat startled; but when he strove to frame his thoughts the girl silenced him. "If it were necessary to corrupt everybody who had ever been acquainted with him, and I could do it—at any cost—it would be done. Now"—and she quietly took up the lamp—"you will come with me."

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Jimmy shivered a little as he went with her into the adjoining room, and set his lips tight when with a steady hand she drew the coverlet down. Then, while his eyes grew a trifle hazy, he drew in a little breath of relief, for Tom Wheelock lay white and serene at last, with closed eyes and no sign of pain in his quiet face, from which all the weariness had vanished. Only a clean linen bandage, which ran from one temple to behind the other ear, was laid upon it. There was nothing that one could shrink from, and Jimmy made a gesture of protest when Eleanor laid her hand on the bandage.

She met his eyes with something that suggested contempt in hers, and quietly drew back the bandage, and then the soft white sheet from the shoulder of the rigid figure. Jimmy sickened suddenly, and seized her arm in a constraining grasp.

"Put it back!" he said. "That is enough—enough, I tell you!"

Then, while the girl obeyed him, he turned from her with a groan, gasped once or twice, and sat down limply. He could not look around again until her task was concluded, and he would not look at her. It seemed an almost interminable time before she spoke.

"Still," she said, "you must look at him again; I should like you to remember him as he is now. Perhaps you can, Jimmy, but that relief is not for me."

Jimmy rose, and in another few moments turned his head away. He stood still, with a whirl of confused emotions that left him half-dazed rioting within him, while he glanced vacantly round the room. It was scantily furnished, and generally comfortless and mean. Long smears of resinous matter exuded from the rough frame boarding of its walls, and there were shrinkage rents in part

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of it that let the cool night air in. In one place he could see where a drip from the shingle roof had spread into a wide damp patch on the uncovered floor, and it seemed an almost insufferable thing that his father should have spent his last days in such surroundings. Then he glanced at Eleanor, standing a rigid, somber figure with the lamp in her hand, and it seemed that she guessed what he was thinking.

"It does not matter now—but he was once considered a prosperous man," she said. "The contrast was one of the things he never complained of; but I think he felt it."

Jimmy turned and went out with her, and, sitting down in the adjoining room, she looked at him with the quietness he was commencing to shrink from. She seemed to understand that, too.

"You think I am unnatural," she said. "Perhaps you are right—but even if you are, what does it matter? Still, I believe I was fonder of him than you ever were. If I hadn't been, could I have done all this for you and him?"

She stopped for a moment, and the hard gleam flashed back into her pale-blue eyes. "He was horribly burned, Jimmy, and until the last few minutes crazed with drink and pain. Still, he was driven to his death and degradation."

Jimmy only gazed at her with a tightening of his lips, and the girl went on in the clear, incisive tones that so jarred on him. "I think it was more than murder. Can you remember him as anything but abstemious, and only unwise in his easy kindness, until the man who crushed him held him in his clutches? Weak! There are people who would tell you that, and perhaps he was. It was the load he had to bear made him so. Try to remember him, Jimmy, as he used to be—brave and gentle, devoted to your mother and mine; the man who, they said, never ran for shelter in the fiercest breeze of wind. Try—I want you to."

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Jimmy turned to her abruptly, moistening his dry lips with his tongue. "Eleanor, have done; I can't stand any more."

"You must;" and the girl laughed harshly. "I hold that he was murdered. Is there any real distinction between the man who holds you up with a pistol and kills you for your money, suddenly and, in one way, mercifully, and the one who with cold cunning slowly sucks your blood until he has drained the last drop out of you? Still, that is not all. If he had only died as most men die. You must remember the upset lamp and the whisky, Jimmy."

"Stop!" said Jimmy hoarsely, clenching a brown hand while the perspiration started from him. "I can't stand it! It is horrible, Eleanor! You are a woman—you have promised to marry my comrade."

The girl rose, and, crossing to where he sat, laid a hand on his shoulder as she looked down at him. "I feel all that you feel, with a greater intensity; but I can bear it, and you must bear it too. Charley will not complain, and I would be his slave or mistress as long as he would stand by me until I carry out my purpose. He is only my lover, but you are Tom Wheelock's son. What are you going to do?"

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"What can I do?" and Jimmy made a little hopeless gesture. "Perhaps it would be only justice, but I can't waylay Merrill with a pistol. The man has no human nature in him. I couldn't even provoke him to strike me."

"No," said Eleanor, with a bitter laugh; "that would be foolishly theatrical, and in one way too easy. It would not satisfy me. You will wait, ever so long if it's necessary, and command the *Shasta* while you take his trade away. Then we will find other means—business means; it can, I think, be done. He must be slowly drained and ruined, and flung aside, a broken man, as your father was. Then it would not matter whether he dies or not."

Jimmy shrank from her a little, and she smiled as she noticed it. "There is a good deal of our mother's nature in both of us, and you cannot get away from it. It will make you a man, Jimmy, in spite of all your amiable qualities."

"Still," said Jimmy vaguely, "one has to be practical. I'm afraid it isn't easy to ruin a man like Merrill just because you would like to—I've met him, you see. The *Shasta* Company was not started with that purpose either, and it was only because Jordan is a friend of mine that I was put in as skipper."

"Didn't old Leeson say that the *Shasta* Company would never have been formed if it hadn't been for me? It is a struggling little company, and Merrill is a big man, and apparently rich; but there are often chances for the men with nerve enough."

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Jimmy rose. "If one ever comes in my way, I shall try to profit by it. That is all I can say. I'm a little dazed, Eleanor. I think I'll go out and try to clear my brain again. You won't mind? I hear Prescott."

He met Prescott in the doorway, and walking past the few frame-houses found Jordan sitting, cigar in hand, upon a big fir-stump. When Jimmy stopped beside him he made a little sign of comprehension and sympathy.

"I guess I know what Eleanor has told you," he said. "In one way, it's not astonishing that she should feel what she does, and I can't blame her, though it's a little rough on me. This is a thing she'll never quite get over—while the other man lives prosperous, anyway—and, of course, I'm

standing in with her."

"But it's not your affair."

"It's Eleanor's, and that counts with me. Besides, I'm not fond of Merrill either."

Jimmy was touched by the man's devotion, but once more he could find nothing apposite to say, and Jordan went on:

"Sometimes, as I told you, I'm a little afraid of Eleanor, and perhaps that's why I like her. It seems to me you never quite understood your sister. Your mother made the Wheelock fleet, and it's quite likely that Eleanor's going to make the *Shasta* Shipping Company. I'm no slouch, but she has more brains than you and I and old Leeson rolled together. Now, you want to rouse yourself, and she has Prescott with her. You'll walk down to the steamer with me."

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CHAPTER XVI UNDER RESTRAINT

Austerly, who was essentially English and a servant of the Crown, somewhat naturally lived outside the boundaries of Vancouver. He had the tastes and prejudices of his class, and did not like the life most men lead in the Western cities, which is in some respects communistic and without privacy. Even those of some standing, with a house of their own, not infrequently use it only to sleep in, and take their meals at a hotel, while, should they retire to their own dwelling in the evening, they are scarcely likely to enjoy the quietness the insular Englishman as a rule delights in. People walk in and out casually until late at night, and a certain proportion of them are chronically thirsty. This, in case of a business man, has its advantages as well as its drawbacks, but Austerly only recognized the latter. He said it was like living in the street, and he did not appreciate being called on at eleven o'clock at night by men of doubtful character whom he had met for the first time a few days before.

He accordingly retired to a retreat that one of his predecessors had built outside the city, which shades off on that side from stone and steel through gradations of frame-houses and rickety shanties into a wilderness of blackened fir-stumps. The Western cities lie open, and though the life in them is more suggestive of that of Paris than the staidness of an English town, they have neither gate nor barrier, and are usually ready to welcome all who care to enter: strong-armed men who limp in, red with dust, in dilapidated shoes, as well as purchasers of land and commercial enterprise directors. They have, it frequently happens, need of the one, and a bonus instead of taxes to offer the other, who may purpose to set up mills and workshops within their borders.

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Austerly, however, was not altogether a recluse, and it came about one evening that Jimmy, who had arrived there with a few other guests, sat beside Anthea Merrill in the garden of his house. The sunlight still shone upon the struggling grass, to which neither money nor labor could impart much resemblance to an English lawn, but great pines and cedars walled it in, and one caught entrancing vistas of shining water and coldly gleaming snow through the openings between their mighty trunks. The evening was hot and still, the air heavy with the ambrosial odors of the forest, and the dying roar of a great freight train that came throbbing out of its dim recesses emphasized the silence. The little house rose, gay with painted scroll-work and relieved by its trellises and wooden pillars, beneath the dark cedar branches across the lawn. Jimmy had seen Valentine and Miss Austerly sitting on the veranda a few minutes earlier. He was, however, just then looking at his companion, and wondering whether in spite of the pleasure it afforded him he had been wise in coming there at all.

Anthea was dressed richly, in a fashion which it seemed to him became her wonderfully well, and he was quite aware that the few minutes he had now spent in her company would be sufficient to render him restless during the remainder of the week. Jimmy had discovered that while it was difficult to resolve that he would think no more of her, it was considerably harder to carry out the prudent decision.

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"It is some little time since I saw you last," she said.

"Four weeks," said Jimmy promptly. "That is, it would be if this were to-morrow."

Anthea smiled, though she naturally noticed that there was a certain significance in this accuracy. Jimmy realized it too, for he added a trifle hastily: "The fact that it was just before the *Shasta* went to sea fixed it in my mind."

"Of course!" and Anthea laughed. "That would, no doubt, account for it. Are your after-thoughts always as happy, Captain Wheelock?"

Jimmy felt a little uncomfortable. Her good-humor, in which there was nothing incisive, was, he felt, in one way a sufficient rebuff, though he could not tell whether she had meant it as such. It

was also disconcerting to discover that she had evidently followed the train of reasoning which had led to the remark, though this was a thing she seemed addicted to doing. After all, there are men who fail to understand that in certain circumstances it is not insuperably difficult for a woman to tell their thoughts before they express them.

"I'm afraid I don't excel at that kind of thing," he said. "It's perhaps fortunate my friends realize it."

Anthea turned and looked at him with reposeful eyes. "Well," she said reflectively, "I almost fancied you were not particularly pleased to see me. You had, at least, very little to say at dinner."

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Jimmy, to his annoyance, felt the blood rise to his forehead. He had sense enough to see that his companion did not intend this to be what, in similar circumstances, is sometimes called encouraging. He was not a brilliant man; but it is, after all, very seldom that an extra-master's certificate or a naval reserve commission is held by a fool. Anthea had, he felt, merely asked him a question, and he could not tell her that he would have avoided her only because he felt afraid that the delight he found in her company might prove too much for his self-restraint.

"Still," he said, somewhat inanely, "how could I? You were talking to that Englishman all the time."

"Burnell?" said Anthea. "Yes, I suppose I was. He and his wife are rather old friends of mine. They have just come from Honolulu, and talk about taking the yacht up to Alaska. In that case, they want Nellie and me to go with them."

Jimmy remembered the beautiful white steam-yacht which had passed the *Shasta* on her way to Vancouver a day or two ago, and was sensible of a vague relief that was at the same time not quite free from concern. If Anthea went to Alaska, it was certain that he would have no opportunity for meeting her for a considerable time. That was, in one way, what he desired, but it by no means afforded him the satisfaction he felt it should have done. She did not, however, appear inclined to dwell upon the subject.

"I think I ought to congratulate you on what you did a few weeks ago," she said. "I read the schooner-man's narrative in the paper."

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Jimmy laughed. "If I had known he was going to tell that tale, I almost fancy I should have left him where he was; but, after all, I scarcely think he did. Seas of the kind mentioned could exist only in a newspaperman's imagination."

The girl smiled, for, though what she thought did not appear, she saw the shade of darker color in his face, and Jimmy was very likeable in his momentary confusion. Now and then his ingenuous nature revealed itself in spite of his restraint, but nobody ever shrank from a glimpse of it, for he had in him, as Anthea had seen, something of the largeness and openness of the sea.

"Still," she said, "I heard one or two men who understand such things talking about it, and they seemed to agree that it needed nerve and courage to take the schooner skipper off without wrecking your vessel; but you are, perhaps, right about the imagination of the men who serve such papers."

Jimmy noticed the trace of half-contemptuous anger in her face and voice, and fancied he understood it. He had, of course, seen the issue of the paper in question, and had read close beneath the schooner-man's account of his rescue a bitter and plainly worded attack upon his companion's father. Merrill was a political as well as a commercial influence, and journalists in that country do not shrink from personalities. He felt, by the way she glanced at him, that she knew he had done so.

"Yes," she said, though he had not spoken, "you understand what I am alluding to. Still, I suppose anybody who does all he can for the Province must expect to be misrepresented."

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Jimmy's face grew a trifle hard. He did not know exactly what she expected from him, but even to please her he would not admit that the man who had seized the *Tyee* could be misrepresented in any way, unless, indeed, somebody held him up as a pattern of virtue.

"I suppose your father denied the statements?" he said. "I have, of course, been away."

"No," replied Anthea; "it was scarcely worth while. After all, very few people would consider the thing seriously."

She turned to him again with an inquiring glance, and there was a certain insistency in her tone. "Of course, that ought to be clear to anybody."

Jimmy met her glance steadily, and set his lips as he usually did when he was stirred, and he was stirred rather deeply then. Still, nothing would have induced him to say a word in Merrill's favor. Then it seemed to him that the girl's expression changed. He could almost have fancied there was a suggestion of appeal in her eyes, as though she would have liked him to constitute himself her ally, and, indeed, had half-expected it. It set his heart beating, and sent a little thrill through him, for in that moment it was clear that she wished to believe altogether in her father, and would value any support that he could offer her. In other circumstances it would have been a delight to take up the cause of any of her kin, whatever it might have cost him, but just then he was conscious of a bitter hatred of the man in question, and Jimmy was in all things honest.

"I'm afraid I don't know how people are likely to regard it," he said. "You see, I am almost a stranger in the Province. I have been away so long."

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Anthea appeared to assent to this, but Jimmy realized that she felt that he had failed her. Still, the thing was done, and he would not have done it differently had another opportunity been afforded him.

"Well," she said slowly, "there is something I want to mention. I fancy Mr. Burnell has a favor to ask of you this evening, and it might, perhaps, be wise to oblige him. He can be a very good friend, as I have reason to know, and though he may not mention this, he is, one understands, rather a prominent figure in the Directorate of the — Mail Company."

For a few moments Jimmy was troubled by an unpleasant sense of confusion. The man's name was famous in the shipping world, and there were a good many aspiring steamboat officers who sought his good-will, while, since he could not have heard of Jimmy until a day or two ago, it was evident that somebody in Vancouver City had spoken in his favor. Jimmy fancied he knew who this must be, and it was but a minute or two since he had turned a deaf ear to the girl's appeal. Then he roused himself, as he saw her curious smile.

"So that is the famous man?" he said. "I should never have imagined it."

Anthea laughed as she rose; but before she moved away, she turned to him confidentially. "I really think," she said, "you should do what he asks you."

Then she left him, and it was some minutes later when a little, quiet Englishman strolled in that direction, cigar in hand. He sat down by Jimmy.

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"I don't know whether I'm presuming, but I believe you are duly qualified to take command of a British steamer and are acquainted with the northwest coast?" he said.

Jimmy said he had not been far north; and Burnell appeared to reflect for a moment or two.

"After all," he said, "I don't suppose that matters so very much. I'm in rather a difficulty, and you may be able to do something for me. We lost our skipper, and my mate and several of the crew have taken leave of me here unceremoniously. I wish to ask if you would take the yacht up to Alaska for me, and afterward home again. I should naturally be prepared to offer whatever salary is obtainable here by a duly qualified skipper, and as several of my friends are also yours, you would, of course, continue to meet them on that footing while you were on board."

"There is one point," said Jimmy. "The arrangement would necessarily be a temporary one."

"I fancied you would raise it. Well, it would perhaps be a little premature to say very much just now; but I did not come to Vancouver entirely on pleasure. In fact, it is likely that we shall shortly attempt to cut into the American South-Sea trade, in which case we should want commanders for a 4000-ton boat or two from this city. If not, I almost think I can promise that you would not suffer from serving me. I may mention that your friends speak of you very favorably."

Jimmy thought hard for a minute or two. It was a very tempting offer, and wages out of that port were excellent just then. What was more to the purpose, it promised to send him back to the liners, where a commander was a person of some consequence, and, besides this, Anthea had told him that she was in all probability going to Alaska. Then he reluctantly shook his head.

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"I'm afraid I can't close with you, sir," he said. "The fact is, I consider myself bound to the *Shasta* Company."

"Ah!" said Burnell; "their terms are still more favorable? One would scarcely have fancied it."

"No," said Jimmy, "that is certainly not the case. Still, they put me into the little boat out of friendliness—and I'm not quite sure anybody else could do as much for them, or, at least, would make an equal effort in the somewhat curious circumstances. Of course, that sounds a trifle egotistical; but still——"

Burnell signified comprehension. "It is not altogether a question of money."

"I couldn't come if you offered me treble the usual thing," said Jimmy gravely.

The other man nodded. "Well," he said, "I'm sorry, because after what you have told me I almost think we should have hit it tolerably well together. At any time you think I could be of service, you can write to me."

He talked about other matters for a while, and it was half an hour after he went away when Jimmy once more came face to face with Anthea Merril. She was walking slowly through the creeping shadow of the pines, and stopped when she saw him beside a barberry bush, among whose clustering blossoms jeweled humming-birds flitted. One of them that gleamed iridescent hovered on wings that moved invisibly close above her shoulder.

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"So," she said, "you have not done as I suggested?"

Jimmy looked at her gravely, and once more felt the blood creep into his face. She had told him she was going to Alaska on board the yacht, and he almost ventured to fancy she had meant it as an inducement; but there was no trace of resentment in her voice. Anthea was too proud for that.

"I'm sorry," he said. "Still, you see, I couldn't."

There was no doubt that he was sorry, and a look that left him almost bewildered crept into the girl's eyes.

"Why?" she asked quietly.

It was a somewhat unfortunate question, since it afforded an opening for two different answers, and Jimmy, who fancied she wished to learn why the fact that he could not go should grieve him, lost his head.

"Why?" he said. "Surely that can't be necessary. I think there is only one thing that could have stopped my going. If it hadn't been for that, I would have walked bare-foot across the Province to join the ship."

Anthea looked up, and met his eyes steadily. It was clear that she understood him, but there was no reproof in her gaze, and for a moment the man felt the sudden passion seize and almost shake the self-restraint from him. The girl was very alluring, and just then her pride had gone, while it was vaguely borne in on him that he had but to ask, or rather take her masterfully. Perhaps he was right, for there are moments when wealth and station do not seem to count, and an eager word or two, or a sudden compelling seizure of the white hand that hung so close beside him, might have been all that was needed. He looked at her with gleaming eyes, while a little quiver ran through him. Still, he remembered suddenly whose daughter she was, and the bitter grievance he had against her father. The opposition Merrill would certainly offer and the stigma others might cast upon him if he wrested a promise from her then, also counted for something; and though neither of them made any sign, both knew when she spoke again that the moment had passed.

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"That," she said, "was not what I meant. Why is it impossible for you to go?"

Jimmy was himself again, for her voice and look had swiftly changed. "I think it is only your due that I should tell you, since I know why Burnell put the offer before me. Well, I was glad to get the *Shasta*, and it would hardly be the thing to leave her now. Jordan and the others put money they could very hardly spare into the venture—and when they did it, they had confidence in me."

"Ah!" said Anthea, and stood silent for a moment or two. Then she smiled at him gravely. "Perhaps you are right—and, at least, one could fancy that Jordan and the others were warranted."

Jimmy, whose face once more grew a trifle flushed, raised a hand in protest. "I feel I have to thank you for sending Burnell to me. It must have seemed very ungrateful that I didn't close with him; but, after all, that is only part of what I mean. You see——"

The girl looked at him, still with the curious little smile. "You fancied I should feel hurt because you could not take a favor of that kind from me? Well, perhaps I did, but, as you have said, you couldn't help it—and I don't think it matters, after all."

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Her voice was quietly even, and there was certainly no suggestion in it that she resented what he had done; but Jimmy knew that he was now expected to put on his reserve again, and he hastened to explain in conventional fashion that the way she might regard the matter was really a question of interest to him. Then Anthea looked at him, and they both laughed as they turned away, which, as it happened, very nearly led to Jimmy's flinging prudence aside again, and he felt relieved when he saw Austerly and his daughter approaching them. Before the latter two joined them, Anthea, however, once more turned to her companion.

"There is still something I wish to say, and perhaps I should have mentioned it earlier; but in such cases one shrinks from causing pain," she said. "I should like you to believe that I was very sorry when I heard—about your father."

Jimmy only made her a grave inclination, for, though he could not blame her for it, his father's death was the most formidable of the barriers between them, and, recognizing it, he felt a little thrill of dismay as she turned off across the lawn toward where Mrs. Burnell was apparently awaiting her. It afterward cost him an effort to talk intelligently to Austerly and his daughter; but since they betrayed no astonishment at his observations, he fancied that he had somehow accomplished it.

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CHAPTER XVII

THE RANCHER'S ANSWER

It was a Saturday evening, and Barbison, the fruit-tree drummer, felt that he had chosen a fitting time to introduce the business which had brought him there, as he sat amidst a cluster of bush-ranchers on the veranda of the little wooden hotel. It stood beside a crystal river in a lonely settlement, with the dark coniferous forest rolling close up to it. There were, however, wide gaps in the firs in front of the veranda, with tall, split fences, raised to keep the deer out, straggling

athwart them amidst the pale-green of the oats, while here and there one could see an axe-built log-house embowered in young orchard trees. A trail led past the hotel, rutted by the wooden runners of jumper-sleds and ploughed up by the feet of toiling oxen and pack-horses. It led back in one direction through shadowy forest to the Dunsmore railroad, thirty miles away, and in the other to the deep inlet where the *Shasta* lay. The ranchers, however, usually reached the latter by canoe, because the trail was as bad as most of the others are in that country.

On the evening in question there was a little stir in the sleepy place, for the mounted mail-carrier, who accomplished the journey weekly, had come in, and hard-handed, jean-clad men had plodded down from lonely clearings among the enfolding hills to inquire for letters, purchase stores, and ask each other whether the Government meant to make a wagon-road or do anything at all for them. The question was, however, not quite so important as usual just then, for private enterprise had, as not infrequently happens, undertaken the Government's responsibilities, and the ranchers were conscious of a certain gratitude to the *Shasta* Shipping Company. Thirty miles over mountains is rather a long way to convey one's produce and supplies.

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A select company of deeply bronzed and wiry men who had tried to do it with pack-horses as well as oxen and jumper-sledges sat listening to Barbison, apparently with grave attention, while another entertainment was being prepared for them. Two of their comrades, stripped to their blue shirts and old jean trousers, were then engaged in grubbing a very big fir-stump in front of the veranda—that is, clearing out the soil from beneath it, and cutting through the smaller roots with an instrument which much resembled a ship carpenter's adze. It is in general use on the Pacific Slope, where the process of making a bush-ranch seldom varies greatly. The rancher purchases the raw material, thin red soil covered with tremendous forest, as cheaply as he can, and at the cost of several years' strenuous toil hews down a few acres of the latter. Then he proceeds to burn up the logs, and there are left rows of unsightly stumps rising four to six feet above the ground, which he laboriously ploughs around. When he has garnered a crop or two he usually attacks these in turn—that is, if they show no sign of rotting; and to grub out a big one and haul it clear with oxen frequently costs him at least a day.

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Barbison, who watched the proceedings with the rest, was aware of this, but he did not know that the man who sat smoking on a big mechanical appliance of the screw-jack order was the *Shasta's* engineer. It was also somewhat curious, since he had contrived to mention her several times, that his companions had not thought it worth while to acquaint him with the fact, but left him to suppose the gentleman in question was traveling the country on behalf of the manufacturers of the American stump-grubber. In the meanwhile Barbison discoursed glibly about fruit-trees and produce prices, and pointed now and then to a big tin case partly filled with desiccated fruits and pictures which lay on a chair beside him. He was a little, dapper man, evidently from the cities, and by no mean disingenuous, though he was apparently young. He turned when a big quiet rancher picked up and gravely munched a fine Californian plum.

"Oh, let up!—that's the third," he said. "How can I sell trees on my samples when the boys have eaten them?"

The man looked at him stolidly. "It's high-grade fruit," he said. "How'd you start those plum-trees bearing?—they're quite a long while showing a flower or two. Cut them hard when the frost lets up in spring?"

"Quite hard!" said Barbison, for one must make a venture now and then; and none of his companions showed any astonishment, though fruit is freely raised in that country, and the trees that grow the kind with stones in it resent the use of the pruning knife, as everybody who has much to do with them knows.

"Juss so!" said the rancher. "Boys, you cut them—hard. Now, those apples. S'pose you had good parent stocks, could you bud on to them—and how'd you do it? Guess that would suit some sorts better than whip-grafting."

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One might have fancied that Barbison was for a moment a trifle disconcerted, but he smiled airily. "Just how you'd bud on anything else. I'd wax the thread."

"You hear him, boys?" said the rancher. "What you want to do is to wax your thread."

They were very quiet, but perhaps not unusually so, for the clearers of those forests are, except on occasion, generally silent men. Barbison looked at them reflectively.

"Raising the fruit's only half the trouble, anyway," he said. "The big question everywhere is how to put it on the market; and if I can be of any use in that direction, you have only to command me. Seems to me the Government's tired of making roads."

"What's the matter with the steamboat?" asked somebody. "Never had no trouble since we hauled our stuff down to the *Shasta*."

Barbison's smile was sympathetic now. "I guess you're not going to haul your stuff down to her very much longer. She's played out, and run by little, struggling men who can't get credit for the patching up that ought to be done on her, and who'll have nothing to meet claims with if she breaks down and spoils your freight some day. That's a sure thing. From what I heard in Vancouver, the bottom's just ready to drop out of the concern. You want to think of that. Creditors have a lien on freight, too, when a boat's held up for debt."

"Then if I sent down my potatoes or fat steers in her, somebody could seize them for the money

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the company owed?" asked another rancher.

"That's the law," said Barbison, and there was nothing in his companions' manner to suggest that they did not in the least believe him. "Now, there's some talk about another firm putting a smart new boat on. Plenty money behind that crowd, and when she comes round it might suit you considerably better to make a deal with them."

"Who's running the thing?"

"Man called Merrill. Enterprising man. When he takes hold he makes things hum. If it were necessary to start a trade, he'd 'most carry your stuff for nothing."

"Juss so!" said the big rancher. "Kind of philanthropist. I've heard of him."

The man's face was vacantly expressionless, but Barbison, who glanced at him sharply, fancied that he had said enough on the subject. He had visited most of the settlements that could be reached from the coast, and had never neglected an opportunity for dropping a word about the *Shasta* and the new boat.

"Where's that stump-grubber fellow from?" he asked.

"Don't quite know," said one of the others. "Strikes me as an Ontario Scotchman. But the machine's an American notion; never saw one quite like it before."

The man in question stood up just then. He was big and gaunt and pale, but he wore ordinary city clothes, and when he and the others had inserted the screw-jack contrivance on a strip of thick planking under the sawn-off tree, he turned to the assembly.

"There are quite a few stump-pullers, and I've struck benighted men who used the chain-tackle tripod," he said. "I'm not saying it's inefficient, for when you put sufficient pressure upon the winch and it will not pull the stump up, it will pull the tripod down upon your head. This one pulls up all the time, and something has got to come if you work hard enough." Then he raised his hand to his two companions. "You look fit and strong. Show them you can heave."

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They drew the sliding bar up to the head of the thing, and pulled it toward them several times, while their faces grew suffused and the veins rose gorged on their foreheads, for men in that country are proud of their vigor. There was a slow cracking and tearing of roots, but the great stump still stood immovable. Then the *Shasta's* engineer inquired what they fed upon, and their comrades flung them sardonic encouragement, while as they gasped and strained their muscles the screw slid slowly, turn by turn, through its socket. At last there was a sharp rending and a little murmur of applause as the big stump tilted and fell over on its side. Then the big rancher stood up on the veranda.

"It's smart work, but Dave and Charley are two of the smartest men round this settlement, and we want to test the thing in every way," he said. "There's another stump yonder, and I guess Mr. Fleming will put up a bottle of whisky for any three men who will knock five minutes off the record. We'll put Mr. Barbison and Jasper in to show what men who don't grub stumps can do."

There was a little laughter, for if Jasper, who slowly took off his jacket, was not accustomed to stump-grubbing, he was at least a man of splendid physique, and Barbison felt uneasy when he laid a great hand on his shoulder.

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"Come right along," he said; "we've got to get that whisky."

Barbison's protests were not listened to, and, seeing no help for it, he also flung off his jacket, when the big rancher firmly led him down the stairway. Then they gave him a shovel, and his two companions saw that he used it while they plied the grub-hoe. There are, however, probably very few men reared in the city who could work with the tireless axemen of the Pacific Slope, and in ten minutes Barbison was visibly distressed. The perspiration dripped from his flushed face, and he gasped for breath, while his comrades inquired with ironical solicitude whether he were getting sleepy. When he had excavated enough to satisfy them, they made him crawl into the hole and claw out soil from among the roots with shortened shovel, most of the contents of which fell all over him. They kept him at it mercilessly for over half an hour, and when he crept out his hands were raw and he was aching in every limb. Even then there was no respite, for the rest insisted on his participating in their labors at the lever, and contrived to allow him to do considerably more than his share. At last, however, the great stump rose and tilted, and he was escorted back to the hotel amidst acclamation.

"Well," said the big rancher, "if you can work like that, why in the name of thunder do you want to be a fruit-tree peddler? It's quite hard to believe you are one. You don't look like it, anyway."

Barbison certainly did not, for he had burst a seam of one of his garments during his efforts, while the red soil that had smeared them freely was on his dripping face and in his ruffled hair. He flung a swift glance at the man as he realized that his observation was apposite. There was, however, nothing suspicious in the rancher's attitude, and the others laughed in the soft fashion peculiar to the bushman.

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"Anyway, he deserves the whisky," said one of them.

It was duly brought, and, though those ranchers are for the most part abstemious men, other bottles made their appearance in turn, and Barbison braced himself for an effort to maintain his

credit as one of The Boys. He had not found this very difficult in the city saloons, but the bushman who lives with Spartan simplicity and toils amidst the life-giving fragrance of the pines twelve hours every day usually possesses a nerve and constitution that will withstand almost anything. Besides, there was only one Barbison and a good many of them. It was therefore not altogether astonishing that by and by the drummer's observations grew a trifle incoherent, until at last his companions grinned at one another when with a visible effort he raised himself shakily to his feet.

"Something wrong with that whisky, boys; I can't quite talk the way I want. Guess I'll go to sleep," he said. "Anyway, you stand by Merril. He'll carry your freight for nothing, and run the *Shasta* men to——"

After that he said nothing further, but lowered himself carefully into his chair, and collapsed with his arms flung out before him across the table. Then the rest proceeded to hold a court-martial over him.

"Seems to me he knows a blame sight more about Mr. Merril and the *Shasta* than he does about fruit-trees," said the big rancher. "Boys, you cut those plums—hard—and always put wax on the string. Oh, yes, you're innocent bushmen being played for suckers by a smart city man! Guess one would wonder when they took the long clothes off him. If that last advice he gave you wasn't quite enough, I see a book in his pocket with a silver-headed pencil strapped to it." [Pg 204]

One of them promptly took it out, and flicking over the pages, read, "'Six fathoms right up to the old sawmill wharf. Worth while to tow the schooner in and leave her to load. Nothing to be had at Trevor. Siwash deck passengers at Tyler's. Sprotson men have odds and ends, but seem stuck on the *Shasta*.'"

He closed the book with a sharp snap, and grinned at the rest. "Well," he said reflectively, "that's 'bout enough for me. I'm stuck on the *Shasta*, too. Seems to me the men who run her mean to do the straight thing by us."

The rest concurred with this, and several of them instanced cases where carriers had in due time put the screw upon producers who had been supinely content to pocket a big rebate until there was no longer any competition. The rancher with the notebook smiled at them.

"Then we've no use round here for a man like Mr. Barbison," he said. "The one question is—what we're going to do with him before we start him back to the blame philanthropist who sent him?"

They made ingenious suggestions, which varied from painting him with red-lead to teaching him to swim; but it was the one offered by Fleming of the *Shasta* that most pleased them. [Pg 205]

"What he wants is exercise, and if you will bring him off to the steamer I'll see he gets it," he said. "I've quite a few tons of coal to trim, and there's a pile of old grease he could clean out of her bilges."

"The blame insect will offer to pay his passage when he comes round," said one of the company.

"That is easily fixed," said another, who had been rummaging Barbison's pockets. "See this wallet, Jake? Well, you're going in to the railroad, and you'll express it to Mr. Merril, care of the fruit agency, with a line to say the gentleman was sick and left it behind him. That strike you all as workable? Then all we have to do is to decorate him."

They did it as well as they were able, and four of them afterward carried him to a Siwash canoe. They had some difficulty in doing it, and fell down once or twice on the way; but just before the *Shasta* went to sea Barbison was put aboard her, with his face rouged with red-lead and a garland of cedar sprays about his head. It was almost dark then. Wheelock was on his bridge, the deck-hands were busy stowing the anchor, and as the two ranchers who brought the drummer laid him beneath a boat where he tranquilly resumed his sleep, some little time had passed before anybody concerned himself about him. Then a grinning seaman brought Jimmy down from his bridge, and held up a lantern while he gazed in blank astonishment at his prostrate passenger.

"Tell Mr. Fleming I want him. He was ashore," he said.

The engineer came, and smiled when Jimmy turned to him. [Pg 206]

"If you can tell me what the meaning of this is, I should be obliged," he said.

"Well," said Fleming reflectively, "there are maybe two or three. For one thing, I'm thinking it's a hint that the boys ashore are standing by you. There's a note they sent off in your room."

Jimmy told the seaman to bring it, and, while the latter turned the light upon the strip of paper, read: "Hasn't a dollar on him, and belongs to a man called Merril, who's on your trail. We recommend a course of shoveling coal. All you have to do is to play a straight game with the boys, and they'll stand behind you all the time."

Then he turned to Fleming. "I fancy you could give me an explanation, and I'd like to have it."

Fleming told him as much as it appeared desirable that he should know, and Jimmy smiled grimly.

"Wake him up," he said. "There's a bucket yonder."

The seaman made a vigorous use of it, and Barbison raised himself on one elbow, drenched and spluttering.

"Throw any more water, and I'll kill somebody! I'm dangerous when I'm mad," he said.

"Get up!" said Jimmy sharply. "What are you doing here?"

Barbison, who endeavored unsuccessfully to get up, did not seem to know, and apparently abandoned the attempt to think it out. His scattered senses, however, came back to him after the application of more cold water.

"How much you want—take me to Victoria?" he gasped.

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"One hundred dollars," said Jimmy dryly.

The passenger expostulated in a half-coherent fashion, and then, apparently realizing that it was useless, fumbled for his wallet. He clenched his fist when he could not find it.

"Stole it—and my tin case," he said. "Ate up all my samples—must have ate the case, too, the—hungry hogs."

"Then you'll have to work your passage;" and Jimmy turned to Fleming. "You'll take care he earns it. Don't quite kill the man."

Barbison, who seemed to understand this, at last got on his feet and unloosed a flood of invective which had no effect on any of his listeners. Several deck-hands were, however, needed before he was conveyed into the stokehold and left in front of a bunker with a shovel in his hand. He assured Fleming that nothing would induce him to work, and the engineer only grinned, because it was a long way to Victoria, and the *Shasta* had several calls to make. Barbison seemed to fancy that his firmness had proved sufficient, and, coiling himself up amidst the coal, once more went to sleep. He awakened hungry, and Fleming smiled again when he demanded food.

"If you'll lift those floor-plates you'll see the spaces between her frames choked with coal-grit and grease," he said. "It's possible you'll get some breakfast when you've scraped them clean. Then it will depend on how much coal you trim out of that bunker whether you get any dinner."

Barbison looked hard at the man, and saw he meant what he said. Then he pulled up a floor-plate and looked at the filthy mass of coagulated grease that had drained from the engine-room.

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"And how'm I to get it out?" he asked.

"Quite easy," said Fleming dryly. "What's the matter with your hands?"

Then he went away and left Barbison to his task. It was a particularly repulsive one, but he accomplished it, and spent most of the next few days trimming coal, waiting on the fireman, and cleaning out an empty coal-bunker on his hands and knees. It is probable that the sight of Victoria filled him with ineffable relief, and it certainly was not Fleming's fault if this were not the case. As they steamed into the harbor Jimmy sent for him.

"I think you have earned your passage, and we're straight," he said. "You can go ashore when we get in."

Barbison glanced down at his dilapidated attire. "Can I go ashore this way? I'll ask you a favor. Let me stay until it's dark."

Jimmy laughed. "Well," he said, "as I scarcely think Mr. Merrill will send you back again, you may."

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CHAPTER XVIII

ELEANOR SPEAKS HER MIND

The afternoon was hot and drowsily still when Merrill drove his daughter down the dusty road which runs from New Westminster through the Fraser meadows. The team was a fast one, and the man, who had an appointment to keep in Vancouver, did not spare them. There were also reasons why he found rapid motion and the attention the mettlesome horses required a welcome distraction, for just then he was troubled with a certain sense of irritation which was unusual with him.

Merrill was not a hot-tempered man; in fact, he owed his commercial success largely to the dispassionate coolness which rarely permitted his feelings to influence his actions, and it was characteristic of him that while he had a finger in a good many schemes the man himself never figured prominently in connection with any of them. His influence was felt, but he was in one sense rather an abstract force than a dominant personality. It was said of him that he always worked underground, and he certainly never made political speeches or favored the newspapers with his views; while, when the results of his unostentatious efforts became apparent in disaster

to somebody, as they usually did, it generally happened that other men incurred the odium. There are, of course, financiers whose enterprises benefit the whole community, since they create new corn-fields and open mines and mills, but Merrill's genius was rather of the destructive order, and it was not to anybody's advantage that he knew how to choose his time and instruments well. In person, he was little, somewhat portly, and very neatly dressed, a man who had never been known to lose his temper or force himself upon the citizens' attention. [Pg 210]

Still, he was human, after all, and as he sat behind his costly team that afternoon he was thinking somewhat uneasily of the unexpected resistance certain land-jobbers in New Westminster had shown to his demands, and the attack on him which had just appeared in a popular journal. It was the second time the thing had happened, and, though he was not directly mentioned and the statements could scarcely be considered libelous, it was evident that a continuance of them would have the effect of turning the attention of those who read them upon his doings, which was just then about the last thing that he desired.

It accordingly happened that he drove a little faster than he generally did, until as the team swung out of a strip of shadowy bush he saw a jumper-sled loaded high with split-rails on the road close in front of him. He shouted to the man who walked beside the plodding oxen, never doubting that way would be made for him, especially as the teamster looked around. The oxen, however, went straight on down the middle of the road, and it was a trifle too late when Merrill laid both hands upon the reins. In another moment there was a crash, and Anthea was almost shaken from her seat. When Merrill swung himself down he saw that one wheel had driven hard against the jumper load. Then as he called to Anthea to move the team a pace or two, the patent bushing squeaked and groaned, and the wheel, after making part of a revolution, skidded on the road. The man who drove the oxen turned and favored him with a little sardonic grin. [Pg 211]

"I hope the young lady's not shook too much," he said.

Anthea, who fancied it was with a purpose he confined this expression of regret, if, indeed, it could be considered such, to herself, was as a matter of fact considerably shaken and very angry.

"Why didn't you get out of the way when you heard my father shout?" she asked.

It was Merrill at whom the man looked. "Well," he said reflectively, "I guess that load is heavy, and the oxen have been hauling hard since sun-up, while there's no reason why a rancher shouldn't use the road as well as anybody from the city. You should have pulled up sooner. Anyway, you're not going far like that."

Merrill said nothing, though he could not very well have failed to notice the hint of satisfaction in the last remark. He very seldom put himself in the wrong by any ill-considered utterance, but Anthea was a trifle puzzled when he quietly walked to the horses' heads. She knew that the small ranchers are, for the most part, good-humored and kindly men, while, although she could not be certain that the one before them had contrived the mishap, it was evident that he had done very little to avert it. He made no further observation, and when he led his oxen into a neighboring meadow Merrill told the girl to drive the horses slowly toward a ranch they could see ahead, and walked beside the wagon watching the wheel. It would turn once or twice and then stick fast and skid again; but they contrived to reach the ranch, and found a bronzed man in dusty jean leaning on the slip-rails. [Pg 212]

"Have you a wagon-jack and a spanner?" asked Merrill.

"I have," said the man, who made no sign of going for them.

"Then I should be obliged if you would lend me them," said Merrill.

The man smiled dryly. "It can't be done. If that wheel won't turn, Miss Merrill can come in and sit with my wife while you go somewhere and get it fixed. That's the most I can do for you."

"I suppose the man who wouldn't let us pass back yonder is a friend of yours?" and Merrill looked hard at him.

"That's so. Runs this ranch with me. Guess you've seen me once before, though it was your clerk I made the deal with. That's why we're here on rented land making 'bout enough to buy groceries and tobacco. You know how much the ranch you bounced us out of was worth to you. Anyway, you can't have that jack and spanner."

Anthea flushed with anger, but she saw that her father was very quiet.

"Well," he said dryly, "they belong to you, but I'm not sure it wouldn't have been as wise to let me have them."

The rancher laughed. "You don't hold our mortgage now, and if I could get hold of that newspaper-man I could give him a pointer or two. Seems to me he's getting right down on to the trail of you. Are you coming in out of the sun, Miss Merrill?" [Pg 213]

"Certainly not," said Anthea; and the man took out his pipe and quietly filled it when Merrill told her to walk the horses on again.

Though she was a trifle perplexed by what she had heard, it seemed to her that her father's attitude was the correct one, and she seldom asked unnecessary questions. She had lived away from home a good deal since the death of her mother when she was very young, but her father

had always been indulgent, and she had cherished an unquestioning confidence in him. It was also pleasant to know that he was a man of mark and influence, and one looked up to by the community. Of late, however, several circumstances besides the newspaper attacks on him had seemed to cast a doubt upon the latter point, but she would not entertain it for a moment, or ask herself whether there was anything to warrant them. It was reassuring to remember her father's little smile when she had ventured to offer him her sympathy; but she could not help admitting that there must, at least, have been some cause for the rancher's rancor. The man, she felt, would not have displayed such vindictive bitterness without any reason at all. She, however, decided that he had no doubt made some imprudent bargain with her father, and was unwarrantedly blaming the latter for the unfortunate result of it.

They went on in silence, and Merrill, who walked beside the wagon, shook the wheel loose now and then when the horses stopped, until they reached Forster's homestead. The rancher greeted Anthea pleasantly, but she felt that there was a subtle change in his manner when he turned to her father, who explained their difficulty.

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"The trouble is that I have rather an important appointment in Vancouver this afternoon," said the latter.

"My wife is there now with our only driving wagon, or I would offer to take you over," said Forster. "I can, however, lend you a saddle-horse, and Miss Merrill could stay with Miss Wheelock until we see what can be done with the wagon. If necessary, I will drive her across when my wife comes back."

Merrill thanked him, and presently moved away toward the stable with the hired man while Forster led Anthea to the house, and left her in the big general room where, as it happened, Eleanor Wheelock sat sewing. The green lattices outside the open windows were partly drawn to, but the shadowy room was very hot, and the little air that entered brought the smell of the pines with it. It was not the aromatic scent they have at evening, but the almost overpowering smell filled with the clogging sweetness of honey the afternoon sun calls forth from them. The ranch was also very still, and for no evident reason Anthea felt the drowsy quietness weigh upon her. Her companion said nothing to break it, but sat near the window sewing quietly, and Anthea became sensible of a faint shrinking from the girl, though she would have liked to overcome it for reasons she was not altogether willing to confess to herself.

Eleanor Wheelock's face looked almost colorless by contrast with her somber dress, and there was a curious hardness in it, while Anthea, who remembered Leeson's speech in the *Shasta's* cabin, wondered whether she were making the very dainty garment for herself, since it was suggestive of wedding finery.

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"That should be very effective," she said at length. "You intend to wear it?"

Eleanor looked up from her sewing. "Yes," she said, "I believe I shall."

Something in her voice struck Anthea as out of place in the circumstances, for one does not sew bitterness into wedding attire, while the suggestion of uncertainty which the speech conveyed was more curious still. Anthea felt there must be something more than the loss of her father to account for her companion's attitude; but that was naturally a thing she could not mention.

"I think I could venture to offer you my sympathy in what you have had to bear," she said. "I was very distressed to see the brief account in the newspaper."

Eleanor laid down her sewing, and looked at her steadily. "Why should you be?"

It was a disconcerting question, and asked with a still more disconcerting insistency. Anthea could not very well say that she did not know, nor yet admit that the news had grieved her because of her sympathy with Jimmy. Still, though she shrank from her, she desired this girl's good-will, and she compelled herself to an effort.

"In any case, I was sincerely sorry," she said. "Although I only met you that evening on board the *Shasta*, one could say as much without presuming. Besides, when we were away in the *Sorata* your brother did a good deal to make the cruise pleasant for Nellie Austerly and me."

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"When he was Valentine's deck-hand?" and Eleanor looked at her with a little sardonic smile. "You no doubt allowed him to forget it occasionally, and Jimmy was grateful. In fact, he admitted as much to me. He was always foolishly impressionable."

Anthea felt her face grow warm, and though she was as a rule courageous, she was glad that she sat in the shadow. In several respects her companion's last suggestion appeared almost insufferable.

"Perhaps I laid myself open to this," she said. "It is seldom wise to make advances until one is reasonably sure of one's ground, but I do not understand why you should resent a few words spoken out of friendliness."

The little hard glint grew plainer in Eleanor's eyes. "Then I think you should do so. There is a very convincing reason why friendliness—of any kind—would be very unfitting between you and me—or, for that matter, between you and Jimmy."

Anthea would not ask the question that suggested itself, for it seemed to her, as, crushing down her anger, she sat and watched her companion, that the latter had been waiting for this

opportunity. There was no mistaking the meaning of the thrill in her voice or the spot of color in her cheek, while the reference to Jimmy had its significance. She felt that the girl wished to hurt her.

"You admitted that you read the newspapers?" said Eleanor abruptly.

"Ah!" said Anthea; "I think I know what you mean by that. Naturally, I cannot discuss those libels with you." [Pg 217]

"Libels!" and Eleanor laughed. "If you can believe them that, one would almost envy your credulity. Presumably your father has never mentioned our name to you?"

Anthea was somewhat startled, for, though Merrill certainly had not done so, she remembered the momentary expression of his face when Forster had mentioned Miss Wheelock. She also remembered Jimmy's attitude on the evening she met him at Austerly's, and the suggestion of distance in Forster's manner to her father. It seemed that there were others as well as the rancher who did not believe the statements made in the paper to be libelous.

"He has not," she said very quietly. "Still, as I said, these are subjects I cannot discuss with everybody."

"And yet you were anxious to know why friendliness was out of the question between you and me! Well, I admit that I find a certain pleasure in telling you, and it isn't quite unnatural. You read how my father—Jimmy's father—died, but you do not know how he came to be living in that sordid shanty, an infirm and nerveless man. Your father slowly ruined him, wringing his few dollars out of him one by one, by practices no honorable man would condescend to, until there was nothing more he could lay his grasping hands upon. When that happened my father was broken in health and courage, and only wished to hide what he felt, most foolishly, was shameful poverty. There were other things—things I cannot tell you of—but they make it clear that your father is directly responsible for my father's death." [Pg 218]

She stopped abruptly and took up her sewing, but her face looked very grim and vindictive in its dead pallor, for the spot of color had faded now, and presently she flung the dainty fabric down again and looked steadily at her companion. Neither of them spoke for almost a minute, and once more Anthea felt the stillness of the ranch-house and the heavy honey-like smell of the pines curiously oppressive. She believed in her father, or had made up her mind to do so, which was, however, perhaps not quite the same thing; but she could not doubt that Eleanor Wheelock was firmly persuaded of the accuracy of the indictment that she had made. The passionate vindictive thrill in her voice had been absolutely genuine, and Anthea recognized that it could not have been so without some reason. Then Eleanor spoke again.

"You may wonder why I have told you this—though I am not quite sure that you do," she said. "Well, you at least understand why I resent your sympathy, and if I had any other purpose it may perhaps appear to you when you think over what you have heard."

Anthea rose at last, and turned toward her quietly, but with a certain rigidity of pose which had its significance. She stood very straight and looked at her companion with big, grave eyes.

"You have, at least, said all I care to listen to," she said.

"And I think sufficient," said Eleanor, with a bitter smile.

Then, and it was a relief to Anthea, Forster came in, and dropped into a chair. [Pg 219]

"I fancy Jake will fix that wheel; but he may be an hour yet, and it's very hot," he said. "I don't want to break off your talk, but perhaps you could make us some tea, Miss Wheelock. I don't feel like waiting until supper."

Eleanor went out, and Anthea found it cost her an effort to talk tranquilly to Forster. She liked the man, but her mind was busy, and had there been any means available she would gladly have escaped from him. It was evident that Eleanor Wheelock believed what she had told her. The rancher who had kept his jumper in the way was as clearly persuaded that Merrill had injured him, and it was conceivable that the newspaper-man also believed his statements warranted. If they were right, her father must have treated several people with considerable harshness, but she could not bring herself to admit that—at least, just then. She naturally did not know Eleanor Wheelock had foreseen that once her doubts were aroused, enlightenment would presently follow. Then there was the latter's veiled suggestion that she was attracted by Jimmy Wheelock, and had condescended to cajole or encourage him. Had she been alone, her cheeks would have tingled at the thought of it, for in one respect the notion was intolerable. Still, though it cost her an effort, she contrived to discourse with Forster, until at last the hired man announced that the wheel was fixed, and, thanking the rancher for his offer to accompany her, she drove on to Vancouver alone.

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CHAPTER XIX

WOOD PULP

The fresh northwest breeze that crisped the Inlet swept in through the open ports and set the cigar smoke eddying about the table, when Jimmy sat with Jordan and another man in the *Shasta's* little stern cabin. Looking forward through the hooked-back door, he could see the lower yards and serried shrouds of a big iron ship that was lying half-loaded on the *Shasta's* starboard side. Beyond her there rode a little schooner with reefed mainsail and boom foresail thrashing, while the musical clinkety-clank of her windlass betokened that she was just going to sea. Jimmy's face grew a trifle hard as he heard it, for she was the *Tyee*.

Jordan sprawled on a settee not far away, and a burly, red-faced Briton who commanded the iron ship sat opposite to Jimmy, cigar in hand. The latter had the faculty some people possess of making friends, and, though they had after all seen very little of him, the shipmaster's manner was confidential.

"If the canners who are loading me had kept their promise I'd be driving south with the royals on her before this breeze instead of lying here," he said. "My broker doesn't know when they mean to send the rest of the cases down either, and it seems it's only now and then a mail goes up that coast. In fact, I've almost made up my mind to run round to the Columbia. I believe the packers would load me there."

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"Port charges and tugs are expensive items," said Jordan thoughtfully. "Vancouver freights are tolerably good, and it might pay you to wait a week or so. You see that schooner on your quarter? She's going up to the cannery now."

The skipper made a little impatient gesture. "How long's she going to be getting there with a head-wind? Besides, all she could bring down would be nothing to me. I wouldn't have stayed so long, only that confounded broker told me a man called Merrill was sending a steamer up."

"Then, since the schooner belongs to him, I guess he has changed his mind. How long would you wait for a steamboat load?"

"A week," said the skipper—"not a day more. I believe I could fill up on the Columbia, and, as there's not another vessel offering for the United Kingdom here, it would please me to feel that the canners would have to keep their salmon."

Jordan flashed a warning glance at Jimmy. "Well," he said, "it seems to me that if you will wait the week, you are going to get your freight. I can't tell you exactly why, but I wouldn't break out my anchor for another eight days if I were you."

"I can take a hint as well as another man;" and the skipper rose. "In the meanwhile, I'll go ashore and stir up that broker again. You'll have a head-wind if you're going north, Mr. Wheelock. Expect you to come off and feed with me when you're back again. Good luck!"

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Jordan went with him to the gangway, and then came back and smiled at Jimmy.

"It's just as well you made the New Cannery people a half-promise you'd call this trip," he said. "Now I guess you've got to keep it. Things fit in. Merrill, as usual, hasn't played a straight game with those packers. Took their transport contract, and when that headed off anybody else from going there, he sends the *Tyee* up instead of the steamboat. You'll be at the cannery two days ahead of her, anyway, and there's no reason why you shouldn't get every case they have on hand."

Jimmy made a sign of comprehension, and Jordan lighted another cigar before he opened the paper he had brought with him. "Now and then the little man gets a show, though it's usually when the big one isn't quite awake," he said. "You sit still there, and listen to this. 'The Provincial Legislature at length appears to recognize that its responsibilities are not confined to fostering the progress of the bush districts, and one contemplates with satisfaction a change in the policy which has hitherto incurred a heavy expenditure upon roads and bridges for the exclusive benefit of the ranchers. Now that retrenchment in this direction appears to be contemplated, there should be money to spare for equally desirable purposes.'"

He threw down the paper. "I guess that's going to cost Merrill a pile, especially as the member for the district in which he is starting his wood-pulp mill shows signs of going back on him. From what the boys are saying, Merrill has a pull on the man, but it seems his party has a stronger one."

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"I don't quite understand," said Jimmy.

Jordan laughed softly. "It's interesting. Shows how things are run. Merrill bought up a mortgage on a half-built wood-pulp mill which the men who began it couldn't finish, and fixed things so that by and by it belonged to him and two or three of his friends. Well, that mill was put where it is because they've a head of water that will give them power for nothing, and spruce fit for making high-grade pulp, but it's not on the railroad and not near the coast. The question is how to get their product out. There are big mills between them and the lake they could put a steamer on, and they'll have to lay down a wagon-road, underpinning a good deal of it on the mountain-side, and cutting odd half-miles of it out. That's going to cost them more than putting up their mill."

"Then how did they expect to hold their own with the mills now running?"

Jordan chuckled. "By getting the Province to make their road for them. Merrill has influential friends, and one of them who went up not long ago discovered that there was a high-class

ranching district behind the mill; it only wanted roads to bring the settlers in."

Then his face grew grave, and he sat silent a minute, or two before he spoke again.

"Jimmy," he said, with a very unusual diffidence, "there's a thing that is worrying me. It doesn't strike me as quite fitting that Eleanor should see so much of that blame Ontario man in Merrill's office. He has been over twice in the last fortnight to Forster's ranch."

"Do you expect me to tell her so?"

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"I do not. Guess she'd make you feel mean for a month after if you did. I want you to remember, all the time, that I'm sure of your sister—but I don't like the man. He had to get out of Toronto—and they're talking about him already in the saloons. Seems to me she's playing a dangerous game in fooling him."

"Fooling him?"

"That's so. He put some money into Merrill's business, and it's quite likely he knows a little of his hand. Eleanor has made up her mind to know it, too."

Jimmy flushed. "The thing must be stopped."

"Well," said Jordan ruefully, "that's how I feel, but the trouble is I don't quite know how it can be done. For one thing, I'm going to run up against that Toronto man, though I don't expect Eleanor to be nice to me after it."

"You can't think she has any liking for him?"

Jordan turned on him with a snap in his eyes. "I don't. If I did, I should not have mentioned it to you. Guess I'd stake my life any time on Eleanor's doing the straight thing by me. It's what those—hotel slouches will say about her I don't like to think of; and you have to remember she'd go through fire to bring down the man who ruined your father. In one way, that's natural—but the thing has been worrying me."

Just then there was a splash of approaching oars, and Jordan rose. "That's the mate with your papers, and I guess I'll go," he said. "Get every case of that salmon—and remember what I've told you if you hear of any trouble between Eleanor and me. It won't be due to jealousy, but because I've spoiled her hand."

He left Jimmy, who remembered what he had seen in Eleanor's face the night she had talked to him of Merrill, thoughtful when he rowed away. It appeared very probable that she would make things distinctly unpleasant for her suitor if he rashly ventured to interfere with any project she might have in view. Jimmy, in fact, felt tempted to sympathize with Jordan.

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In a few minutes, however, he proceeded to take the *Shasta* out, and drove her hard all that night into a short head-sea. She had left the comparative shelter of Vancouver Island behind, and was rolling out with whirling propeller flung clear every now and then, head on to the big, white-topped combers, when as he stood dripping on his bridge a schooner running hard materialized out of the rain and spray. Jimmy pulled the whistle lanyard, and the man behind him hauled his wheel over a spoke or two; but the schooner came on heading almost for him, and rolling until her mastheads swung over the froth to weather. Her mainboom was down on her quarter, and she had only her foresail set and a little streaming jib.

She drove the latter into the back of a big gray-and-white sea as she went by, and when she hove it high once more while the water sluiced along her deck, Jimmy, who could look down at her from his bridge, recognized her as a vessel that had once belonged to his father. She drove past with a drenched object clinging desperately to her wheel, and Jimmy smiled as she vanished into the rain again, for it seemed to him that, as his comrade had said, fortune favored the little man now and then. Merrill had evidently sent two schooners up to the cannery, but the *Tyee* was some sixty miles astern of the *Shasta*, and it was clear that the skipper of the other vessel could no longer thrash her to windward in that weather. There was, he believed, a good deal of salmon at the cannery, and all he had to do was to take the *Shasta* there.

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It was, however, not particularly easy. The breeze freshened steadily, until she put her forecastle under and hove her stern out at every plunge, while her propeller shook her in every plate as it whirred in empty air. A man could scarcely venture forward along her brine-swept deck, and at times when Jimmy had to cling to the bridge-rails for his life she rolled until all her rail was in the sea. He was battered and blinded by flying spray, and when the black night came he could not see an arm's-length in front of him; but the telegraph still stood at full-speed, and the *Shasta* resolutely butted the big foaming seas. At last she ran in among the islands, where there was smoother water, and Jimmy was rowed ashore, red-eyed, half-asleep, and aching in every limb, when he had brought her up off a certain icy, green-stained river. As it happened, the man in charge of the cannery on its bank was unusually pleased to see him, though he did not say so. He gave Jimmy a cigar in his office, and when they sat down looked at him thoughtfully.

"It's rather a long way up here, and it will cost you a little in coal if you mean to make your usual trip," he said. "I don't think I made you any definite promise."

Jimmy smiled. "Still, I said I would call."

"Then I wish some of the other people with whom we trade were as punctilious. I suppose you

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expect something now you're here?"

"I do," said Jimmy. "In fact, I almost fancy it's going to suit you to fill me up."

"I think I mentioned we had a standing arrangement with Mr. Merrill."

"You did," said Jimmy cheerfully. "He's sending you up two schooners. It will be a week before they are here. I passed one of them yesterday running back for shelter, and the other's—anyway—sixty miles astern of her."

"The wind may change, and they wouldn't be long getting here with sheets slacked away."

"It won't change," said Jimmy. "Look at your glass. That rise means northerly weather."

The canner appeared to consider. "Well," he said, "I gave you a few cases once or twice, and, though we have an arrangement with Merrill, I can fill you up one hatch now at the rate you fixed."

"I can't trade on those terms. The rate in question was a special cut. We made it to get in ahead of Merrill; but when the time came, you didn't give us an opportunity for tendering for your carrying. In fact, I hear he's getting more than I did. That, however, does not directly concern me, and you no doubt understand your own business; but I should like to mention that the *Agapomene's* skipper will not wait a day longer than next Thursday."

The canner looked hard at him. "You will excuse my asking if that is a sure thing?"

"You mean am I talking quite straight?" and a suggestive dryness crept into Jimmy's tone. "I can only say that the man, who did not know I was coming here, assured me of it just before I went to sea. It would, of course, be easy for you to wait and find out whether you could believe me. Only the fact that you had done so would naturally place you in a difficulty, since the *Agapomene* would have gone to sea, and there isn't another vessel offering."

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"Well?" said the canner.

Jimmy smiled at him. "I want two things—every case you have ready, and a rate equal to what you're giving Merrill. It is not very much, after all. As you know, since Merrill's schooners can't get here until there is a change of wind, I could strike you for double."

The canner sat silent a moment or two, and then laughed good-humoredly. "To be quite straight, the last was what I expected. Now, I'm not the only man in this concern, and the people who have the most say are, as usual, in Victoria. I know why they made the deal with Merrill, and while, as you say, that does not concern you, it didn't quite please me. Anyway, he hasn't kept his arrangement, and has put the screw on us in several ways; so if you'll warp your boat in we'll heave the cases into her. There's just another thing. Come back when you lighten her, and if this run of fish lasts I'll do what I can to make it worth your while."

Jimmy thanked him, and went out to bring the *Shasta* alongside the little wharf, after which he went to sleep, though almost every other man on board was kept busy stowing salmon-cases all that night.

It happened that during the earlier hours of it several irate gentlemen who had the control of a good deal of money sat in conclave in Merrill's house, which stood just outside the city limits of Vancouver. It was a tastefully furnished room in which they sat, and nobody could have found fault with the wine and cigars on the table, but as it happened both these facts irritated one of the gentlemen.

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"I feel tempted to talk quite straight, and I expect you'll understand me, Merrill, when I say that you don't seem to have had your usual luck over this wood-pulp deal," he said. "In a general way, it's the other people who take a hand in your ventures who feel the pinch when things don't quite work out right, but in this case you have got to bear it with the rest of us."

Merrill, who lay in a big lounge chair, little, portly, and immaculately dressed, looked up at him quietly. "If it's any consolation to you, I'm holding as much stock as the rest of you put together. The thing hits me rather hard, but, as you say, we can only stand up under it—that is, if the appropriation grants are thrown out by the House."

"They will be," said another man. "Anyway, the road-making in which we are interested comes under a clause that will be struck off in Committee. It's a sure thing. I can't quite blame the Legislature, either, after the admissions made by the district member. He has gone back on you, Merrill. You told us you were sure of him."

Merrill smiled curiously. "Well," he said, "it's a little difficult to be sure of anything, and as the man will be here very shortly you can talk to him yourself. That, however, will not straighten anything out. The question is, what is to be done about the wagon-road?"

"Build it ourselves," said another man. "It's either that or let the mill go, and, considering the money I've put in, I'm for holding on. Still, it will practically mean doubling our capital."

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Merrill nodded quietly, and nobody could have told that to raise the sum required would be singularly inconvenient to him. "At least!" he said. "You can't get it from outsiders, either. All the money in this Province is in mines and mills; and bank interest's ruinous."

"Well," said one of the others, "I guess you don't expect us to feel obliged to you. There isn't any probability of those road-making appropriations getting passed."

"You'll know when Shafleton comes," said Merrill dryly. "Somebody was to wire him as soon as the result was known in the House. He came across from Victoria this afternoon, and should be on his way from Westminster now."

They discussed the wagon-road, growing more and more impatient all the time, while an hour dragged by, and then two of them rose to their feet as a man, who appeared somewhat ill at ease, was shown in. The rest, including Merrill, sat still and looked at him. He waved one hand as though disclaiming all responsibility and laid a telegram on the table.

"That's all I can tell you, gentlemen. I'm sorry, but it can't be helped," he said.

One of them took up the message, and when he passed it to his comrades the storm broke.

"You practically asked them to vote no more money, in your last speech," said Merrill.

"Played us for—suckers!" said another man, while a third struck the table with his clenched fist. [Pg 231]

"Leslie's right. The straight fact is that we're fooled," he said.

It was significant that nobody had asked the member of the Provincial Legislature to sit down, and he leaned on the arm of a big lounge as though he required support, and blinked at them.

"Well," he said, "when I first saw you about it I was willing to do what I could, but on going further into the thing I found it couldn't be considered quite in line with the interests of the country."

One of them laughed aloud, sardonically, and Merrill's face contorted into an unpleasant smile.

"It's rather a pity you didn't make sure of that before you took what we offered you," he said.

The baited man turned to them appealingly. "You know what I promised. I would support the bridge-building and road-making policy as long as I considered it in line with the interests of the country."

The man who had struck the table shook his fist at him. "— the interests of the country. You know what you meant, and you got your price," he said.

"That remark," said Merrill, "is quite warranted. Mr. Shafleton made a perfectly understood bargain—and he got his price. It is also likely that he would never have been elected if we had not set certain influences to work. Owing to the Government's finding a change of policy convenient, he has not kept his bargain. The question, however, is how—"

One of the men who was standing up looked around just then.

"I guess it might be as well to have that door shut," he said. [Pg 232]

"If you wish," said Merrill. "Still, there is nobody in this part of the house."

"Well," said the other man, who crossed the room, "I fancied I heard somebody a moment or two ago."

He closed the door, and when he sat down Merrill commenced again, and the member of the Provincial Legislature had to listen to a good many things that did not please him. The rest also spoke bitterly, in lower tones now; but it was in one respect unfortunate they had not displayed that caution earlier, for the man who had fancied he heard a footstep was, as it happened, not mistaken.

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CHAPTER XX

ANTHEA MAKES A DISCOVERY

While Merrill discussed the prospects of the pulp-mill with his companions, Anthea sat by the open window of an upper room. There was an open book on her knee, but it lay face downward, and she leaned back in a cane chair, looking out upon the Inlet across the clustering roofs of the city. The still water lay shining under the evening light, with a broad smear of smoke trailing athwart it from the steamer which had just vanished behind the dark pines that overhang The Narrows. It drifted across the tall spars of the *Agapomene*, and through it a big passenger boat's tier of deck-houses showed dimly white. Further up the Inlet another dingy cloud drifted out from behind the piles of stacked lumber about the Hastings mill, while the clatter of an Empress liner's winches came up through the clear evening air with the tolling of locomotive bells and the grind of freight-car wheels.

All this had a certain interest as well as a significance for Anthea Merrill. In England the business

man, as a rule, endeavors to leave his commercial affairs behind him when he turns his back on the city; but it is different in the West, where he has no privacy and his calling is his life. Mills and mines, freight rates and timber rights, are seldom debarred as topics at social functions, and Anthea had acquired a considerable knowledge of these things, though she had not lived very long in that city. It was, of course, also evident to her that her father was regarded as a man of influence and one who had a share in directing the activities of the Province, and this afforded her a certain pleasure. Several expressions overheard and facts that had lately been forced on her attention might, perhaps, have rudely dissipated that satisfaction had she not resolutely endeavored to attach a more favorable meaning to them than a good many people would have considered justifiable. She had spent most of her life with her mother's relatives in the East, and it was not altogether astonishing that there was a good deal in her father's character with which she was unacquainted. Merrill had a desire to stand well with his daughter, and he had sufficient ability to accomplish what he wished, in most cases.

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By and by, as she glanced at the shining Inlet, the fading smoke-trail led Anthea's thoughts away to the man who was then doubtless standing on the *Shasta's* bridge, and her eyes softened curiously. She could now admit that she knew what he felt for her, because, although he had never told her, there had been occasions when his face had, perhaps against his will, made it very plain. What the result of it would be, she did not know, but she could wait, and be sure of his steadfastness, in the meanwhile, for circumstances which were unpropitious now might change, as, indeed, they were rather apt to do with almost disconcerting suddenness in that country. Then she tried to reconstruct the interview she had had with his sister, an occupation in which she had indulged somewhat frequently of late, although it troubled her; and that, by a natural transition, once more led her thoughts back to her father.

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It was impossible to doubt that Eleanor Wheelock believed she had grounds for bitterness against him, and a curious something in her brother's manner had once or twice suggested that he shared it too; but Anthea endeavored to assure herself that they had merely adopted their father's views without sufficient investigation. She was aware that men who failed were frequently apt to blame somebody else for it instead of their own supineness, while it was clear that both parties could not always expect a bargain to be advantageous. For all that, the girl's assertions had been startling, and once more Anthea wished that she had not heard them. They vaguely troubled her, since she would not have her father's probity left open to doubt.

Then, rising somewhat abruptly, she flung the book aside, and went down the wide cedar stairway to search for another that might, perhaps, hold her attention more firmly. When she reached the foot of it she turned into a corridor, and stopped a moment when she heard a murmur of angry voices. She was aware that a member of the Provincial Legislature had reached the house not long ago, and that the rest of her father's guests had come there to discuss something with him, while as the door of the room reserved for them had been left open a foot or so she could see within from where she stood.

The house stood high, and the sunlight still streamed into the room, while there was something in the pose of the men that seized and held her attention. She had heard nothing clearly yet, but the strung-up attitudes and intent faces had their dramatic suggestiveness, and she lingered. She could see her father sitting at the head of the table with one hand closed hard on the edge of it, and a grim smile that was quite new to her in his eyes; the member supporting himself by the big lounge and apparently shrinking from his gaze; and one of the others leaning forward in his seat with his fist clenched. In fact, the scene burned itself into her memory, and she never forgot the look in her father's face.

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Then the voices suddenly became intelligible, and she heard Merrill say, "It's rather a pity you didn't make sure of that before you took what we offered you."

She caught the legislator's answer, and saw the man who leaned forward shake his fist at him, while the latter's exclamation sent a little thrill of dismay through her.

"You know what you meant, and you got your price," he said.

This was sufficiently plain in connection with what had gone before it, and she waited in tense suspense to see whether her father would discountenance it, though she felt that he would not do so. She saw him make a little sign of concurrence, and once more was sensible of an enervating dismay when he flung his answer at the shrinking member of the Legislature.

"A perfectly understood bargain, and he got his price," he said. "He would never have been elected if we had not set certain influences to work."

Then she roused herself with an effort, and, thinking no more of the book she had come for, turned softly and flitted back up the stairway to the room she had left. She made sure the door was fast, with a vague, instinctive feeling that she must be quite alone, then sat down by the window again, a trifle colorless in face, with both hands clenched. She was a woman of keen intelligence, and realized that there was no room for doubt. Her father, the man she had endeavored to look up to, had openly condemned himself.

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It was perhaps strange, considering that she was his daughter, that she had wholesome thoughts as well as mental ability, and that honesty formed a prominent part of her morality. The fact made the blow more cruel, for it was clear that her father and his associates had been engaged in an infamous conspiracy. They had bought a member of the Legislature—bribed him to betray the confidence the people had placed in him; and though she did not know whether the bribe had

been actual money, that, as she recognized, scarcely affected the question. He had, at least, promised to do something that was against the interests of the country, for which, as one had declared, they cared nothing, and would evidently have kept his promise if circumstances had not been too strong for him. Anthea had sense enough to attach as little credence to his assertions as the others had done.

She supposed that things of the kind were sometimes done, but only by men without morality, and it was almost intolerable to realize that her father had been the instigator of one of them. The fact seemed to bear out all the newspaper had charged him with, and made it more than probable that Eleanor Wheelock's assertions, too, had been well-founded. It was with a little shiver that Anthea realized that in such a case the father of the man who loved her had in all probability been ruined by a nefarious conspiracy. His daughter had told her plainly that his death was the direct result of it, and if that were so, Jimmy must hold her father accountable. The thing was becoming altogether horrible.

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She did not know how long she sat there after she heard the guests take their leave, but at last she realized that since she must meet him on the morrow there was little to be gained by keeping out of her father's sight that night. She was not deficient in courage, but it was with an effort that she nerved herself to go down, knowing that she could not meet him as though nothing unusual had come to her knowledge. He was still sitting in the room where he had spoken with his guests, with a litter of papers in front of him, when she went in, but on hearing the rustle of her dress he looked up. The lamps were lighted now, and he started slightly when he saw her face. Then he brushed aside the papers, and sat still, looking at her with a little grim smile. Anthea felt her heart beat, for she saw that he understood.

"Ah!" he said. "Sprotson fancied he heard somebody. It was you?"

Anthea nodded, standing very straight in the middle of the big room and wondering, with a fierce desire that he should do so, whether he would offer any explanation in which she could place a little credence. Almost a minute passed, and the man never took his eyes off her. She longed that he would speak, for the tension was growing unendurable.

"You heard—something—at least?" he said.

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"Yes," replied Anthea, with a cold quietness at which she almost wondered. "Enough, I think, to make me understand the rest."

Again Merrill said nothing for a while, though he still kept his keen eyes fixed on her face, and at last it was without any sign of anger, and in a tone of grave inquiry, he broke the silence.

"Well?" he said.

There was an appeal in Anthea's voice. "Can't you say anything that will drive out what I think?" she asked. "I want to believe that I could not have heard or understood aright."

Merrill raised one hand, and for a moment she could have fancied that there was pain in his face. "I almost think you are too clever, and, perhaps, I am too wise. By and by you would not believe me. I have known this moment would come since I brought you to Vancouver, and—though you may scarcely credit this—almost dreaded it. The thing has to be faced now."

This time it was Anthea who said nothing, and Merrill went on again. "You might never have had to face it had you been a pretty fool, but that could hardly have been expected. You are my daughter. Still, intelligence, as other people have no doubt discovered, is not always a blessing to a woman."

Again he made a little abrupt movement. "You see, I offer no palliation. The one question is simply—do you mean to turn your back on me?"

Anthea looked at him steadily. "No," she said, "I could never do that. Still, must you continue what you are doing? Can't you give it up?"

"Sit down," said Merrill quietly, and, rising, drew her a chair. "I think we must understand each other now and altogether. To commence with, I should have liked you to continue to think well of me, though, considering what you are, I knew the thing was hardly likely. Now you have made a discovery that hurts you."

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He stopped a moment, and though there had been a certain elusive gentleness in his voice, the girl was sensible that she shrank from him. He was, she realized, without compunction, and had no regret for what he had done. Indeed, his passionless quietness conveyed the impression that some of the usual attributes of humanity had been left out of him. A trace of confusion or anger would have appeared more natural, and invective would have been easier to bear than this suggestive tranquillity.

"Well," he said, "you asked a very natural question. What I am doing—my view of life, in fact—displeases you. You ask, can't I give it up? I ask why? Can you offer me any reason?"

Anthea said nothing. Reasons occurred to her, but they were rather felt than concretely formulated, and, as she realized, would suffer from being forced into shallow and inadequate expression. She also naturally shrank from an unsuccessful attempt to play the teacher to her father, and had sense enough to know that trite maxims and virtuous platitudes would have very small effect on such a man. It was, perhaps, not an unusual feeling in one respect, for the deep

optimistic faith of the wise cannot be rashly formulated without its suffering in the process. It is, as a rule, the people with shallow beliefs who have the ready tongues, and the result of their well-meaning efforts is seldom the one they desire. Anthea, at least, recognized her disabilities, and kept silence. She also saw that her father understood her, for he nodded.

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"It is clear that you are not a fool," he said. "If you had been, the thing would have been easier for both of us. I allowed you to be brought up in the conventional morality, knowing that you would grow above what was spurious in it, and cling to what you felt was real. If you felt that, it would be sufficient for you. Still, that morality was never mine. I had to face life as I found it, without the money that might have made it easier to regard it virtuously, and scruples would have insufferably handicapped me. As a matter of fact, I do not think I ever had any. This existence is a struggle, as no doubt you have heard often without realizing it, and it is the strong and cunning who get out of it what is worth having. That, at least, is my point of view. It may be the wrong one, but I am satisfied with it, and, what is more to the purpose, quite content to leave you yours."

He broke off once more, and smiled before he went on. "We have done with that subject. I would not influence you against your belief—which is the prettier one—if I could, and I do not think you could influence me. In fact, one feels diffident about having said so much. Well, it is the days to come we have to consider. I am not likely to change my code, and you do not wish to leave me?"

Again, for just a moment, the faint tenderness crept into his voice, and the girl's nature stirred in answer.

"No," she said, "there is nothing that could make me wish to do that."

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"Well," said the man, with a dry smile, "we will try to avoid offending each other, and I should have been sorry had you gone away. In fact, it is a relief to know that you will be with me. My affairs have not been going well lately."

This was sufficiently matter-of-fact, but in spite of the vague shrinking from him of which she was still sensible, Anthea was touched. She could not, however, concretely realize what she felt, and wisely made no attempt to express it. Instead, she spoke of something else, seizing on an immaterial point that casually occurred to her.

"I fancied you were a prosperous man," she said.

"So do many people," said Merrill dryly. "It was by leading them to believe it that I've done what I have done. My operations are for the most part conducted with other people's money. Still, one has to face reverses now and then, and when two or three of them come together the people who support one commence to doubt their wisdom. Then they are apt to back down and become virtuously scrupulous, while the men with a grudge against one waken up and fancy their turn has come. In my case there are evidently quite a few of them."

He laughed softly, but in a fashion that jarred on the girl. "Still, it is very probable that I shall keep ahead of them, after all. In any case, I won't offend you by suggesting that the odd chance of your having to dispense with what I have been able to offer you so far would count for very much."

"Thank you for that," said Anthea softly.

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Merril turned to the papers before him. "Well," he said, "now we understand, and, as you see, I am busy."

Anthea went out, not reassured, but more tranquil. She realized what her duty was, and purposed to do it; but while there was still a tenderness for the man in her, there was also something about him besides his avowed point of view and the actions it led to, that repelled her. He had, it seemed, an intellect that was unhampered by the usual passions and affections of humanity.

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CHAPTER XXI

JIMMY GROWS RESTLESS

The city was almost insufferably hot, and Jimmy, who had time on his hands that afternoon, found it pleasant to saunter through the dim green shadow among the Stanley pines which crowd close up to its western boundary. They rose about him, old and great of girth, a tremendous colonnade of towering trunks, two hundred feet above the narrow riband of driving road which was further walled in by tall green fern. There was drowsy silence in those dim recesses, and a solemnity which the occasional faint hoot of a whistle or tolling of a locomotive bell did not seem to dissipate, for the civic authorities had, up to that time, at least, with somewhat unusual wisdom made no attempt to improve on what nature had done for them. Here they cut a little foot-path, there a wavy driving road, but except for that they left the Stanley Park a beautiful strip of primeval wilderness.

Jimmy had arrived in Vancouver a few hours earlier with the *Shasta* loaded deep, but, although affairs had been going tolerably well with the Company, this fact afforded him no very great satisfaction. He liked the sea, and had succeeded in making firm friends of most of the ranchers and salmon-packers whose produce he carried; but there was ambition in him, and of late he had been growing vaguely restless. After all, the command of a boat like the *Shasta*, with some two hundred and fifty odd tons of carrying capacity, could not be expected to prove a very lucrative occupation, and Jimmy now and then remembered regretfully that he might have had a commission in the Navy. He had also an incentive for desiring advancement, upon which, however, he seldom permitted himself to dwell, since on two occasions he and Anthea Merrill had read in each other's eyes a fact that had a vital significance to both of them. Jimmy scarcely dared remember it, but he felt that the girl would listen when he thought it fit to speak.

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That, however, was in the meanwhile out of the question. He must by some means first make his mark, and, as happens not infrequently in similar circumstances to other men, he did not know how it was to be done. One thing, at least, was clear: he could not expect to advance himself very much by commanding the *Shasta*. There was also, in any case, Merrill's opposition to count on, while the bitterness Eleanor had endued him with against the man she held responsible for the death of his father had its effect, and it was in an unusually somber mood that Jimmy strolled through the shadow of the pines that hot afternoon.

By and by he heard a soft thud of hoofs, and, looking up, felt the blood creep into his face. He recognized the costly team that swung out of the shadow, and the girl in the white dress who held the reins in the vehicle behind them. He also recognized the lady beside her, for her husband was an Englishman who held high office under the Crown in Victoria. The fact that she was sitting by Anthea Merrill's side suggested how far circumstances held the latter apart from the *Shasta's* skipper. Silver-mounted harness and splendid horses had the same effect, and, since these things also reminded him of something else, Jimmy unfortunately lost his head. A sudden vindictive anger came upon him as he remembered that the money that provided them and stood as a barrier between him and the girl had been wrung from struggling men, and that some of it at least was the result of his father's ruin.

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It was, of course, not reasonable to blame Anthea for this, but Jimmy was scarcely in a mood just then to make any very nice distinction, and, straightening himself a trifle, he stood still a moment looking at the girl. He saw the little friendly smile fade out of her face and a look of perplexity take its place, and then, while his heart thumped furiously, he turned and stepped aside into a little trail that led into the shadow of the bush. In another moment the team swept past, and he was left uncomfortably conscious that he had made a fool of himself. The feeling, while far from pleasant, is no doubt wholesome, which is fortunate, since there are probably very few men who are not now and then sensible of it.

It was half an hour later when Anthea came up with him again. The road was narrow and crossed a little bridge near where he was standing. As it happened, another lady was then driving a pair of ponies over it. Anthea pulled up her team close behind Jimmy, and when the impatient horses moved and drew the vehicle partly across the road, he turned and seized the head of the nearest. He did not know much about horses, but he contrived to back the team sufficiently to leave a passage, and was unpleasantly sensible that Anthea was watching him with a little smile. It brought a tinge of darker color to her face, and hurt him considerably more than if she had shown resentment of his previous attitude by any suggestion of distance. There is, after all, a certain vague consolation in feeling that one is able to offend a person whose good-will is valuable. Anthea perhaps realized this, for when the other team had gone by she made a sign to him. Jimmy, who felt far from comfortable, approached the vehicle, and the girl looked down at him, with the twinkle still in her eyes.

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"Thank you! That is permissible?" she said.

Jimmy flushed again. "In any case, I'm not sure it's exactly what I deserve."

"Well," said Anthea reflectively, "I really was wondering whether you saw us a little while ago."

"I did," said Jimmy, meeting her inquiring gaze. "Still, perhaps there were excuses for me."

There was a scarcely perceptible change in Anthea's expression, but Jimmy noticed it, though he did not know that she was thinking of what his sister had told her. Next moment she smiled at him again.

"I scarcely think it would be worth while to make them," she said.

Then she shook the reins, and left him standing in the road. When they were out of earshot her companion turned to her.

"Who is that young man?" she asked.

"Captain Wheelock of the *Shasta*."

"Ah!" said the other; "I remember hearing about him. The man who took off the schooner's skipper? But what did he mean by saying that there were excuses for his not seeing you?"

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"I don't know," said Anthea, who contrived to smile, though she was rather more thoughtful than usual. "I don't mind admitting that the question has a certain interest. Still, one cannot always demand an explanation."

Her companion flashed a keen glance at her. "Well," she said, "I almost fancy it would have been a sufficient one if you had heard it. In fact, I think I should like that man. After all, honesty is a quality that wears well. But what is a man of his description doing in that very little and somewhat dirty *Shasta*? I made somebody point her out to me one day in Victoria."

"I don't know," said Anthea; "that is, I know why he went on board her in the first case, but not why he seems content to stay there altogether. Still, it naturally isn't a matter of any particular consequence."

Then they spoke of other things, while Jimmy, who suddenly remembered that he was standing vacantly in the road, turned toward the city, wondering as Anthea had done why he had remained so long the *Shasta's* skipper. Now that the trade Jordan and his associates had inaugurated had been well established in spite of Merrill's opposition, he felt that they had no longer any particular need of him.

The city was unusually hot when he reached it, but he fancied that alone did not account for the crowded state of the saloons he passed. It also seemed to him that the groups of men who stood here and there on the sidewalks talking animatedly must have found some unusually interesting topic; but he had his own affairs to think of, and, as they appeared sufficient for him just then, he walked on quietly until he reached Jordan's office. It was not elaborately furnished. In fact, there was very little in it besides a table, a safe, a chair or two, and an American stump-puller standing against one wall. Jordan sat reading a newspaper, with a cigar, which had gone out, in his hand, but he looked up and threw the paper on the table when Jimmy came in.

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"Read that. They've struck it rich at last," he said. "Guess there are men who have believed in that gold ever since we bought Alaska from the Russians. Ran across one of them, 'most eight years ago, Commercial Company man, and he told me it was a sure thing there was gold up the Yukon. Odd prospectors had struck a pocket here and there, but though they brought a few ounces out, nobody seemed inclined to take up the thing. Practically every white man in that country was connected with the Indian trade in furs, and I'm not sure they were anxious to see an army of diggers marching in. Anyway, the few men who believed in the gold couldn't put up the money to prove their confidence warranted. Now, as you see, they've found it, and before long the whole Slope will be humming from Wrangel to Lower California."

Jimmy read a column of the paper with almost breathless interest, as many another man had done that day in every seaboard city and lonely wooden settlement to which the news had spread. Then he looked at Jordan.

"The thing appears almost incredible," he said.

"It isn't," said his companion. "I know what the Alaska Commercial old-timer told me quite a while ago. It's going leagues ahead of Caribou. They'll be going up in their thousands in a month or two. Now, you sit still a minute, and listen to me. This is a thing I believe in, and I'll tell you what I know."

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He spoke for ten minutes with dark eyes snapping, and Jimmy's blood tingled as he listened. Jordan's faith, the all-daring optimism of the Pacific Slope of which many men have died in the wilderness, was infectious, and something in Jimmy's nature responded. He had fought with bitter gales and frothing seas, and it seemed to him that the struggle with ice and frost, rock and snow, could not be harder. He was also, though he had not quite realized it until that moment, one of those who are born to play their part in the forefront of the battle between man and nature—and nature is not beneficent, but very grim and terrible until she is subdued, as everybody who has seen that strife knows.

Then Jimmy stood up and slowly straightened himself, with a quiet smile.

"You'll have to get a new skipper for the *Shasta*—I'm going north," he said.

Jordan gazed at him a moment in amazement, and then laughed in a fashion which suggested that comprehension had dawned on him.

"Sit down again," he said. "I begin to understand how it is with you. Still, you can't afford to do the thing you want to. It quite often happens that way."

"I fancy that what I can't afford is to remain on board the *Shasta*," said Jimmy dryly.

"Sit down," said Jordan; "we'll talk out this thing. Now, why do you want to go up there?"

Jimmy did as he was bidden, though there was a significant gleam in his eyes. "Well," he said, "perhaps it's your due that I should tell you. For one thing, because I feel that I must. I'm not sure you'll understand me, but I feel it's what I was made for. There are half-frozen swamps to be crossed, leagues of forest, cañons, melting snow to be floundered through. That kind of thing gets hold of some of us. I feel I have to go. Secondly, there seems to be gold up there. I want the money."

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Jordan noisily thrust back his chair, and then took up a pen and, apparently without recognizing what he was doing, snapped it across.

"Stop right there! I can't stand too much—and there's Eleanor," he said, and broke into a harsh laugh as he glanced down at the pen. "In one way, it's significant that I've broken the—thing."

He said nothing for the next moment or two, and appeared to be putting a restraint upon himself, but there was longing in his voice when he went on again. "Lord! I guess it's in us. When we'd only the wagons and axes we worried right across the continent. There was always something that drew us to the place we didn't know. The harder the way was the more the longing grew. I was up in the Selkirks on the gold-trail once, and I'm never going to work something that life left behind right out of me."

"Come!" said Jimmy simply.

The veins rose swollen on Jordan's forehead, but he struck the table with a clenched fist and gazed at his comrade with hot anger in his eyes.

"Will you stop, you—fool?" he said. "Don't you know how I want to go? Stop, or I'll throw you out right now!" [Pg 252]

He sat still, looking at Jimmy for perhaps half a minute, and each was conscious of the same longing in his heart and the same tingling of his blood, for that is a country where men still feel the lust of the primeval conflict and the allurements of the wilderness. Then Jordan appeared to recover himself.

"I guess we'll be ashamed of this afterwards, but I have got to talk," he said. "Anyway, we can't all get right in with the axe and shovel. My work's here, and I've just sense enough to stay with it. Besides, it's a sure thing that everybody who goes north won't rake out money. Now, you want the snow and the cañons? You can't have them; but I'll give you drift-ice, blinding fog, reefs and breaking surf instead. You want money? Well, we'll try to meet your views on that point, and by and by we'll double what you're getting."

Jimmy gazed at him in evident bewilderment, and his comrade waved his hand.

"You're going to take the first of the crowd to St. Michael's in the *Shasta*, and the man who can run a 250-ton boat there and back again will have all the excitement he has any use for. Half the reefs aren't charted, the tides run any way, and when the gale drops, the fog shuts down thicker than a blanket. You can't pound a rock-drill or swing the shovel, but you can hold a steamer's wheel. Get hold of that, and try to understand it. It's the whole point of the thing."

He stopped a moment as if for breath, and then went on again, hurling out his words incisively while his eyes snapped. [Pg 253]

"It's St. Michaels now, but by and by they'll find a way in from the Pan-handle or over British soil. The C.P.R. will put big boats on, and they'll run everything that will float up from 'Frisco and Portland; but we'll be in first and take hold with the *Shasta*. The men you're going to carry would go in a canoe. She has built up the coast trade enough to make it easy for us to raise the money to buy another boat—I'm hanging right on to that trade too—and I know of a handy steamer. I'll get an option on her now. She'll be worth considerably more in a week or two. You stand by the *Shasta* Company, and do your part in the rush that's coming in the way you know, and you'll rake in more money than you ever would mining. We'll put a thousand-ton boat on before long if you play our hand well. I want your answer right off: are you hanging on to us?"

"Yes," said Jimmy quietly. "After all, your point of view is no doubt the right one. If the boat were only fifty tons I'd start as soon as she was ready."

Jordan rose and grabbed his hat before he flung a letter across the table. "Then I'm going for old Leeson now. Hustle, and wire those people that we want an option on that steamboat firm until to-morrow."

He strode out of the office, and when Jimmy reached the street a minute later he saw him running hard in the direction of Leeson's house.

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CHAPTER XXII

ASHORE

It was summer in the north, and now that the bitter wind which had blown thick rain before it had dropped, the clammy fog shut the *Shasta* in like a wall. She crept through it with engines pounding steadily, swinging to the slow heave of the swell, while Jimmy stood, chilled to the backbone, on his bridge, as he had done for most of the last forty-eight hours. A chart in a glass case was clamped to the rail in front of him, and Lindstrom, the mate, stooped over it with the moisture trickling from his oilskins.

"This thing is not much good," he said. "The stream moves a different way with the change of wind. Also there is discrepancy in the depth of water."

"There is. If I knew how much to mark off for leeway in that last breeze I'd feel a good deal easier," said Jimmy, who turned to fling a disgusted glance at the chart, upon which little arrows,

that indicated the general drifts of the currents, had apparently been scattered promiscuously. Then he raised his voice. "Forward there! See you have a good arming on your lead, and stand by to let go when I take the way off her!"

He pressed down his telegraph and a curious silence followed the clang of the gong when the engines stopped. The *Shasta* lurched on more slowly into the fog, and when Jimmy swung up his hand a man on the half-seen forecastle loosed the deep-sea lead, while another, perched in the mainmast shrouds, stood intent with a coil of slack line in his hand. There was a splash, the line ran out, and when a sing-song cry came up Jimmy made a little impatient gesture as he turned to the chart.

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"A fathom less than we ought to have," he said, and raised his voice. "What bottom have you got?"

A couple of men were busy hauling in the ponderous lead, and one of them who lifted it turned to the bridge. "Mud, sir," he said. "Soft at that."

Jimmy looked at Lindstrom. "That, at least, is what this thing says. I suppose one ought to bring her up, and wait for a sight, but we can't stay here a week on the odd chance of a blink of clear weather. Anyway, there's plenty water under us, and we'll try the lead again presently."

The mate made a sign of concurrence as Jimmy pressed down his telegraph. "I was at Kenai four year ago. For two weeks we see nothing. How we get there I cannot tell you, but I think it is by good fortune. Also the skipper come there often for the Commercial Company. You do a thing several times, then you shut your eye, and perhaps you do it again."

He went down the ladder, and Jimmy was left alone except for the silent, shapeless figure in trickling oilskins at the steering wheel. How he had groped his way to St. Michael's near the tremendous desolation of willow swamps about the Yukon mouth he did not exactly know, but he had accomplished it in spite of screaming gale and blinding fog, and the treasure-seekers he had taken up had duly presented him with a written testimonial, which was all they had to give. A few days of clear weather had permitted him to steam across to one of the Commercial Company's factories, but since he left it he had held southward at a venture through thick rain and fog without a single glimpse of any celestial body. That would not have mattered so much had the sea been still as a lake is, for then he could have steered by dead reckoning; but that sea is swept by currents which run for the most part in guessed-at and variable directions, and it was impossible to calculate how far they might have deflected his course for him. In fact, for all he knew, they might have deflected it several times and set it right again. He had cable enough to anchor, but, as he had said, he could not stay there for a week or two on the odd chance of getting an hour's clear weather.

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So, since the chart suggested that he was clear of the shore, he went on leisurely, leaning on his bridge-rails chilled in every limb, with the damp trickling off him, while the *Shasta* bored her way through the woolly vapor, until a little while after the lead had given him a reassuring depth of water she stopped suddenly. Jimmy was flung against the wheel with a violence that drove all the breath out of him, but the next moment he had jumped for his telegraph while everything in the vessel banged and rattled, and the gong clanged out his orders, "Stop her!" and "Hard astern!"

Then while the smooth swell lapped level with one depressed rail the *Shasta* shook in every plate, and the men who came scrambling to her slanted deck looked at him anxiously. There was, however, no clamor or any sign of undue consternation. The men had almost expected this, and the energy, which for want of direction now and then in such cases leads to purposeless and unreasoning scurry, had been washed out of them. Jimmy leaned quietly on the rails, and nodded in answer to their glances.

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"Yes," he said, "we're hard on. If the propeller won't shake her loose in the next ten minutes, we'll see about laying out an anchor. Mr. Lindstrom, will you clear the two boats ready, and ask Fleming if there's any more water in his bilges?"

It was twenty minutes before the pounding engines stopped, but the *Shasta* had not moved an inch astern. The lower side of her lifted as the long gray swell lapped gurgling to her rail, and then came down again; but that was all. In the meanwhile the hand-lead armed with tallow had shown the bottom to be soft, and Fleming quietly reported that there was no sign of any water coming in. Then Jimmy turned to Lindstrom, who once more had climbed to the bridge.

"If this fog lifts and the breeze gets up as usual, she'll certainly break up," he said. "If it doesn't, I don't think there's any reason why we shouldn't heave her off. We'll try it first with the coal in. It's a long way to Wellington, and I don't want to dump a ton if I can help it."

The big Scandinavian went down the ladder, and by and by half the men on board the *Shasta* were engaged under his direction in lashing a platform of hatch-planks between the two boats that lay beneath the forecastle. The long heave drove them banging against the *Shasta*'s side, and jerked the planks loose as they strove to lash them fast; but at last they accomplished it, and, while the dimness that stands for the Northern summer night crept into the fog, the men on the forecastle head lowered the anchor down. It was of the old, stocked pattern, and though the *Shasta* was not a large vessel, they found it and the cable which came down after it sufficiently difficult to handle upon a slippery platform that heaved and slanted under them. Still, the thing was done because it was necessary; and with oars splashing clumsily, because there was little space for the men who pulled them, they paddled off into the fog.

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When they came back the cable was unshackled and the end of it led in through the mooring half-moon on the vessel's stern, and there then remained the second anchor to lay out. The cable of this one was unshackled too, but wire-rope purchases were rigged to the end of it from the after winch, and by the time all was ready it was six o'clock in the morning. The men were worn out, and Jimmy's eyes were heavy with want of sleep, but nobody made any demur about facing the further work before him. They knew what would happen if the fog lifted and the breeze that rolled it back should find the *Shasta* there.

Jimmy pressed down the telegraph on his bridge. Winch and windlass groaned and rattled, the wire-rope screamed, and the clanking cable tightened suddenly. Then the thudding propeller shook the ship until she quivered like a thing in pain each time the smooth swell lifted one side of her. Steam drifted about her, wire and cable were drawn rigid, but she would not budge an inch in spite of them, and Jimmy's face was a trifle grim when he flung up his hand. The thud of the propeller slackened, and there was a silence that was almost oppressive when winch and windlass stopped. The gurgle of the gray swell about the steamer's plates and the drip of moisture from the slanted shrouds emphasized it. Then Jimmy signed to one of the men.

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"Send Mr. Fleming here," he said.

The man disappeared, and the engineer looked grave when he climbed to the bridge.

"You'll be wanting to dump my coal now?" he asked. "How are you going to take her home without it?"

"There is a good deal of heavy timber right down the West Coast," said Jimmy dryly. "There are also quite a few inlets into which one could take a steamer."

"You can't feed a boiler furnace with four-foot-diameter pines."

"They can be sawn and split. Besides, there are probably smaller ones among those four-foot pines. They don't grow that size in a year or two."

The engineer made a last protest. "I'm aware that it won't be much use, but it's my duty to point out the difficulties. You can't saw those trees without a big cross-cut, and I'm not sure what my boiler tubes will do under a stream of resinous flame."

"Well," said Jimmy thoughtfully, "I think I could make some kind of cross-cut out of a thin plate if I were an engineer. In fact, I'd make two, and keep a man filing up one of them while I used the other. Then I'd pump my feed-water rather higher than usual about those tubes."

"You can't pump water round the back-end," said the engineer. "You're going to see that resin flame make a hole in the back plate of the combustion chamber."

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He stopped, and smiled when Jimmy looked at him. "Well, now that I've told you, I'll start every man to dumping the coal over."

Worn out as they were, the men worked feverishly until noon. Some panted at the ash-hoist, some standing on slippery iron ladders passed the heavy baskets from one to another, and the rest toiled amidst the stifling dust that streamed from the bunkers. Those who could see it were sincerely glad that the fog still hung about them—clammy, impenetrable, and apparently as solid as a wall.

Then it commenced to stir a little and slide past the vessel in filmy wisps, and it seemed to Jimmy that the smooth gray swell which lapped about her was getting steeper. Once or twice, indeed, it overlapped her depressed rail, and poured on board in a long green cascade. He knew that meant the breeze had already awakened somewhere not far away, and that when the sea that it was stirring up came down on them it would not take it very long to knock the bottom out of the *Shasta*. So did the men, and they toiled the harder, until when the bunkers were almost empty Jimmy once more stopped them.

"Stand by winch and windlass. We have to heave her off inside the next hour," he said. "Tell Mr. Fleming to shake her with the propeller, and give you all the steam he can."

The engines pounded, the sea boiled white beneath the *Shasta's* stern, and wire and studded cable screamed and groaned above the clamor of the winch and the thudding of the screw. For thirty long minutes, during which the uproar ceased for a moment or two once or twice, the *Shasta* did not move at all, and Jimmy felt his heart thump under the tension, while a cold breeze whipped his face. Then he thrust down his telegraph, and his voice reached the men on the forecastle harshly when the engines stopped.

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"You have to do it now, or tear the windlass out. I'll give you all the steam," he said.

The men understood why haste was necessary. The fog no longer slid past them but whirled by in ragged streaks, and the wind that drove it came up out of the wastes of the Pacific. Already the long swell was flecked with little frothing ridges, and there was no need to tell any of those who glanced at it anxiously that it would break across the stranded vessel in an hour or two. Some of them stood by clanking windlass and banging winch, while the rest swabbed the creaking wire with grease and rubbed engine tallow on guide and block where it would ease the strain. For five minutes they worked in silence, and then a shout went up as the winch-drum that had spun beneath the wire took hold and reeled off a foot or two of it. The *Shasta* swung herself upright as a big gray heave capped with livid white rolled in, and a curious quiver ran through her before

she came down on one side again. The roar of the jet of steam that rushed aloft from beside her funnel grew almost deafening, but Jimmy's voice broke faintly through the din.

"Lindstrom," he said, "tell Mr. Fleming he can turn the steam he daren't bottle down on to his engines."

Then a sonorous pounding, and the thud of the screw joined in; and by the time the jet of steam had died away, the *Shasta* was quivering all through, while her masts stood upright and did not slant back again. Her windlass was also slowly gathering the clanking cable in, until at last it rattled furiously as she leaped astern. Then a hoarse shout of exultation went up, and Jimmy drew in a deep breath of relief as he strode across his bridge.

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"Heave right up to your kedge and break it out," he said. "Then we'll let her swing, and get the stream anchor when she rides to it ahead."

It meant an hour's brutal labor overhauling hard wire tackles and leading forward ponderous chain, but they undertook it light-heartedly, with bleeding hands and broken nails, while the *Shasta* heaved and rolled viciously under them. Then, when they broke out the stream anchor under her bows, Jimmy sighed from sheer satisfaction as he pressed down his telegraph to "Half-speed ahead."

"We wouldn't have done it in another hour, Lindstrom," he said. "We'll drive her west a while to make sure of things before we put her on her course again; and in the meanwhile you'll keep the hand-lead going."

It gave them steadily deepening water, until the sea piled up and the *Shasta* rolled her rail under, so that the man strapped outside the bridge could do no more than guess at the soundings; and Jimmy told him to come in. Then he turned to Lindstrom.

"I'll have to let up now," he said; "I can't keep my eyes open."

He lowered himself down the ladder circumspectly, and found it somewhat difficult to reach the room beneath the bridge; but five minutes after he got there he was sleeping heavily.

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They made some four knots in each of the next thirty hours, with the gale on their starboard bow. When at last it broke, Jimmy, who got an observation, headed the *Shasta* southeastward, and a day or two later ran her in behind an island. Then two boats pulled ashore across a sluice of tide, and came back some hours later when it had slackened a little, loaded rather deeper than was safe with sawn-up pines. Fleming also brought two very rude saws with him, and invited Jimmy's attention to one of them.

"Saws," he said, "are in a general way made of steel, and you can't expect too much from soft plate-iron. The boys did well; there's not a man among the crowd of them can get his back straight. You'd understand the reason if you had tried to cut down big trees with an instrument that has an edge like a nutmeg-grater."

Jimmy smiled, for he considered it very likely. "Well," he said, "what are you going to do to make them serviceable?"

"Sit up all night re-gulletting them with a file. I want four loads of billets before we start again; but we'll take another axe ashore in the morning."

They went off early, when the tide was slack, taking an extra axe along, while it was noon when they came back, with one man who had badly cut his leg lying upon the billets. Fleming, however, insisted on his four loads, and it was evening when he brought the last two off. The men were almost too wearied to pull across the tide, and only the handles attached to them suggested that the two worn strips of iron they passed up had been meant for saws.

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"That," said Fleming, who held one up before Jimmy, "says a good deal for the boys; but if I drove them the same way any longer there would be a mutiny."

Jimmy laughed, and told him to raise steam enough to take the *Shasta* to sea. She made six knots most of that night; and two days later the men went ashore again. Fleming, at least, never forgot the rest of that trip down the wild West Coast. He mixed his resinous billets with saturated coal-dust and broken hemlock bark, but in spite of it he stopped the *Shasta* every now and then when his boilers gave him water instead of steam.

Still, she crept on south, and at last all of them were sincerely glad when the pithead gear of the Dunsmore mines rose up against the forests of Vancouver Island over the starboard hand. An hour or two later Fleming stood blackened all over amidst a gritty cloud while the coal that was to free him from his cares clattered into the *Shasta's* bunkers, and Jimmy sat in the room beneath her bridge with one of the coaling clerks writing out a telegram.

"I'll get it sent off for you right away," said the coaling man. "Guess it will be a big relief to somebody. It seems they've 'most given you up in Vancouver."

Jimmy laughed. "Well," he said, "we have brought her here. Still, I think there were times when my engineer felt that the contract was almost too big for him."

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CHAPTER XXIII

ANTHEA GROWS ANXIOUS

The afternoon was hot, but Jordan failed to notice it as he swung along, as fast as he could go without actually running, down a street in Vancouver. He walked in the glaring sunlight, because there was more room there, as everybody else was glad to seek the shadow cast across one sidewalk by the tall stores and offices, and he appeared unconscious of the remarks flung after him by the irate driver of an express wagon which had almost run over him. Jordan was one of the men who are always desperately busy, but there were reasons why his activity was a little more evident than usual just then. His associates had contrived to raise sufficient money to purchase a boat to take up the *Shasta's* usual trip, but the finances of the Company were in a somewhat straitened condition as the result of it, and he was beset with a good many other difficulties of the kind the struggling man has to grapple with.

For all that, he stopped abruptly when he saw Forster's driving-wagon, a light four-wheeled vehicle, standing outside a big dry-goods store. He was aware that Mrs. Forster seldom went to Vancouver without taking Eleanor with her, which appeared sufficient reason for believing that the girl was then inside the store. If anything further were needed to indicate the probability of this, there was a well-favored and very smartly-dressed man standing beside the wagon, and Jordan's face grew suddenly hard as he looked at him. As it happened, the man glanced in his direction just then, and Jordan found it difficult to keep a due restraint upon himself when he saw the sardonic twinkle in his eyes. It was more expressive than a good many words would have been.

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Jordan had for some time desired an interview with him, but, warm-blooded and somewhat primitive in his notions upon certain points as he was, he had sense enough to realize that he was not likely to gain anything by an altercation in a busy street, which would certainly not advance him in Eleanor's favor. Besides this, it was probable that somebody would interfere if he found it necessary to resort to physical force. Jordan, who was by no means perfect in character, had, like a good many other men brought up as he had been in the forests of the Pacific Slope, no great aversion to resorting to the latter when he considered that the occasion warranted it.

Still, he held himself in hand, and strode into the store where, as it happened, he came upon Mrs. Forster. There was a faint smile in her eyes when she turned to him, for she was a lady of considerable discernment; but she held out her hand graciously. She liked the impulsive man.

"It is some time since we have seen anything of you," she said.

"That," said Jordan, "is just what I was thinking, though it's quite likely there are people who wouldn't let it grieve them. In fact, I was wondering whether you would mind if I asked myself over to supper with your husband this evening?"

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Mrs. Forster laughed.

"I really don't think it would trouble me very much, and I have no doubt that Forster would enjoy a talk with you," she said. "I wonder whether you know that Mr. Carnforth is coming?"

"I do;" and Jordan looked at her steadily with a trace of concern in his manner. "In fact, that was one of my reasons for asking you."

The lady shook her head. "So I supposed," she said. "Still, while everybody is expected to know his own business best, I'm not sure you're wise. You see, I really don't think Eleanor is very much denser than I am, though you can tell her you have my invitation to supper."

Jordan, who expressed his thanks, strode across the store and came upon Eleanor standing by a counter with several small parcels before her. She turned at his approach, and he found it difficult to believe that his appearance afforded her any great pleasure. While he gathered up the parcels, she made him a little imperious gesture, and they moved away toward a quieter part of the big store. Then she turned to him again.

"Charley," she said sharply, "what are you doing here?"

"I saw Forster's wagon outside, and that reminded me that it was at least a week since I had seen you."

Eleanor smiled somewhat curiously, for it was, of course, clear to her that he could not have seen the wagon without seeing Carnforth too.

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"And?" she said.

"I'm coming over to supper with Forster. You don't look by any means as pleased as one would think you ought to be."

The girl appeared disconcerted. "I should sooner you didn't come to-night."

"Of course!" said Jordan. "I can quite believe it."

A tinge of color crept into Eleanor's face, and there was now nothing that suggested a smile in the sparkle in her eyes. "Pshaw!" she said. "Charley, don't be a fool!"

"I'm not," said Jordan slowly. "That is, I don't think I am, in the way you mean. In fact, though it shouldn't be necessary, I want to say right now that I have every confidence in you."

"Thanks! There are various ways of showing it. You haven't chosen one that appeals to me."

Jordan flung out one hand. "After all, I'm human—and I don't like that man."

"You are. Now and then you are also a little crude, which is probably what you mean. Still, that's not the question. I think I mentioned that I should sooner you didn't come to supper this evening."

The gleam in her pale-blue eyes grew plainer, and it said a good deal for Jordan's courage that he persisted, since most of Eleanor's acquaintances had discovered that it was not wise to thwart her when she looked as she did then.

"I'm afraid I can't allow that to influence me, especially as Mrs. Forster expects me."

"Very well!" and Eleanor's tone was dry. "You may carry those parcels to the wagon."

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Jordan did so, and felt his blood tingle when Carnforth favored him with a glance of unconcerned inquiry. There was a suggestive complacency in his faint smile that was, in the circumstances, intensely provocative, but Jordan contrived to restrain himself. Then Mrs. Forster and Eleanor came out, and the latter took the parcels from him.

"Four of them?" she said. "You haven't dropped any?"

Jordan did not think he had, and the girl pressed one or two of the parcels between her fingers. "Then I wonder where the muslin is?"

"I guess they can tell me in the store," said Jordan.

He swung around, and in a moment or two was back at the counter. The clerk there, however, had to refer to one of her companions, and, as the latter was busy, Jordan had to wait a minute or two.

"I wrapped up the muslin with the trimming," she said at last. "Miss Wheelock had four parcels, and I saw you take up all of them."

Jordan turned away with an unpleasant thought in his mind, and was out of the store in a moment. There was, however, no wagon in the street, and after running down most of it he stopped with a harsh laugh. Forster's team was a fast one, and Jordan realized that it was very unlikely that he could overtake it, especially when Eleanor, who usually drove, did not wish him to. After all, her quickness and resolution in one way appealed to him, and he remembered that he had promised to dine with Austerly that evening. Still, he went back to his business feeling a trifle sore, and one or two of the men who called on him noticed that his temper was considerably shorter than usual.

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He had, in fact, not altogether recovered his customary good-humor when he sat on the veranda of Austerly's house some hours later. The meal which Austerly insisted on calling dinner, though he had found it impossible to get anybody to prepare it later than seven o'clock in the evening, was over, and the rest of the few guests were scattered about the garden. Valentine, who had arrived in the *Sorata* a day or two earlier, sat at the foot of the short veranda stairway close by the lounge chair where Nellie Austerly lay looking unusually fragile, but listening to the bronzed man with a quiet smile. Austerly leaned on the balustrade, and Anthea sat not far from Jordan. She was, as it happened, looking out through a gap in the firs which afforded her a glimpse of the shining Inlet. A schooner crept slowly across the strip of water, on her way to the frozen north with treasure-seekers.

"She seems very little," said Anthea. "One wonders whether she will get there, and whether the men on board her will ever come back again."

"The chances are against it," said Austerly. "It is a long way to St. Michael's, and one understands that those northern waters are either wrapped in fog or swept by sudden gales. Besides that, it must be a tremendous march or canoe trip inland, and before they reach the gold region the summer will be over. One would scarcely fancy that many of them could live out the winter. In fact, it seems to me scarcely probable that the Yukon basin will ever become a mining district. Nature is apparently too much for the white man there. What is your opinion, Jordan?"

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Jordan smiled, though there was a snap in his eyes.

"It seems to me you don't quite understand what kind of men we raise on the Slope," he said. "Once it's made clear that the gold is there, there's no snow and ice between St. Michael's and the Pole that would stop their getting in. When they take the trail those men will go right on in spite of everything. You have heard what their fathers did here in British Columbia when there was gold in Caribou? They hadn't the C.P.R. then to take them up the Fraser, and there wasn't a wagon-road. They made a trail through the wildest cañons there are on this earth, and blazed a way afterward, over range and through the rivers, across the trackless wilderness. It was too big a contract for some of them, but they stayed with it, going on until they died. The others got the gold. It was a sure thing that they would get it. They had to."

"Just so!" said Austerly, with a smile. "Still, if I remember correctly, they were not all born on the Pacific Slope. Some of them, I almost think, came from England."

"They did," said Jordan, who for no very evident reason glanced in Anthea's direction. "The ones who got there were for the most part sailormen. They and our bushmen are much of a kind, though I'm not quite sure that the hardest hoeing didn't fall to the sailor. He hadn't been taught to face the forest with nothing but an axe, build a fire of wet wood, or make a pack-horse bridge; but he started with the old-time prospectors, and he went right in with them. It's much the same now—steam can't spoil him. When a big risky thing is to be done anywhere right down the Slope, that's where you'll come across the man from the blue water."

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He stopped a moment as if for breath, with a deprecatory gesture. "There are one or two things that sure start me talking. It's a kind of useless habit in a man who's shackled down to his work in the city, but I can't help it. Anyway, the men who are going north won't head for St. Michael's and the Yukon marshes much longer. They'll blaze a shorter trail in from somewhere farther south right over the coast range. It won't matter that they'll have to face ten feet of snow."

Neither of the other two answered him, but the fact that they watched the fading white sails of the little schooner had its significance. There was scarcely a man on the Pacific Slope whose thoughts did not turn toward the golden north just then, and one could notice signs of tense anticipation in all the wooden cities. The army of treasure-seekers had not set out yet, but big detachments had started, and the rest were making ready. So far there was little certain news, but rumors and surmises flew from mouth to mouth in busy streets and crowded saloons. It was known that the way was perilous and many would leave their bones beside it, and though, as Jordan had said, that would not count if there were gold in the land to which it led, men waited a little, feverishly, until they should feel more sure about the latter point.

By and by Austerly, who spoke to Valentine, went down the stairway, and Anthea smiled when the latter, after walking a few paces with him, turned back again to where Nellie Austerly was lying.

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"There are things it is a little difficult to understand," she said. "Valentine has, perhaps, seen Nellie three or four times since she left the *Sorata*, and yet, as no doubt you have noticed, he will scarcely leave her. She would evidently be quite content to have him beside her all evening, too."

"You didn't say all you thought," and Jordan looked at her gravely. "You mean that the usual explanation wouldn't fit their case. That, of course, is clear, since both of them must realize that she can't expect to live more than another year or so. I naturally don't know why she should take to Valentine; but I have a fancy from what Jimmy said that she reminded him of somebody. What is perhaps more curious still, I think she recognizes it, and doesn't in the least mind it."

"Somebody he was fond of long ago?"

Jordan appeared to consider. "That seems to make the thing more difficult to understand? Still, I'm not sure it does in reality. He is one of the men who remember always, too. He would not want to marry her if she were growing strong instead of slowly fading. It would somehow spoil things if he did."

"Of course!" said Anthea slowly. "In any case, as you mentioned, it would be out of the question. But how——"

Jordan checked her, with a smile this time. "How do I understand? I don't think I do altogether; I only guess. A man who lived alone at sea or on a ranch in the shadowy bush might be capable of an attachment of that kind, but not one who makes his living in the cities. One can't get away from the material point of view there."

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He broke off, and sat still for a minute or two, for though it was clear that Anthea had no wish to discuss that topic further, he felt that she had something to say to him.

"Mr. Jordan," she asked at last, "have you had any news about the *Shasta*?"

Jordan's face clouded, but he did not turn in her direction, for which the girl was grateful.

"No," he said, "I have none. As perhaps you know, she should have turned up two or three weeks ago."

It was a moment or two before he glanced around, and then Anthea met his gaze, in which, however, there was no trace of inquiry.

"You are anxious about her?" she asked.

"I am, a little. It is a wild coast up yonder, and they have wilder weather. The charts don't tell you very much about those narrow seas. One must trust to good fortune and one's nerve when the fog shuts down. That," and he smiled reassuringly, "was why I sent Jimmy."

Anthea felt her face grow warm, but she looked at him steadily.

"Ah!" she said, "you believe in him. Still, skill and nerve will not do everything."

"They will do a great deal, and what flesh and blood can do, one can count on getting from the *Shasta's* skipper. I believe"—and he lowered his voice confidentially—"Jimmy will bring her back again. That's why I sent her up there less than half-insured. Premiums were heavy, and we wanted all our money. Still, if he does not, I know he will have made the toughest fight—and that will be some relief to me. You see, I'm fond of Jimmy—and I'm talking quite straight with you."

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There was a hint of pain in the girl's face, and she realized that it was there, but his frankness had had its effect on her. It suggested a sympathy she did not resent, and she smiled at him gravely.

"Thank you!" she said. "There is another thing I want to ask, Mr. Jordan. If you get any news of the *Shasta*, will you come and tell me?"

"Within the hour," said Jordan, and Anthea, who thanked him, rose and turned away.

Jordan, however, sat still, gazing straight in front of him thoughtfully, for, though she had perhaps not intended this, the girl's manner had impressed him. He fancied that he knew what she was feeling, and that she had in a fashion taken him into her confidence. It was also a confidence that he would at any cost have held inviolable. Then he rose with a little dry smile.

"She is clear grit all through," he said. "And her father is the ——— rogue in all this Province."

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CHAPTER XXIV JORDAN KEEPS HIS PROMISE

Right sunshine streamed down on the Inlet, and there was an exhilarating freshness in the morning air; but Anthea Merrill sat somewhat listlessly on the veranda outside her father's house, looking across the sparkling water toward the snows of the north. She had done the same thing somewhat frequently of late, and, as had happened on each occasion, her thoughts were fixed on the little vessel that had apparently vanished in the fog-wrapped sea. Anthea had grown weary of waiting for news of her.

Hitherto very little that she desired had been denied her, and though that had not been sufficient to pervert her nature, it naturally made the suspense she had to face a little harder to bear, since the money before which other difficulties had melted was in this case of no avail. The commander of the *Shasta* had passed far beyond her power to recall him; and, if he still lived, of which she was far from certain, it was only the primitive courage and stubborn endurance which are not confined to men of wealth and station that could bring him back to her in spite of blinding fog and icy seas. Anthea had no longer any hesitation in admitting that this was what she greatly desired. Now that he had—it appeared more than possible—sailed out of her life altogether into the unknown haven that awaits the souls of the sailormen, she knew how she longed for him. Still, the days had slipped by, and there was no word from the silent north which has been for many a sailorman and sealer the fairway to the tideless sea.

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At last she started a little as a man came up the drive toward the house. He appeared to be a city clerk, but, though Merrill had not yet gone out, she did not recognize him as one of those in her father's service. He turned when he saw her and came straight across the lawn, and Anthea felt a thrill run through her as she noticed that he had an envelope in his hand.

"Miss Merrill?" he said. "Mr. Jordan sent this with his compliments."

Anthea thanked him, but did not open the envelope until he turned away. Even then she almost felt her courage fail as she tore it apart and took out a strip of paper that appeared to be a telegraphic message addressed to Jordan.

"Held up by fog and got ashore, but arrived here undamaged. Clearing again morning," it read, and the blood crept into her face as she saw that it was signed, "Wheelock Shasta."

For the next five minutes she sat perfectly still, conscious only of a great relief, and then she roused herself with an effort as Merrill came out of the house.

"A telegram!" he said, with a smile. "Who has been wiring you? Have you been speculating?"

"In that case, don't you think I should have come to you for information?" asked Anthea, who was mistress of herself again.

"I'm not sure that you would have been wise if you had," said Merrill, with a whimsical grimace. "I don't seem to have been very successful with my own affairs of late. Anyway, you haven't told me what I asked."

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Anthea was never quite sure why she placed the message in his hand. She was aware that he was not interested in the subject, and would certainly not have pressed her for an answer. In fact, he very seldom inquired as to what she did, and had never attempted to place any restraint upon her. He glanced at the message, and then turned to her again.

"Wheelock to Jordan. Friends of yours?" he said. "You would probably meet them at Austerly's."

"Yes," said Anthea, "I think I may say they are."

It was essentially characteristic of Merrill that he showed no displeasure. He was indulgent to his

daughter, and one who very seldom allowed himself to be led away by either personal liking or rancor. For a moment he stood still looking down at her with a dry smile, and, because no father and daughter can be wholly dissimilar, Anthea bore his scrutiny with perfect composure.

"Well," he said, "they're both men of some ability, with signs of grit in them, though I don't know that it would have troubled me if I had heard no more of the *Shasta*. Now I'm a little late, and it will be to-night before I'm back from the city."

He turned away, and once more Anthea became sensible of a faint repulsion for her father. Every word Eleanor Wheelock had uttered in Forster's ranch had impressed itself on her memory, and she knew now that his interests clashed with those of the *Shasta* Company. It would not have astonished her if he had shown some sign of resentment, but this complete indifference appeared unnatural, and troubled her. He was, it seemed, as devoid of anger as he was, if Eleanor Wheelock and several others were to be believed, of pity. Then she felt that she must, to a certain extent, at least, confide in some one, and she set out to call on Nellie Austerly.

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It happened that morning that Jimmy stood on the *Shasta's* bridge as she steamed up the softly gleaming straits. Ahead a dingy smoke-cloud was moving on toward him, and he took his glasses from the box when the black shape of a steamer grew out of it. She rose rapidly higher, and Jimmy guessed that she was considerably larger than the *Shasta* and steaming three or four knots faster. Then he made out that her deck was crowded with passengers, and, though the beaver ensign floated over her stern, their destination was evident when he glanced at the flag at the fore. The only American soil north of them was Alaska.

She drew abreast, a beautiful vessel of old and almost obsolete model, with the clear green water frothing high beneath her outward curve of prow. There was no fore-castle forward to break the sweeping line of rail, and the broad quarter-deck that overhung her slender stern had also its suggestiveness to a seaman's eye. The smoke-cloud at her funnel further hinted that her speed was purchased by a consumption of coal that would have been considered intolerable in a modern boat. Then the strip of bunting at her mainmast head fixed Jimmy's attention.

"Merril's hard on our trail," he said. "She's taking a big crowd of miners north. That's his flag."

Fleming, who stood beneath the bridge, looked up with a little nod. "I would not compliment him on his sense," he said. "A beautiful boat, but the man who runs her will want a coal-mine of his own. Got her cheap, I figure, but it's only at top-freights she could make a living. Guess Merrill's screwing all he can out of those miners, but those rates won't last when the C.P.R. and the Americans cut in, and if I had a boat of that kind I'd put up a big insurance and then scuttle her."

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Then one of the two or three bronzed prospectors who had come down with the *Shasta* approached the bridge.

"Can't you let the boys who are going up know we've been there?" he said. "It might encourage them to see that somebody has come out alive."

Jimmy called to his quartermaster before he answered the man. "Well," he said, "in a general way the signal wouldn't quite mean that, but it's very likely they'll understand it."

Merril's boat was almost alongside, when the quartermaster broke out the stars and stripes at the *Shasta's* masthead. A roar of voices greeted the snapping flag, and the heads grew thick as cedar twigs in the shadowy bush along the stranger's rail; while the men who stood higher aft upon her ample quarter-deck flung their hats and arms aloft. Jimmy could see them plainly, and their faces and garments proclaimed that most of them were from the cities. There were others whose skin was darkened and who wore older clothes; but these did not shout, for they were men who had been at close grips with savage nature already, and had some notion of what was before them. Jimmy blew his whistle and dipped the beaver flag, while a curious little thrill ran through him as the sonorous blast hurled his greeting across the clear green water. He knew what these men would have to face who were going up, the vanguard of a great army, to grapple with the wilderness, and it was clear that nature would prove too terrible for many of them who would never drag their bones out of it again.

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Once more the voices answered him with a storm of hopeful cries, for the soft-handed men of the cities had also the courage of their breed. It was the careless, optimistic courage of the Pacific Slope, and store-clerk and hotel-lounger cheered the *Shasta* gaily as, reckless of what was before them, they went by. When the time came to face screaming blizzard and awful cold they would, for the most part, do it willingly, and go on unflinching in spite of flood and frost until they dropped beside the trail. Jimmy, who realized this vaguely, felt the thrill again, and was glad that he had sped them on their way with a message of good-will; but there was no roar from their steamer's whistle, and the beaver flag blew out undipped at her stern. Then, as she drew away from him, his face hardened, and the engineer looked at him with a grin.

"Merril's skipper's like him, and that's 'most as mean as he could be," he said.

Jimmy glanced toward his masthead. "If there were many of his kind among my countrymen, I'd feel tempted to shift that flag aft, and keep it there," he said. "The boys from Puget Sound could cheer."

One of the prospectors who stood below broke into a little soft laugh. "Oh, yes," he said, "it's in them, and all the snow up yonder won't melt it out. Still, it's your quiet bushmen and ours who'll do the getting there. Guess they could raise a smile for you—and they did; but when it comes to

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shouting, they haven't breath to spare."

He turned and looked after the steamer growing smaller to the northward amidst her smoke-cloud. "One in every twenty may bottom on paying gold, and you might figure on three or four more making grub and a few ounces on a hired man's share. The snow and the river will get the rest."

Then he strolled away, and when Jimmy looked around again there was only a smoke-trail on the water, for the steamer had sunk beneath the verge of the sea. His attention also was occupied by other things that concerned him more than the steamer, for another two or three hours would bring him to Vancouver Inlet, which he duly reached that afternoon, and found Jordan and a crowd through which the latter could scarcely struggle awaiting him on the wharf. Still, he got on board, and poured out tumultuous questions while he wrung Jimmy's hand, and it was twenty minutes at least before Jimmy had supplied him with the information he desired. Then he sat down and smiled.

"Well," he said, "we'll go into the other points to-morrow, and to-night you're coming to Austerly's with me. Got word from Miss Nellie that I was to bring you sure. She wanted me to send a team over for Eleanor."

"Then why didn't you?" asked Jimmy.

Jordan's manner became confidential. "Nellie Austerly contrived to mention that Miss Merrill would be there too, and it seemed to me that Eleanor mightn't quite fit in. She has her notions, and when she gets her program fixed I just stand clear of her and let her go ahead. It's generally wiser. Anyway, I felt that I could afford to do the straight thing by you and Austerly."

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"Thanks!" said Jimmy, with a dry smile. "Of course, there is nothing to be gained by pretending that Eleanor is fond of Miss Merrill."

Jordan sighed. "Well, I guess other men's sisters have their little fancies now and then, and though she has scared me once or twice, Eleanor's probably not very different from the rest of them. I was a trifle played out—driven too hard and anxious—while you were away, and she was awfully good to me—gentle as an angel; but for all that, I feel one couldn't trust her alone with Miss Merrill on a dark night if she had a sharp hatpin or anything of that kind. And as for Merrill, I believe she wouldn't raise any objections if it were in our power to have him skinned alive. Now, I like a girl with grit in her."

"Still, Eleanor goes a little further than you care about at times?"

Jordan laid a hand on his companion's arm. "Jimmy," he said, "there's a thing you haven't mentioned to either of us—and I didn't expect you to—but I feel that by and by your sister is going to make trouble for you."

Jimmy looked at him steadily, and Jordan smiled. "You needn't trouble about making any disclaimer. I see how it is. Somehow you're going to get her. Merrill's not likely to run us off. I guess there's no reason to worry about him. Still, I want you to understand that if I can't put a check on your sister—and that's quite likely—I'm going to stand by her. I just have to."

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"Of course!" said Jimmy gravely. "Nobody would expect anything else from you. I don't mind admitting that I have been a little anxious about what Eleanor might do—but we'll change the subject. You suggested that Merrill was getting into trouble?"

"He is," said Jordan, with evident relief. "They're making the road to the pulp-mill, and I don't quite know where he raised his share of the money, especially as he has just taken over a big old-type steamer. Had to face a high figure, played out as she is. Ships are in demand. Now, there are men like Merrill whose money isn't their own; that is, they can get it from other people to make a profit on, as a general thing. But these aren't ordinary times; any man with money can make good interest on it himself just now, and I've more than a fancy that Merrill's handing out instead of raking in. He has been at the banks lately, and when there's a demand for money everywhere you can figure what they're going to charge him. Anyway, we won't worry about him in the meanwhile. Get on your shore-clothes. As soon as you're ready you're coming up-town with me."

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CHAPTER XXV

AN UNDERSTANDING

Jimmy went to Austerly's, and during the evening related his adventures in the north to a sympathetic audience. His companions insisted on this, and though there was one fact he would rather not have mentioned he complied good-humoredly with their request. The narrative was essentially matter-of-fact, but he had sufficient sense to avoid any affectation of undue diffidence, and the others appeared to find it interesting. Indeed, Nellie Austerly, at least, noticed the faint

sparkle which now and then crept into Anthea's eyes as he told them how, in order to keep his promise to the miners that there should be no delay, he had come out of a snug anchorage and groped his way northward through a bewildering smother of unlifting fog. He also told them simply, but, though he was not aware of the latter fact, with a certain dramatic force, how, straining every nerve and muscle in tense suspense, they hove the steamer off just before the gale broke, and of the strenuous labor cutting wood for fuel on the southward voyage.

When he stopped, Nellie Austerly looked up with a little nod. "Yes," she said, "you took those miners in as you had promised, in spite of the fog, and you brought the *Shasta* down all that way with only a few tons of coal. Still, I don't think you should expect any particular commendation. There are men who can't help doing things of that kind."

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Jimmy laughed, though his face grew slightly flushed. "I'm afraid I also put her ashore. One can't get over that." Then he looked at Jordan. "In fact, I scarcely think I'm out of the wood yet. There will be an inquiry."

"Purely formal," said his comrade. "They'll have a special whitewash brush made for you. Nautical assessors have some conscience, after all. Besides, it depends largely on the facts you supply them whether they consider it worth while to have one."

Austerly had a few questions to ask, and then the conversation drifted away to other topics, until some little time later Jimmy found himself sitting alone beside Nellie Austerly. She lay wrapped in fleecy shawls in a big chair near the foot of the veranda stairway, looking very frail, but she smiled at him benevolently.

"I am glad they have gone," she said. "You see, I wanted to talk to you, but the dew is commencing to settle and I must go in soon. That is insisted on, though I don't think it matters."

She smiled again. "It is a beautiful world, Jimmy, isn't it?"

Jimmy drew in his breath as he glanced about him, for he guessed part of what she was thinking, and it hurt him. He could see the dark pines towering against the wondrous green transparency which follows hard upon the sunset splendors in that country. The Inlet shone in the gaps amid that stately colonnade, and far off beyond it there was a faint ethereal gleam of snow. To him, filled as he was with the clean vigor of the sea, it seemed too beautiful a world to leave.

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"Still," said his companion, "it has had very little to offer me, and perhaps that is why I feel one should never stand by and let any good thing it holds out go; that is, of course, when one has the strength to grasp it. It usually needs some courage, too."

"I'm afraid it does;" and Jimmy looked down at her gravely, for since this was not quite the first time she had suggested the same thing he commenced to understand where she was leading him. "One might, perhaps, manage to muster enough if one could only be sure——"

He stopped somewhat awkwardly, and the girl laughed. "One very seldom can. You have to reach out boldly and clutch before the opportunity has gone."

"In the dark?"

"Of course! One can't always expect to see one's way. You were not afraid of the fog, Jimmy?"

"I was. It got hold of my nerves and shook all the stiffening out of me. In fact, in the sense you mean, I'm afraid of it still."

He checked himself for a moment, and his face was furrowed when he turned to her again. "You understand, of course. The clogging smother of uncertainty now and then gets intolerable when a man wants to do the right thing. He can't see where he is going. There is nothing to steer by."

"If you had sat down and tried to think of every reef and shoal, and what would become of the *Shasta* if she struck them, would you ever have reached your destination when the fog shut down?"

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"No," said Jimmy; "I should in all probability have turned her round, and steamed south again."

Nellie Austerly laughed. "Instead of that you went on—and got there—as they say in this country. That, as I think you will recognize, is the point of it all."

"I also got ashore."

"In spite of the lead. It wasn't much service, Jimmy. It really seems that one is just as safe when going full-speed ahead. Besides, you got off again, and brought the *Shasta* back undamaged. Well, perhaps it may occur to you by and by that there must always be a little uncertainty, and in the meanwhile I dare say you won't mind giving me your arm. I must go in, and these steps seem to be getting steeper lately."

Jimmy gravely held out his arm, and when he handed her one of the shawls as they reached the veranda, she smiled at him again.

"Now you are released, and I see Anthea is all alone," she said.

She disappeared into the house, and Jimmy's heart beat a good deal faster than usual when he went down the stairway. Though he did not know what he would say to her, he had been longing all evening for a word or two with Anthea, and now the desire was almost overwhelming. He had,

of course, seen the drift of Nellie Austerly's observations, and it scarcely seemed likely that she would have offered him the veiled encouragement unless she had had some ground for believing that it was warranted. He also remembered what he had twice seen in Anthea's face; but he was a steamboat skipper with no means worth mentioning, and she the daughter of a man who was in one sense responsible for his father's death. That was certainly not her fault, but Jimmy felt that even if she would listen to him, of which he was far from certain, he could not expose her to her father's ill-will and the scornful pity of her friends. Still, Nellie Austerly's words had had their effect, and he strode straight across the lawn, with the same curious little thrill running through him of which he had been sensible when he drove the *Shasta* full-speed into the fog.

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Anthea stood waiting for him beneath the dark firs, very much as she had done when he had last seen her, with a smile in her eyes.

"I suppose it is Nellie's fault, but I was commencing to wonder whether you wished to avoid me," she said.

Jimmy stood silent a moment, trying to impose a due restraint upon himself, until she lifted her eyes and looked at him. Then he knew the attempt was useless, and abandoned it.

"The fault was not exactly mine," he said, with a faint hoarseness in his voice. "For one thing, how could I know that you would be pleased to see me?"

"Still," said Anthea quietly, "I really think you did. Were your other reasons for staying away more convincing?"

Then Jimmy flung prudence to the winds. The fog of which he had declared himself afraid was thicker than ever, but that fact had suddenly ceased to trouble him. Again he felt, as he had done when he crouched in the *Sorata's* cockpit one wild morning, that he and Anthea Merrill were merely man and woman, and that she was the one he wanted for his wife. That was sufficient, for the time being, to drive out every other consideration; but he answered her quietly.

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"A little while ago I believed they were, but I can't quite think that now," he said. "Something seems to have happened in the meanwhile—and they don't appear to count."

They had as if by mutual consent turned and followed a path that led into the scented shadow of the firs, but when a great columnar trunk hid them from the house Jimmy stopped again.

"Yes," he said, "after that morning when we watched the big combers from the *Sorata's* cockpit, I think I should have known you were glad to see the *Shasta* back; but the trouble was that I dared not let myself be sure of it. There were, as you said, reasons for that. I suppose I should be strong enough to recognize and yield to them still, but—while you may blame me afterward for not doing so—I can't."

He moved a pace forward, and laid a hand on her shoulder, holding her back from him, unresisting, while he looked down at her. "Since I carried you through the creek that evening up in the bush I have thought of nothing, longed for nothing, but you. It has been one long effort to hold the folly in check; but it has suddenly grown too hard for me—I can't keep it up. Now, at least, you know."

He let his hand drop to his side, and stood still with his eyes fixed on her. Anthea looked up at him with a smile.

"Ah!" she said, "I knew it all long ago. Was it very hard, Jimmy—and are you sure it was necessary?"

The blood surged to the man's forehead, but there was trouble as well as exultation in his face, for his senses were coming back, and it seemed to him that he must somehow muster wisdom to choose for both of them.

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"My dear," he said a trifle hoarsely, "I think it was. I am a struggling steamboat skipper, and you a lady of station in this Province. That was a sufficient reason, as things go."

"If you had been the director of a steamship company, and I a girl without a dollar, would that have influenced you?"

"It would have made it easier. I should have claimed you on board the *Sorata*. Lord"—and Jimmy made a little forceful gesture—"how I wish you were!"

Anthea smiled at him curiously. "Well," she said, "I may not have very much money, after all—and, if I had, is there any reason why you should be willing to give up more than I would? Does it matter so very much that I may, perhaps, be a little richer than you are?"

The veins showed swollen on the man's forehead, and again he struggled with the impulses that had carried him away, for the discrepancy in wealth was, after all, only a minor obstacle. Anthea, too, clearly realized that, and she roused herself for an effort.

"Jimmy," she said, while he stood silent, "would it hurt you very much if I admitted that you were right, and sent you away? After all, you have scarcely said anything that could make one think you would feel it very keenly."

The man stooped a little, and seized one of her hands. "Dear, you are all I want, and to go would be the hardest thing I ever did; but there is your father's opposition to consider, and, if to stay

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would bring you trouble, I might compel myself."

"Ah!" said Anthea softly, "the trouble would come if you went away."

Then with a little resolute movement she drew herself away from him, and looked up with a flush in her face and a quickening of her breath, for there was something of moment to be said. "There is a reason you haven't mentioned yet, though your sister did. Does that count for so very much with you?"

"Eleanor!" said Jimmy, while a thrill of anger ran through him. "I might have known she would do this."

He stood quite still for several moments with a hand clenched at his side and his face furrowed, and when he spoke again it was hoarsely.

"What did she tell you?" he asked.

"I think she told me all that she knew about your father's ruin, and his death. It was very hard to listen to, Jimmy—but did it really happen that way?"

She stopped a moment, and cast a little glance of appeal at him. "I have tried to think that she must have distorted things. It would have been no more than natural. If I had borne what she has I would have done the same. One could not regard them correctly. Bitterness and grief must influence one's point of view."

The man turned his face from her, and moved away a pace or two as if in pain. Then once more he turned toward her with a compassionate gesture, for he knew that the blow would be a heavy one to her, and it was almost insufferable that his hand should be the one to deal it.

"Then anything I could say would not be more reliable. My views would as naturally be distorted too." [Pg 293]

"Still, I should have an answer. You must realize that, and if it is one that hurts I should sooner it came from you than anybody else."

Jimmy drew in his breath. "Then, while I don't know exactly what Eleanor has said, or whether I can forgive her that cruelty, I think you could believe every word of it."

The color faded from Anthea's face, and she looked at him with a faint horror in her eyes and her lips tight set. She could not doubt him. If there had been no other reason, the pity she saw he had for her was proof enough, and for a moment or two she forgot everything but the grim fact to which Eleanor Wheelock had forced her to listen. She could make no excuses for her father now.

She saw him suddenly as she felt that he was a creature of insatiable greed, cunning, unscrupulous, and without pity, and then she commenced to feel intolerably lonely. It was almost as though he had died, and the longing for the love of the man who stood watching her with grave sympathy in his eyes grew so strong that for the moment she was sensible of nothing else. There was nobody but him to whom she could turn. It was, she felt, his part to comfort her; and then she shivered as she remembered that circumstances had placed that out of the question. The injury her father had done him must, it seemed, always stand between them, and she shrank back a pace from him.

"Ah!" she said, "you must hate me for that, Jimmy."

It was half an assertion, and, though she had perhaps not consciously intended the latter, half a question, and the man recognized the dismay in it. He strode forward, and seizing both her hands laid them on his shoulders, and drew her to him masterfully. For a moment he used compulsion, and then she clung to him quivering with her head on his breast. [Pg 294]

"Dear," he said, "it is not your fault. You had no part in it, and, even had it been so, I think I could not have helped loving you. As it is, there is nothing in this world could make me hate you."

Anthea made him no answer, and Jimmy drew her closer still. He had flung prudence and restraint away. What he had said and done was irrevocable, and he was glad that it was so. At last the girl looked up at him again.

"Jimmy," she said, "if you can thrust into the background all that Eleanor told me, you cannot let money come between us. Besides, I haven't any now. Could I lavish money that had been wrung from your father and other struggling men upon my pleasures—or dare to bring it to you? Can't you understand, dear? I am as poor as you are."

Then she suddenly shook herself free from his grasp, and seemed to shiver. "But you can't forgive him—it will be war between you?"

"Yes," said Jimmy slowly, "I am afraid that must be so. If there were no other reason, I cannot desert the men who befriended me, and your father will do all he can to crush them."

"Ah!" said the girl, "it is going to be very hard. Still, I cannot turn against him; he has, at least, been kind to me. I have never had a wish he has not gratified." [Pg 295]

Jimmy slowly shook his head. "No," he said; "that is out of the question—I could not ask it of you. There is also this to recognize: your father is a man of station, and would never permit you to marry a steamboat skipper. He will make every effort to keep you away from me."

Just then Austerly's voice reached them from the house, and Anthea turned to the man again. "Jimmy," she said, "I know that you belong to me, and I to you; but that must be sufficient in the meanwhile. We can neither of us be a traitor. You must wait and say nothing, dear."

Then she turned and, slipping by him swiftly, moved across the lawn toward the house, while Jimmy stood where he was, exultant, but realizing that the struggle before them would tax all the courage that was in him and the girl.

Before he left the house, Nellie Austerly contrived to draw him to her side when there was nobody else near the chair in which she lay.

"Well?" she said inquiringly.

Jimmy looked at her with a little grave smile. "I have rung for full-speed," he said. "Still, the fog is thicker than ever, and, when I dare to listen, I can hear breakers on the bow."

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CHAPTER XXVI

ELEANOR HOLDS THE CLUE

Mrs. Forster had gone out with her daughters, and there was just then nobody else in the ranch, when Eleanor Wheelock and Carnforth sat talking in the big general room. This was satisfactory to the girl, for she desired to have the next half-hour free from interruption. She was aware that Mrs. Forster might come back before that time had elapsed; but, although she had a purpose to accomplish, any appearance of haste would spoil everything, for it was, as she recognized, advisable that Carnforth should be permitted to take her into his confidence in his own time and way, without her doing anything to suggest that she was encouraging him. He had not been very long in Vancouver, and though he had placed a good deal of money in Merrill's hands, and was associated with him in some of his business ventures, she had reasons for believing that he did not know exactly what her relations with Jordan were, or that she had a brother in command of the *Shasta*. Carnforth, as it happened, had also come there with a purpose in his mind. Indeed, it was one he had been considering for some little time, though he had at length decided that it would have to be modified. This did not exactly please him, but he was prepared to make a sacrifice in case of necessity.

He was a tall, well-favored man, and his tight-fitting clothes displayed the straightness of his limbs as he leaned back in his chair, with his eyes which had a suggestive sparkle in them fixed on the girl. The fashion in which he regarded her would, in different circumstances, have aroused Eleanor's resentment, but she was quite aware that there were certain defects in his character, and she had taken some trouble to discover why he had left Toronto somewhat hastily. She sat in a canvas chair opposite him across the room, and, since she had expected him that afternoon, she was conscious that everything she wore became her well.

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The long, light-tinted skirt was no fuller than was necessary, but Eleanor could afford to wear it so, for both in man and woman the average Western figure is modeled in long sweeping lines, and the soft fabric emphasized her dainty slenderness. The pale-blue blouse that hung in filmy, lace-like folds heightened the color of her eyes and the clear pallor of her ivory complexion. Eleanor was, in fact, quite satisfied with her appearance, and aware that it suggested a Puritanical simplicity, which was in one respect, at least, not altogether misleading. There is a certain absence of grossness in the men and women of the West, and even their vices are characterized rather by daring than by materialistic sensuality. She felt that she loathed the man and the part circumstances had forced on her while she dressed herself in expectation of his visit; but, for all that, she was prepared to undertake it.

"And you are really thinking of going away?" she asked.

Carnforth did not answer hastily, but looked at her with the little sparkle growing plainer in his eyes while he appeared to reflect; and, though there was nothing to suggest that she was doing so, Eleanor listened intently as she marshaled all her forces for the task she had in hand. The afternoon was hot and still, and she could hear Forster and his hired man chopping in the bush. The thud of their axes came faintly out of the shadowy woods, but there was no other sound, and the house was very quiet. This was reassuring, for she had no wish to hear Mrs. Forster's footsteps just then. At last her companion spoke.

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"Yes," he said, "I have been thinking over it for some time. In fact, I should have gone before, only I couldn't quite nerve myself to it. I guess I needn't tell you why I found that difficult."

Eleanor laughed. "Then if you don't wish to, why go away at all?"

"I think it would be nicer to tell you why I wish to stay."

"Well," said Eleanor thoughtfully, "I almost fancy you have suggested your reasons once or twice already. Still, it's evident they can't have very much weight with you, or you wouldn't go."

Carnforth leaned forward. "Anyway, my reasons for going would have some weight with most men."

"Then until I hear what they are, you are on your defense," said Eleanor, with a smile that set his blood tingling. "In the meanwhile, I am far from pleased with you. It is not flattering to find one of my friends so anxious to get away from me."

"That was by no means what I was contemplating," said the man, and there were signs of strain in his voice, while a trace of darker color crept into his face. "I guess you know it, too."

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"Ah!" said Eleanor, "why should you expect me to? It wouldn't be reasonable in the circumstances. I was willing to allow you to excuse yourself for wishing to go away, and you don't seem at all anxious to profit by my generosity."

"You mightn't find my reasons—they're rather material ones—interesting."

"Then you are still on your defense, and far from being forgiven. As a matter of fact, I am interested in almost everything, as you ought to know by this time."

"I believe you are," and Carnforth made her a little inclination. "I guess you understand almost everything, too. Well, it seems I have to tell you."

Eleanor displayed no eagerness, though she was sensible of a little thrill of satisfaction, for the thing was becoming easier than she had expected. Instead, she moved with a slow gracefulness in her low chair, so that the narrow ray of sunlight which shone in between the half-closed shutters fell on one cheek and delicate ear. She knew that the pose she had fallen into was one that became her well, and would in all probability have its effect on her companion, and she meant to make the utmost of her physical attractiveness, though such a course was foreign to her nature. Eleanor Wheelock was imperious, and it pleased her to command instead of allure; but she could on due occasion hold her pride in check, and she would not have disdained to use any wile just then. It was with perfect composure that she watched the little glow kindle in Carnforth's eyes, though she could have struck him for it.

"There is no compulsion," she said indifferently. "It rests with yourself."

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Carnforth laughed in a fashion that jarred on her. "The fact that you wish it goes a long way with me. Well, I am a man with somewhat luxurious tastes, which the money I possess would unfortunately not continue to gratify unless I keep it earning something. That is what induced me to take a share in one or two of Merrill's ventures, and now makes it advisable for me to leave him. If I elect to remain, I must put more money into the concern than I consider wise."

"Then Merrill's affairs are not prospering?"

"No," said the man, with a keen glance at her. "I believe you are as aware of that as I am. One way or another you have extracted a good deal of information out of me—the kind in which women aren't generally interested. I don't know why you have done so."

"I think I told you that I am interested in everything. You don't feel warranted in handing the money over to Merrill?"

Carnforth shook his head. "The pulp-mill hit us hard; but before he quite knew that we would have to make the wagon-road, he had bound himself to take over the steamer we are sending up with the miners," he said. "She cost him a good deal."

"Still, freights and passage to the north are high."

"They won't continue to be when the C.P.R. and other people put on modern and economical boats. It is quite clear to me that Merrill's boat can't make a living when she has to run against them."

Eleanor decided to change the subject for a while, though she had not done with it yet. "Well," she said languidly, "I really don't think it matters to me whether she does or not. What I gave you permission to do was to defend yourself for wishing to go away."

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"Haven't I done it?" asked the man. "When I break with Merrill I shall naturally have to discover a new field for my abilities. I think it will be in California."

"You are going to break with him because he is saddled with an unprofitable vessel? Now, there are tides, and fogs, and reefs up there in the north; don't they sometimes lose a well-insured steamer?"

Carnforth laughed, but the girl had seen him start. "Well," he said, "I don't mind admitting that if the one in question went north some day and didn't come back again, it would be a relief to one or two of us. Still, I'm 'most afraid that's too fortunate a thing to happen."

"Of course! There would always be a probability of the skipper's demanding money afterward? Besides, a mate or quartermaster or somebody who hadn't a hand in it might have his suspicions."

The man gazed at her, and this time his astonishment at her perspicacity was very evident for a moment. "A wise man wouldn't tamper with the skipper. Anyway, the people who try to get their money back by means of that kind 'most always involve themselves in difficulties."

It cost Eleanor an effort to conceal her satisfaction. Little by little she had, to an extent her companion did not realize, extracted from him information that enabled her to understand the state of Merrill's affairs tolerably accurately, and she had decided that he would attempt some daring and drastic remedy. Now her purpose was accomplished, for she knew what that remedy would be, and it only remained for her to determine whether Carnforth could be used as a weapon against his associate or must be flung aside. The latter course was the one she would prefer, and she decided on it since he had practically answered the question.

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"So you are going to leave him now that he is in difficulties?" she said with a sardonic smile. "It isn't very generous, but I suppose it's wise, and I almost think you have cleared yourself. Would you mind looking whether you can see Mrs. Forster?"

He had served his purpose, and she was anxious to get rid of him; but the man made no sign of moving.

"I would mind just now, and I hope she'll stay away," he said. "The fact is I have something to say to you, and don't know why I let you switch me off on to Merrill. His affairs can't concern you."

"Then why did you tell me so much about them?"

The man gazed hard at her in evident bewilderment, and then rose to his feet with a little air of resolution. "I'm not to be driven away from the point again. I told you why I have to go, but that is less than half of it. I can't go alone; I want you to come with me."

"Ah!" said the girl very quietly, though a red spot which her brother and Jordan would have recognized as a warning showed in each cheek. "This is unexpected."

Carnforth crossed the room and leaned on a table not far from her chair, looking down at her with a look from which she shrank.

"No," he said, "I don't think it's unexpected; you knew what I meant from the beginning."

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This was, as a matter of fact, correct, but the color grew plainer in Eleanor's cheek. She had known exactly what her companion's advances were worth, and at times it had cost her a strenuous effort to hold her anger in check. It was, however, characteristic of her that she had made the effort.

"After that, I think it would save both of us trouble if you understood once for all that I will not go," she said.

Carnforth laughed harshly, while his face flushed with ill-suppressed passion. "Pshaw! you don't mean it. For several months you have led me on, and now that I'm yours altogether, I'm not going to California without you. You know that, too; you have to go."

"You have had your answer," and Eleanor rose and faced him with portentous quietness. "Don't make me say anything more."

The man moved forward suddenly, and laid a hot grasp on her wrist. There was as yet no dismay in his face, and it was very evident that he would not believe her. There were excuses for him, and the fact that it was so roused the girl, who remembered what her part had been, to almost uncontrollable anger.

"You are going to say that you are willing and coming with me, if I have to make you," he said fiercely. "I mean just that, and I am not afraid of you, though at times one can see something in your eyes that would scare off most men. It's there now, but it's one of the things that make me want you. Eleanor, put an end to this. You know you have me altogether—isn't that enough? Do you want to drive me mad?"

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He stopped a moment, and broke into a harsh laugh as the girl, with a strength he had not looked for, shook off his grasp. "Oh," he said, "it seems I've gone on too fast. I'll fix about the wedding soon as I break with Merrill."

There was certainly something in Eleanor Wheelock's eyes just then that few people would have cared to face. The vindictive hatred she bore Merrill had for the time being driven every womanly attribute out of her, but she remembered how she had loathed this man's advances and endured them. To carry out her purpose she would, indeed, have stooped to anything, for her hatred had possessed her wholly and altogether. Now it was momentarily turned on her companion.

"It would have been wiser if you had made that clear first," she said, with a slow incisiveness that made the words cut like the lash of a whip. "Still, I suppose, the offer is generous, in view of the trouble you would very probably bring on yourself by attempting to carry it out."

The man appeared staggered for a moment, but he recovered himself.

"Well," he said, with a little forceful gesture, "there are parts of my record I can't boast about, but there are points on which you'd go 'way beyond me. That, I guess, is what got hold of me and won't let me go. By the Lord, Eleanor, nothing would be impossible to you and me if we pulled together."

"That will never happen," said the girl, still with a very significant quietness. "Don't force me to speak too plainly."

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Carnforth appeared bewildered, for at last he was compelled to recognize that she meant what she said, but there was anger in his eyes.

"Well," he said stupidly, "what in the name of wonder did you want? You know you led me on."

"Perhaps I did. Now that I know what you are, I tell you to go. Had you been any other man I might have felt some slight compunction, or, at least, a little kindness toward you. As it is, I am only longing to shake off the contamination you have brought upon me."

She broke off with a little gesture of relief, and moving toward the window flung the shutters back.

"They have finished chopping, and I hear the ox-team in the bush," she said. "Forster will be here in a minute or two."

Carnforth stood still, irresolute, though his face was darkly flushed; and Eleanor felt the silence become oppressive as she wondered whether the rancher would come back to the house or lead his team on into the bush. Then the trample of the slowly moving oxen's feet apparently reached her companion, for with a little abrupt movement he took up his wide hat from the table. He waited a few moments, however, crumpling the brim of it in one hand, while Eleanor was conscious that her heart was beating unpleasantly fast as she watched for the first sign of Forster or his hired man among the dark fir-trunks. At last she heard her companion move toward the door, and when it swung to behind him she drew in her breath with a gasp of relief.

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CHAPTER XXVII

JORDAN'S SCHEME

Carnforth had been gone some twenty minutes when Eleanor stood among the orchard grass, from which the ranks of blackened fir-stumps rose outside the ranch. She had recovered her composure, and was looking toward the dusty road which wound, a sinuous white ribbon, between the somber firs. Jordan, whom she had not expected to see just then, was walking along it with Forster, and, since it was evident that he must have met Carnforth, she was wondering, with a somewhat natural shrinking from doing so, how far it would be necessary to take him into her confidence. This, as she recognized, must be done eventually; but she was not sure that her legitimate lover would be in a mood to understand or appreciate her course of action when fresh from a meeting with the one she had discarded. Jordan had laid very little restraint upon her, but he was, after all, human and had a temper.

She lost sight of the two men for a few minutes when they passed behind a great colonnade of fir-trunks that partly obscured her view of the road, but she could see them plainly when they emerged again from the shadow. Instead of turning toward the house they came toward her, and there was, she noticed, a curious red mark on Jordan's cheek, as well as a broad smear of dust on his soft hat, which appeared somewhat crushed. His attire was also disordered, and his face was darker in color than usual. Forster, who walked a pace or two behind him, because the path through the grass was narrow, also appeared disturbed in mind, and when they stopped close by the girl it was he who spoke first.

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"I had gone down the road to see whether there was any sign of Mrs. Forster when I came upon Mr. Jordan; and, considering how he was engaged, it is perhaps fortunate that I did," he said. "Although it is not exactly my business, I can't help fancying that you have something to say to him."

He went on, but he had said enough to leave Eleanor with a tolerably accurate notion of what had happened, and to make it clear that he was not altogether pleased. The rancher and his wife were easy-going, kindly people, with liberal views, but it was evident that their toleration would not cover everything. Then she turned to Jordan, who stood looking at her steadily with a certain hardness in his face, and the red mark showing very plainly on his cheek.

"Well," she said, "how did you get here?"

"On my feet," said Jordan. "There was little to do this afternoon in the city, and two or three things were worrying me. It struck me that I'd walk it off, and I'm glad I did."

"Ah!" said Eleanor, "won't you go on a little?"

"It's what I mean to do. I met Carnforth driving away from here, and since the fact that he has been here quite often has been troubling me lately, I invited him to pull up right away. When he didn't do it I managed to get hold of the horses' heads, and went right across the road with them. Still, I stopped the team, and I was getting up to talk to Carnforth when Forster came along. I hated to see him then."

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Somewhat to his astonishment, Eleanor laughed softly. "Forster persuaded you to abandon the—discussion?"

"He did. If there's a split up the back of my jacket, as I believe there is, he made it. Anyway, he wasn't quite pleased, and I don't blame him. He and his wife have let you do 'most whatever you like, but, after all, you couldn't expect them to put up with everything."

"Or expect too much from you? You feel you have borne a good deal, Charley? Well, Forster was right in one respect. We have something to say to each other, and it may take a little time. There is a big fir he has just chopped yonder."

She walked slowly toward the fallen tree, and seated herself on a great branch before she turned to the man who was about to take a place beside her.

"No," she said, "you can stand there, Charley, where I can see you. To commence with, how much confidence have you in me?"

"All that a man could have;" and there was no doubt about Jordan's sincerity. "Still, I don't like Carnforth. He's not fit for you to talk to, and I can't have him coming here. In fact, I'll see that he doesn't. I've wanted to say this for quite a while, but it would have pleased me better to say it first to him. That's one reason why I feel it's particularly unfortunate Forster didn't stay away a minute or two longer."

A faint tinge of color crept into Eleanor's cheek, but she looked at him with a smile.

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"Charley," she said, "I am a little sorry too that Forster came along when he did. I don't know that it's what every girl would say, but I think if you had thrashed that man to within an inch of his life it would have pleased me."

She stopped for a moment, and the color grew a trifle plainer in her face, though there was no wavering in her gaze. "I want you to understand that I knew just what that man was—and still I led him on. It is a little hard to speak of; but one has to be honest, and when it is necessary I think both of us can face an unpleasant thing. Well, I encouraged him because I couldn't see how I was to attain my object any other way. Still, you mustn't suppose it cost me nothing. It hurt all the time—hurt me horribly—and now I almost feel that I shall never shake off the contamination."

The man, who did not know yet what her purpose was, realized that the task she had undertaken must have heavily taxed her strength and courage. He knew that she was vindictive, and one who was not addicted to counting the cost, but he also knew that there was a certain Puritanical pride in her which must have rendered the part she had played almost insufferably repulsive. His face burned as he thought of it, and he drew in his breath with a curious little gasp while he gazed at her with a look in his eyes that sent a thrill of dismay through her.

"Oh!" she said, "don't ask, Charley. I couldn't bear that from you. I—I kept him at a due distance all the time."

Jordan's tense face relaxed. "I can't forgive Forster for coming along when he did," he said. "Eleanor, you have courage enough for anything. In one way, it isn't natural."

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"You have felt that now and then?"

The man said nothing for almost a minute, for he was still a little shaken by what she had told him. It had roused him to fierce resentment and brought the blood to his face, but he now recognized that there were respects in which the momentary dismay of which he had been sensible was groundless. She had given him sympathy and encouragement freely, and at times had shown him a certain half-reserved tenderness, but very little more, and he felt that it should have been quite clear to him that she had unbent no further toward the stranger. Then he straightened himself as he looked at her.

"My dear," he said, "I needn't tell you there is nobody on this earth I would place beside you."

Eleanor smiled wistfully. "Ah!" she said, "I like to hear you say that, though it is, of course, foolish of you; and perhaps I shall change and be gentler and more like other women some day. Still, that wouldn't be advisable just now. We must wait, and in the meanwhile there are other things to think of. Listen for a minute, and you will understand why I led Carnforth on. He is, of course, never coming here again."

She told him quietly all she had heard respecting Merrill's affairs, and when at last she stopped, Jordan made an abrupt gesture.

"It's a pity I can't act upon what you have told me," he said.

"You can't act upon it?"

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"No," said Jordan firmly. "You should never have done it—it cost you too much. Oh, I know the shame and humiliation it must have brought you. You can't make things like these counters in a business deal."

"You must;" and Eleanor's eyes grew suddenly hard again. "Is all I have gained by doing what I loathed to be thrown away? Listen, Charley. I loved my father, and looked up to him until Merrill laid a trap for him. Then he went downhill, and I had to watch his courage and control being sapped away. He lost it all, and his manhood, too, and died crazed with rank whisky."

She rose, and stood very straight, pale in face and quivering a little. "Could anything ever drive out the memory of that horrible night? You could hardly bear what had to be done, and you can

fancy what it must have been to me—who loved him. Can I forgive the man who brought that on him?"

Jordan shivered a little with pity and horror, as the scene in the room where the burned man gasped out his life in an extremity of pain rose up before him. Then he was conscious that Eleanor had recovered herself and was looking at him steadily.

"Charley," she said, "you must stand by me in this, or go away and never speak to me again. There is no alternative. Only support me now, and afterward I will obey you for the rest of our lives."

The man realized that she meant it, and though it cost him an effort, he made a sign of resignation.

"Then," he said, "it must be as you wish. And I guess, after what you have told me, we hold Merrill in our hand. That is, if Jimmy and I can do our part." [Pg 312]

Both of them had felt the tension, and now that it had slackened they said nothing for several minutes as they walked toward the house. Then Eleanor turned to her companion.

"I am glad I can depend on you," she said. "When the pinch comes Jimmy will fail us."

"Jimmy," said Jordan quietly, "is your brother as well as my friend."

"Ah!" said Eleanor, "don't misunderstand. Jimmy would flinch from nothing on a steamer's bridge. Still, it isn't nerve of that kind that will be needed, and Miss Merrill has a hold on him."

Jordan saw the faint sparkle in her eyes. "After all, you can't hold the girl responsible for her father?"

"I do," said Eleanor, with a curious bitter smile. "At least, I would keep her away from Jimmy."

Jordan said nothing, but there was trouble in his face, for he had seen how things were going, and though he was Eleanor's lover he was Jimmy's friend. When they reached the ranch they found that Mrs. Forster had come back, and she glanced at Jordan with a smile in her eyes when he crossed the room.

"Do you know that you have split your jacket up the back?" she asked.

Jordan looked reproachfully at Forster. "Well," he said, "I almost think that your husband does."

"Then he will lend you another one while I sew it for you."

"One would fancy that Eleanor would prefer to do it," said the rancher dryly.

His wife pursed up her face. "It is possible that she may bring herself to do such things by and by. Still, I can't quite imagine Eleanor quietly sitting down and mending a man's clothes." [Pg 313]

Jordan laughed. "It's quite likely that she'll have to. It depends on how the *Shasta* pleases the miners. Forster, I'll trouble you to lend me a jacket. I guess you owe it to me."

Forster promised to get him the garment, and when they went away together his wife asked Eleanor a plain question or two. It was some time before she said anything to her husband about that interview, but she appeared somewhat thoughtful until supper was brought in. Shortly after it was over Jordan, who borrowed a horse from Forster, rode away, and the rancher, who was sitting on the veranda, smiled at his wife when Eleanor walked back from the slip-rails toward the house.

"Well," he said reflectively, "though I'm rather fond of Miss Wheelock, I can't help thinking that Jordan is an unusually courageous man. It is fortunate that he is so, considering everything."

Mrs. Forster flashed a keen glance at him, but it said a good deal for her capability of keeping a promise that she contented herself with a simple question.

"Why?" she asked.

"He expects to marry her," said Forster dryly.

In the meanwhile Jordan was riding down the dusty road, and thinking out a scheme which, though he had been reluctant to adopt it in the first case, was now commencing to compel his attention. As the result of this, he spent most of the evening in certain second-rate saloons where sailormen and wharf-hands congregated, which, though he had been well acquainted with such places in his struggling days, was a thing he had not done for several years. However, he came across one or two men there who, while they were probably not aware of it, gave him a little useful information, and he had a project in his mind when he went on board the *Shasta* on the following morning. She was then in the hands of the ship-carpenters, for, although the treasure-seekers in their haste to reach the auriferous north would if necessary have gone in a canoe, it was evident that the *Shasta* Company must offer them at least some kind of shelter in view of the opposition of larger vessels. Jordan also knew that niggardliness is not always profitable, and the new passenger deck that was being laid along the beams was well planned and comfortable. He drew Jimmy into the room beneath the bridge, and taking out his cigar-case laid it on the table. [Pg 314]

"Take one. We have got to talk," he said. "Now, the *Shasta's* out after money, and it 'most seems

to me that Merrill is going to have an opportunity for providing some of it. You don't know any reason why you shouldn't get what he screwed out of your father, and, perhaps, a little more, out of him?"

"No," said Jimmy grimly, though there was a shadow on his face; "I could find a certain pleasure in making him feel the screw in turn."

"Then I'll show you how it can be done. But first of all we'll go back a little. Merrill has had to make the road to his pulp-mill, and it's costing him and the other men a lot of money. His particular share is quite a big one. Then he's saddled with an old-type steamer that can't be run economically, and, as you know, we'll have to come down in freight and passage rates now that the other people are putting on new boats. Besides, Carnforth, who was to take a big share in the concern, is going to leave him."

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"How do you know that?"

Jordan hesitated for a moment. "Well," he said, "I do, and that's about all I mean to tell you. Anyway, I've cause for believing that Merrill is tightly fixed for money, and can't lay his hands on it. There are reasons why he couldn't let up on the pulp-mill if he wanted. Still, there is one way he could get the money, and that is by making the underwriters, who hold the steamboat covered, provide it."

"Ah!" said Jimmy, "it wouldn't be very difficult either."

His companion smiled dryly. "I have a notion how she is insured, and, so far as I can gather, it's under an economical policy. Underwriters face total constructive loss, but don't stand in for minor damage or salvage. Well, I've ground for believing the thing is to be done by the engineer, and he is a man who has to do just what Merrill tells him. You and Fleming could figure out how he will probably manage. But one thing is clear: when that steamboat's engines give out you have got to be somewhere round to salve her."

"You are sure of this?" asked Jimmy. "What makes you so?"

Jordan did not answer him for a moment, and once more there was hesitation in his manner.

"Well," he said, "that is my affair, and I've been worrying over it quite a while now. Anyway, I think it's a sure thing."

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"What do you purpose if I salve that steamer and we find anything wrong on board her?"

"In that case I'm not sure the salvage will content the *Shasta* Company. It's admissible to break your trading opponent. As I tried to show you, Merrill's tightly fixed, and while the man's quite clever enough to wriggle loose, it will be our business to see that he doesn't."

Jimmy sat still for a few moments with trouble in his face, which was hard and grim, until his comrade turned to him again.

"Jimmy," he said quietly, "that man had no pity on your father. The thing has to be done, and the *Shasta* Company stood by you. We have got to have that salvage, and you're not going to go back on us now."

Jimmy stood up and straightened himself in a curious slow fashion. "No," he said, "I'm with you. As you say, the thing has to be done—and it naturally falls to me. Well, though it'll probably cost me a good deal, I'm ready. When do you expect him to try it?"

"I don't quite know—you couldn't expect me to. Still, I should figure it won't be until she goes north, after the lay-off, in spring. Guess he'll hold on as long as he can. Freights won't drop much before then."

He rose and laid his hand on his comrade's shoulder as they went out. "I think I understand how you are fixed, but you have to face it," he went on. "There's another thing I want to mention. If you can, get hold of Merrill's engineer, and scare him into some admission."

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CHAPTER XXVIII

DISABLED ENGINES

Spring had come, and all down the wild West Coast the tall pines had shaken off their load of snow and the rivers were thundering in their misty cañons, but there was very little sign of it at sea when one bitter morning a cluster of deeply bronzed men hung about the *Adelaide's* engine-room skylights. They were lean and somewhat grim of face, as well as ragged and suggestively spare of frame, for they had borne all that man may bear and live through during the winter they had spent in the ice-bound wilderness. Now they were going back to civilization with many ounces of gold, and papers relating to auriferous claims, to invoke the aid of capital before they once more turned their faces toward the frozen north.

It was noticeable that although they were of widely different birth and upbringing there was the same stamp which revealed itself in a certain quietness of manner and steadiness of gaze upon them all, for these were the pick of the mining community, men who had grappled with the wilderness in its most savage moods long before they blazed a new trail south from the wilds of the Yukon. They had proved their manhood by coming back at all, for that winter the unfit had died. Still, though they had endured things beyond the comprehension of the average city man, they were glad of the shelter of the tall skylights, because the *Adelaide's* flush deck was swept by a stinging wind and little showers of bitter spray blew all over it. She was rolling viciously across a waste of gray-blue sea which was flecked by livid froth, and her mastheads swung in a wide sweep athwart a sky of curious dingy blue. There was no warmth anywhere in the picture, and apparently very little light; but for all that, every sea stood out from its fellows, and those back in the clear distance were etched upon the indented horizon with harsh distinctness. One of the men shook his head as he gazed at them.

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"They look like the pines on the ridge did the day the blizzard struck us down on the Assiniboia Creek," he said. "It was a full-powered one. The boys who'd camped ahead of us were frozen stiff by morning. The two we scraped the snow off were sitting there like statues, and we didn't worry 'bout the others. There was ten feet over them, anyway. I've no use for this kind of weather."

One of his companions swept his glance astern toward the smear of smoke on the serrated skyline, which was blotted out next moment when the *Adelaide* swung her stern aloft.

"If you're right in your figuring, I'm glad I came along in this boat," he said. "Anyway, she's bigger, though I 'most took my berth in the *Shasta*. Seems to me we're quite a long while getting away from her."

The others agreed with him, for they had seen that smear of smoke on the skyline since early morning. Then they turned to watch the engineer, who came out of a door close by, and glanced up to weather, blinking in the bitter wind. He was a big loosely-built man in dungarees, with the pallid face of one accustomed to the half-light and heat of the engine-room, but in his case it was also unhealthily puffy. Then he slouched right aft, and stood still again looking down at the dial of the taffrail log which records the distance run, while he fumbled in a curious aimless fashion with the blackened rag in his hand.

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"That," said one of the miners, "is a man I'm no way stuck on. Now, you'll most times find hard grit in an engineer, but this one kind of strikes me as feeling that there was something after him he was scared of."

"Well," said one of the others reflectively, "it's not an uncommon thing. There was a man down on the flat where we struck it who had a kind of notion that there were three big timber wolves on his trail. Kept his rifle clean with the magazine ram full for them, but one night they got him. A sure thing. Tom was there."

The man at whom he glanced nodded. "Now and then I wish I hadn't been," he said. "Lister was sitting very sick beside his fire that night. Said he heard those wolves pattering in the bush—there were thick pines all round us—'most made me think I did."

"Well?" said one of his companions.

The miner made a little expressive grimace. "Longest night I ever put in. Sat there and kept them off him. Anyway, I tried, but he was dead at sun-up."

None of the others showed any astonishment, and the man who had asked the question glanced back toward the engineer.

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"Guess the man who runs this steamboat should be getting rich by the way they strike you for a drink," he said. "I'm bringing down 'most two hundred ounces, but I wouldn't like to fill that engineer up at the tariff."

"Never saw him making a traverse, anyway. He walks quite straight," said a comrade.

"Well," said the other, "I've seen his eyes."

Just then the man they were discussing turned toward the bridge, from which the skipper was beckoning him. A minute or two later they went into the room beneath it, and the engineer sat down looking at the man in front of him with narrow, half-open eyes. The latter was young and spruce in trim uniform, a man of no great education, who had a favorable opinion of himself.

"Can't you shove her along a little faster, Robertson?" he said. "We'll be thirty knots behind our usual run at noon."

"No," said the engineer, in a curious listless drawl. "I've been letting the revolutions down. That high-pressure piston's getting on my nerves again."

"Shouldn't have thought you had any worth speaking of," said the skipper, with a quick sign of impatience. "You give one the impression that they've gone to pieces long ago. Take a drink, and tone them up."

He flung a bottle on the table, and watched his companion's long greasy fingers fumble at it with a look of disgust. Robertson half-filled his glass with the yellow spirit, and drained it with slow enjoyment. Then he breathed hard, and, leaning his elbows on the table, looked at the skipper

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heavily.

"Well," he said, "you want something?"

"I do," said the skipper, and taking down a chart unrolled one part of it. "I want to shake her up until we get away from the *Shasta*, for one thing. Wheelock has been hanging on to us as far as his boat's speed will allow it the last two or three runs. I can't quite figure what he's after."

Robertson looked almost startled for a moment as though an unpleasant thought had occurred to him, but his heavy, puffy face sank into its usual lethargicness again.

"Wants to scoop your passengers. Done it once or twice," he said. "Well?"

"For another thing, I want to get round this nest of islands before the breeze that's brewing comes down on us. It will be a snorter. If I were surer of your—old engines, I'd try the inside passage, though the tides run strong. Now, if I head her up well clear of the islands I'm throwing miles away, and letting the *Shasta* in ahead of me. Wheelock has apparently an engineer who will stand by him."

Again a curious furtive look that suggested uneasiness crept into Robertson's eyes.

"He's always just ahead or just astern, and we've altered our sailing bill twice," he said, as if communing with himself.

"I guess you dropped on the reason. Anyway, if you can give me a little more steam, we'll be clear of this unhallowed conglomeration of reefs and tides by this time to-morrow. If it's necessary, you can run her easier afterward." [Pg 322]

Robertson laid a grimy finger on the chart. "She'll be feeling the indraught now—it's running ebb," he said. "If I can read the weather, you'll soon have the breeze strong on your starboard bow."

The skipper flung a swift glance at him, in which there was a trace of astonishment. "How'd you come to know just where she is?"

"Taffrail log," said Robertson. "I generally run a rough reckoning in my head. Well, you want another knot or two out of her until you have the big bight to lee of you? See what I can do, though I'd sooner take a knot off her. That high-press piston's worrying me."

He jerked himself heavily to his feet, and when he shambled out of the room the skipper, who made a little gesture of relief, took up his dividers and laid their points on the chart. One of them rested in the middle of the mark left by the engineer's greasy finger. After that he rolled the chart up and stowed it away from the others in a drawer beneath his berth, and the look of annoyance in his face had its significance. He did not like his engineer, and although he had no particular reason for distrusting him he remembered that when the latter had found it necessary to stop his engines at sea, as he had done once or twice during the last trip or two, it had generally been in the last spot a nervous skipper would have desired. Then he went out, and climbed to his bridge.

"You can head her out two points more to westward," he said to the mate.

"Very good!" said the latter. "Still, we decided that the course she was on would keep her off the land." [Pg 323]

"We did," said the skipper dryly. "Anyway, you'll head her out. We're going to have a wicked breeze from the west before this time to-night."

In the meanwhile the second engineer was leaning out from a slippery platform that swung and slanted as the *Adelaide* lurched over the long gray seas, listening to the dull pounding of the high-pressure engine. His face was as near as he could get it to the big cylinder, and after glancing at a little glass tube he looked down at a man with a tallow swab who clung to the iron ladder beneath him.

"I don't like the way she's slamming, Jake," he said. "There's mighty little oil going into her, either. Who's been throttling up the feed?"

"The chief," said the man on the ladder. "He was slinging it red-hot at Charley 'bout heaving oil away. Guess I'd have fed it to her by the gallon after seeing that new piston-ring sprung on."

The second pursed up his face, for there is an etiquette in these affairs at sea which the man, who had come there fresh from a sawmill, apparently did not understand. "Well," he said, "I guess Mr. Robertson bossed the putting in of that ring, and he knows his business. Anyway, if he tells you you will run her dry."

Then a big, loosely-hung figure came shambling down the ladder, and the second withdrew. However, he stood among the columns below, and watched his superior stop and glance at the tube through which the oil flowed before he went about his work again. Robertson was apparently satisfied, and after slouching round the engine-room and unscrewing a little further the throttle valve which turns steam on to the engines, he crawled back to his greasy room. He sloughed off his jacket and boots, and drawing a bottle from beneath the mattress of his bunk poured himself a stiff drink of whisky before he stretched himself out. [Pg 324]

He slept soundly, and did not hear the roar of the engines below him when the *Adelaide* flung her stern out and the lifted screw whirred madly in the air. The thud of green water on her deck passed unheeded too, though the second heard it as he watched the maze of clanking, banging steel, until the young third relieved him. The latter came down dripping, and shook a little shower of brine off him when he stopped beside his superior.

"It's blowing quite fresh, and she seems to be plugging it mighty hard since you shook her up," he said. "The chief must have given up worrying about that piston, or he wouldn't have had you take the extra knot or two out of her."

"Keep your eye on the—thing," said the second. "It's going to make us trouble yet. If I were boss of this job, I'd slow her down right now instead of pressing her."

He went up and also went to sleep, and, since the telegraph stood at full-speed ahead, the young third clung to a greasy rail, all eyes and ears, with one hand on the gear that would throttle down the steam, while the rolling grew more vicious and the plunges steeper. Quick as he was, there was a thunderous clamor every now and then as the big compound engines, which were twice the size of those of a modern boat of equal tonnage, ran away, and he commenced to long for the close of his watch while the perspiration dripped from him. He had not been very long at sea, and there is a responsibility upon the man on watch when the whirring screw swings clear. At last there was a heavier plunge than usual, and, though the third did all he could, the big engines span and clamored furiously as the stern went up. Then there was a harsh, grinding scream, and a crash. After that came sudden stillness, and the third frantically span the wheel that cut off the steam, while grimy men went sliding and floundering over the slippery plates and platforms toward the high-pressure engine.

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The sudden portentous silence and the roar of blown-off steam that followed it roused every man on board the ship, and Robertson crawled sluggishly out of his berth. He had reasons for knowing exactly what had happened, and he showed no sign of haste, but there was a furtive look in his eyes, and he sat on the ledge of the bunk shivering a little while he thrust his hand beneath the mattress again. He felt that he needed bracing, for he had once spent several anxious hours in a half-swamped lifeboat after the steamer to which it belonged had gone ashore, and he was aware that somebody is usually held accountable for mishaps at sea. There was not very much left in the whiskey-bottle when he thrust it out of sight again, and shambled out of his room. The *Adelaide* was rolling viciously, and when he reached the engine-room he came near falling down the slippery ladder. Indeed, most men would have gone down it headlong if they had braced themselves as he had done, but habitual caution made him feel for a good hold, and he descended safely to where his subordinates were clustered beneath the high-pressure cylinder. Their faces showed tense and anxious in the flickering light of the lamps which swung wildly as the steamer rolled, and the young third engineer hastily related what had brought about the stoppage.

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"Rig the lifting tackles while she cools," said Robertson. "Get the stud-nuts loose. We'll have the cover off soon as we can."

Then he turned and saw, as he had partly expected, a quartermaster standing just inside the door above him, and with a word or two to his second he crawled back up the ladder and went with the man to the room beneath the bridge. The young skipper who stood there with a furrowed face regarded him grimly.

"How long are you going to be before you start her again?" he asked.

Robertson blinked at him with furtive, half-open eyes. "I don't quite know—it's a heavy job. We have to heave the piston up," he said. "Besides that, she has knocked things loose below."

The skipper appeared to have some difficulty in restraining himself.

"Unless you can get steam on her in the next few hours she'll be breaking up by morning. The reefs to lee of us are not the kind of ones I'd like to put a steamer ashore on, either."

Then he took a bottle from a drawer with a little grimace of disgust, for he remembered that skippers are comparatively plentiful, and the man he could scarcely keep his hands off was for some reason apparently a favorite with his employer.

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"Oh, take a drink, and hump yourself," he said. "I guess that's the only thing to put a move on you."

Robertson hesitated for a moment, for he realized that he had still a part to play. Then it occurred to him that his companion might draw his own conclusions as to his reasons for any unusual abstemiousness, and he helped himself liberally.

"Well," he said when he had drained his glass, "I'll be getting back again. Do what I can—but it's a heavy job."

He shuffled out, but his potations were commencing to have their effect, and when he reached the top platform in the engine-room he felt carefully for the rail that sloped as a guide to the ladder. It was as usual greasy and Robertson's grip not particularly sure, while the *Adelaide* rolled wickedly to lee just then. As the result of it, her engineer went down the ladder much as a sack of coal would have done, and fell in a limp heap on the floor-plates with a red gash on his head. The second stooped down and shook him before he turned to the other men.

"Heave him on to the tool locker, one or two of you," he said. "We can't pack him up to his room with this job in front of us. See if you can fix that cut for him, Varney, and then go up and tell the skipper."

A man went up the ladder, and the skipper, who sent an urgent message back with him, turned to the little cluster of miners who were waiting about his room.

"Something wrong with the engines?" asked one.

"There is," said the skipper, who knew his men and would not have admitted to the ordinary run of passengers what he did to them. "It will probably be some hours before they start again, and the shore's not very far away to lee. If you feel inclined to lend a hand at getting sail on her I guess it would be advisable."

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The miners were willing, and set about it cheerfully, though it was blowing hard now and the long deck heaved and slanted under them. There is very seldom an unnecessary man on board a steamer, and the *Adelaide's* mate was glad of a few extra strong arms just then. That they were drenched with bitter spray and occasionally flung against winch and bulwarks did not greatly trouble them. Things of that kind did not count after facing the wild turmoil of northern rivers and living through destroying hazes of blizzard-driven snow. So they got the canvas on her, forestaysail, gaff-headed foresail, mainstaysail, and a blackened three-cornered strip abaft the mainmast, and the skipper felt a trifle easier when he found that he could steer her. She crawled through the water at perhaps two knots an hour, dragging her idle screw, but she also drove to leeward nearer the deadly reefs.

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CHAPTER XXIX UNDER COMPULSION

It was in the gray of the morning when Jimmy saw her, a dim patch of hull and four strips of sail that heaved and dipped between the seas. He also saw the faint loom of land behind her, and turned to Lindstrom, who stood beside him, with a grim smile.

"I think we can make our own terms to-day," he said. "She wouldn't be there with those reefs to lee of her if her engines hadn't broken down. Will you ask the bos'n to have a board ready and a brushful of white lead?"

Then he turned to the man in oilskins who held the steering wheel. "Hard over. Run her right down on them."

The *Shasta's* bows came round, and the light was growing clearer when she lay with engines stopped as close to windward of the *Adelaide* as Jimmy dared venture. The latter crawled ahead sluggishly, heaving her bows up streaming out of the long seas that fell away beneath a high wall of slanted iron hull until the blackened strips of sailcloth swung wildly back again. Then her tall side sank down until the line of rail was level with the brine. A couple of shapeless, oilskinned figures clung to her slanted bridge with the spray whirling about them, and ragged wisps of cloud drove fast across the low and dingy sky overhead.

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Jimmy watched her with eyes half-closed to keep the spray out, which had a portentous glint in them. This was a moment for which he had waited long months, and now his turn had come. If Jordan were right—and the fact that the *Adelaide* was there to leeward of him with engines useless certainly suggested it—he had only to play his cards well and deal the man who had ruined his father a crushing blow. He set his lips tight as he remembered that when it fell the man's daughter must bear it too, for he was bound by every honorable tie to do what he could for the men who had entrusted him with the *Shasta*. That fact, he felt, must stand first with him; but he was also a seaman, and could not stand by while a costly vessel drove ashore as the result of an infamous conspiracy. While he waited, grim-faced, with his wet hand clenched on the telegraph, a string of flags fluttered up between the other steamer's masts, and he laughed harshly as he turned to Lindstrom, who had come up again with a brush and a strip of board.

"That's quite plain without the code," he said. "Engines given out, and he's open for a tow. Well, he shall have it, on conditions. Closer, quartermaster. Lindstrom, hold the board for me."

He painted his answer neatly in big bold letters, and when he had pressed down his telegraph flung up an arm for a sign to the cluster of very wet men below.

"Look at this thing, and remember it," he shouted. "Hold it up before you hang it out, Lindstrom."

The mate did as he was bidden, and one or two of the men made a sign of comprehension, for, as all on board share in salvage, they were keenly interested too. Then the quartermaster pulled over his wheel, and the *Shasta* crept ahead a little with a message hung outside her bridge rails.

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"Half your appraised value, or the court's award."

There was no answer for several minutes, though the flags came fluttering down, and then a thing happened that apparently strengthened Jimmy's hand, which was, as he alone knew, a particularly strong one already. A white streak appeared to leeward, perhaps two miles away beneath the gray loom of land, and it was evident that the *Adelaide's* skipper knew it was the filmy spray flung up by crumbling breakers. Two or three colored strips ran up between her masts again, and the hard smile crept back into Jimmy's eyes.

"Seems to fancy he'll get off easier through the court," he said to Lindstrom. "Well, he's wrong; but the first thing is to get their rope on board. Strip your lifeboat, and get her clear."

Lindstrom bustled down the ladder, and a handful of drenched men set about getting the boat out. It was not an easy task, for there were times when the *Shasta* rolled her rail in, and the boat swung in upon her deck as often as over the sea. Then she drove against the streaming plates with a crash, and a big gray comber that swept round the *Shasta's* stern half-filled her as they lowered her with a run, but the men dropped into her, and she reeled clear with the oars splashing any way on the back of the next one. Jimmy set his lips as he watched her, and pressing down his telegraph sent the *Shasta* half-speed ahead in a big sweep, until she came up steaming dead slow once more under the *Adelaide's* lee. He waited there ten anxious minutes until the boat drove down on him bringing a line with her. [Pg 332]

Somehow they hove her in not greatly damaged, and the rattling winch afterward hauled a big steel hawser across; but the land was clearly visible, a dark streak of rock that rose above a haze of flying spray, when Jimmy rang for full-speed again. He knew by the chart that it was an island of some extent with a wide sound between it and the next one where he might find shelter, provided he could hold the *Adelaide* off the rocks that long. This, however, appeared very doubtful in the meanwhile, for it was evident that the larger vessel was rapidly dragging him to leeward. It was simply a question whether she would drive ashore before he towed her around the point he could dimly see on the contracted horizon, but it was a somewhat momentous one. If he failed, the sea that spouted on the shoals would make short work of her.

It became evident that there was a capable helmsman at the *Adelaide's* wheel, for she crawled along well in line astern, with but little of the wild sheering from the course which in such cases is apt to part the stoutest hawser; but Jimmy grew tensely anxious as the next hour slipped by. The beach was rapidly growing plainer, but the head beyond which there was shelter was still apparently a long way off, and it was not an inviting prospect that unrolled itself to lee. The gray rock, smeared by the whiteness of flung-up spray, dropped sharply to the wide line of tumbling foam, and above it low-flying shreds of cloud blurred the wisps of climbing trees. Still, the head was rising all the time, and the *Shasta's* engines pounding steadily, except when her screw shot clear, as it frequently did. Another hour went by, and the tension grew worse to bear when a jagged and fissured slope of rock rose under their lee-bow scarcely half a mile away. Beyond it stretched a dim vista of more rock and reedy pines that shut in the sound. [Pg 333]

"We could swing her in if there were no tide," said Jimmy harshly. "As it is, the stream is setting us down on the point together, but I'll hold on until she strikes. There's no use worrying Fleming. He can't do any more."

Lindstrom, who glanced at the streak of flame in the dingy cloud that blew down from the slanted funnel, made a sign of concurrence, and Jimmy gripped the bridge rails hard as he gazed ahead. He could see the white smear of tideway that streamed around the head, and the gray wall of rock seemed forging back toward him through the midst of it. The sea hurled itself against its feet and crumbled into a white spouting and streaky wisps of foam that the stream swept away. Then he signed to the quartermaster, and gripping the whistle-lanyard flung out a sonorous blast of warning.

The *Shasta's* bows swung seaward a little further, and both vessels swept up the tideway toward the deadly slope of stone. It crept a trifle aft from the lee-bow while a narrow strip of water opened up ahead, and then Jimmy held his breath as the *Adelaide* took a sheer. She swung off at a tangent, rolling until a great slanted slope of rusty iron was clear on that side of her, while the *Shasta's* poop was held down by the strain on the hawser. A sea smote her on the weather side and veiled her in a cloud of flying spray, but Jimmy could dimly see a man flounder aft up to his knees in water with an axe on his shoulder. It was not the instrument an engineer would have chosen for cutting hard steel wire, but the axe is wonderfully effective in the hands of a Canadian, and the strain would part the rope if one strand were nicked. This was also in accordance with Lindstrom's instructions, but Jimmy flung up a restraining hand. [Pg 334]

"Hold on!" He hurled his voice through hollowed hands. "Drop the—thing! If we can't swing her clear we're going ashore with her."

He forgot what he owed the *Shasta* Company and what Anthea Merrill had said to him, for the primitive man had come uppermost under the stress of conflict. Twining his hands in the whistle-lanyard, he hurled out a great blast that the rocks flung back through the turmoil of the tide, and then once more gripped the bridge rails hard, standing rigidly still, with grim wet face and a light in his eyes. For two more minutes the issue hung in the balance, and then, while a wider gap of water opened up ahead, the *Adelaide* swung back astern. In a few moments there was a hoarse, exultant clamor from both vessels, and the froth-swept rock slid away behind her. In front lay a stretch of less troubled water. Half an hour later the *Shasta* came around again in a big sweep, and when the anchors went down the two vessels lay rolling uneasily in comparative shelter.

Another hour had passed when Jimmy went off in the lifeboat, and was greeted by a cluster of bronzed men who stood about the *Adelaide's* gangway and insisted on shaking hands with him. Some of them also pounded his shoulders with hard fists, and though none of them expressed themselves very artistically, Jimmy understood what was implied by the offers of whisky that were thrust upon him. The genuine prospector, the man who, as they say in that country, gets there when he takes the gold-trail, is as a matter of fact usually a somewhat abstemious person and particular as to whom he drinks with; but these miners had made the *Shasta's* commander one of them and presented him with the freedom of the guild. It was in some respects as great a cause for gratification as if he had been made companion of an ancient order, for no man is admitted to that one who cannot prove that he possesses, among other qualifications, high courage and stubborn endurance. Their codes are not nicely formulated in the frozen wastes and the silent woods of the north, but it is as a rule the great primitive essentials that advance a man in his comrades' estimation there. Jimmy, however, waved the miners back.

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"It ought to be quite clear, boys, that I can't drink with you all, especially as I've business with the skipper," he said. "Anyway, I'm pleased to feel I have your good-will."

They still hovered about him until the *Adelaide's* skipper drew him into his room, and gravely shook hands with him.

"It's not often boys of their kind make a fuss over any one, but in this case the thing's quite natural," he said. "I want to say first of all that we're much obliged."

Then he emptied the contents of a locker on the table, and they included a cigar-case and a couple of glasses, which he filled. "Well, in one way, you made a hard bargain with us, but I'm not going to complain of that. It was made, and, though I felt tolerably sure we were both going up on the head yonder, you carried it out. We owe you a little for hanging on to us."

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Jimmy, who sat down and took a cigar, regarded him thoughtfully. The man was, he fancied, opinionated and somewhat assertive; but there was something in his manner which suggested that he was honest, and therefore likely to resent having been unwittingly made Merrill's accomplice. Jimmy was far from being a genius, but like a good many other quiet men whose conversation contains no hint of brilliancy, he was at least as far from being a fool.

"How did you come to be where you were when we fell in with you?" he asked.

"That is very much the same thing as I meant to ask you."

"Well," said Jimmy dryly, "I can account for it; but I'll hear what happened to you first."

His companion told him, and Jimmy, who watched him closely, made up his mind as to the course he should adopt. "Has it struck you that your engines couldn't well have given out at a more inconvenient time?" he asked.

"It naturally has;" and the skipper's disgust and bitterness against his engineer were stronger than his prudence. "Still, what could you expect with a whisky-tank of the kind I've got in charge below? The thing has happened before."

"When there was a reef or a shoal close to lee?"

The sudden change in his companion's expression had its significance, and Jimmy smiled suggestively. "Now you were a little astonished to see me turn up just when I was wanted, and you have probably noticed that I have been on your trail lately? Well, supposing we put the two together, what do you make of it?"

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It had been little more than a chance shot, for Jimmy had clearly recognized that there was a certain probability of Merrill's skipper having acted in collusion with him; but it reached its mark. His companion's face flushed darkly, and he laid a clenched hand on the table.

"Now," he said sharply, "you have got to talk quite straight."

"I think I have done so. Do you suppose I should have lost a day or two every now and then and gone to sea before I was quite ready to keep close on your track, without a reason?"

Jimmy's last uncertainty vanished as he watched his companion, and he saw that the course he had taken was fully warranted. Merrill, it was evident, had considered it safer not to tamper with his skipper, perhaps because he shrank from giving two men a hold on him when the thing could be done by one who was in all probability to some extent already in his hands. In any case, the skipper's face was hard with vindictiveness, and a very unpleasant look crept into his eyes. He was young and opinionated, and he saw the pitfall that had been dug for him.

"I guess you're right," he said hoarsely. "It's not the first time my engineer has tried it. He and the other—hog would have broken me."

"It's scarcely likely they could have blamed—you—at the inquiry. In fact, I fancy Merrill would have liked you held clear. It would have made the thing look straighter."

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The skipper's laugh was very grim. "It wouldn't have counted if they hadn't. One thing would have been certain—I was in command, and that would have been quite enough to stop my getting another steamer. It's always somebody else's fault when you get a boat ashore."

Jimmy knew that his companion had reached the point to which he had been leading him. "Well,"

he said quietly, "the question is, what do you purpose to do now?"

"I mean to get even with the man who meant to break me, back you up in all you say when you send in your salvage claim, and in the meanwhile wring the whole thing out of that—whisky-tank below."

He stopped a moment. "First of all, I want to say I'm sorry I went by that day without answering your whistle. Merrill had worked me up against you, and since I get a bonus on results, every dollar's worth of freight you picked up was so much out of my pocket. Still, you're not going to remember that against me now. We both earn our bread at sea, and you have to stand by me."

Jimmy nodded. "I'm willing," he said. "Hadn't you better send for your engineer?"

The skipper rose and opening the door called to a man outside. "I want Mr. Robertson here," he said. "If he isn't willing or fit to come, you can drag him."

The engineer arrived on his own feet, and stood still, leaning somewhat heavily on the table with one hand, when the skipper closed the door behind him. A curious furtive look of apprehension crept into his eyes when he heard the snap, and Jimmy glanced at him with a sense of disgust. There was a dirty bandage around his head, and his face showed baggy and pallid under it, while his loosely-hung figure draped in greasy serge seemed disproportionately large and clumsy in the little trim room. There was also something in his attitude that vaguely suggested the viciousness of a rat in a trap, and it was evident that he had been drinking hard of late.

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"Well," he asked harshly, "what do you want?"

The *Adelaide's* skipper turned to Jimmy. "This is Captain Wheelock of the *Shasta*. He and I have been comparing notes, and the game you have been playing is quite clear to me. If you're wise you'll own up to it before we go any further. In the first place, what were you to get for casting this ship away?"

The man showed more courage than Jimmy had expected from his appearance, though it was clearly the courage of desperation. He braced himself stiffly, and his laugh was contemptuous. "I guess you're going to be sorry for this. You've said it before a third party."

"I'll say it before a magistrate in Vancouver," broke in the skipper; but Jimmy stopped him with a sign.

"I don't think what you asked him is very material," he said reflectively. "In any case, he wouldn't get very much. Mr. Merrill is not the man to hand over money when it isn't necessary."

He watched the man closely, and it became evident to him that Jordan had been warranted in the construction he had put on certain scraps of information picked up on the wharf and in the saloons of Vancouver.

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"I don't quite understand," said the skipper.

"I think Mr. Robertson does. Of course, he couldn't well drop his name without invalidating his papers, and after all it was probably safe to keep it, since there are a good many Robertsons, and everybody would expect him to change it. Still, I scarcely fancy he is aware that there are two men in Vancouver who would swear to him with pleasure. They're firing sawmill boilers."

The engineer's jaw dropped and there was craven fear in his face, but he seemed to pull himself together, though Jimmy noticed his glance toward the door.

"I dare say you can recall the *Oleander* case," he said. "She was a British ship, and I don't know how Mr. Robertson was able to slip out of Portland quietly; though since the fireman who was done to death on board her belonged to that city, the boys along the wharves would have drowned him if they had got their hands on him."

"Good Lord!" said the skipper, with a little gasp; "the man was slowly roasted." Then he swung around toward the engineer. "This is the—brute who did it?"

"If you're not sure, you can look at him."

A glance was sufficient, and the skipper had no time for another. Robertson turned swiftly in a frenzy of drink-begotten rage and crazing fear, and flung open the door. Then he stooped, and before they quite realized his purpose whipped up the poker from the little stove and struck furiously at Jimmy's head. Jimmy, throwing himself backward, flung up his forearm and broke the full weight of the blow; but it left him dazed and sick for a second or two, and before the skipper could get around the little table Robertson had swung out of the door. A clamor broke out, and men ran aft along the deck as he headed for the rail; but as he laid his hands on it Jimmy reeled out of the room beneath the bridge with the blood trickling down his face. The engineer swung himself over, and Jimmy, who shook off the skipper's grasp, sped aft with uneven strides and leaped from the taffrail.

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The cold of that icy water steadied him when he came up again, and he saw that the stream of tide was carrying the other man down toward the *Shasta* and strained every muscle to come up with him. It was, however, five or six minutes before he did it, and when Robertson grappled with him they both went under. Jimmy waited, knowing that they must come up again, and when that happened there was a splash of oars close by. Then he struck with all his strength at a livid face, and just as he felt himself being drawn down once more an oar grazed his head and a hand

grabbed his shoulder.

"Lay hold of him!" he gasped, and the boat swayed down level with the water while he and Robertson were dragged on board.

"Keep still!" said somebody, who struck the latter hard with the pommel of an oar.

Then Jimmy scrambled to his feet with the water draining from him. "Back to the *Adelaide*," he said, "as fast as you can."

It was, however, half an hour later when Robertson was once more thrust into the skipper's room, and collapsed, with all the fight gone out of him, on a settee. He seemed to have fallen to pieces physically, but it was evident that his mind was clear, though there was now only abject fear in his eyes. [Pg 342]

"Well," he said, "what do you want from me?"

Jimmy still felt a trifle dazed, and his head was throbbing painfully, but he roused himself with an effort.

"I'll tell you in a minute; but first of all I should like you to realize how you stand," he said. "The *Oleander* is a British ship, Vancouver is a Canadian town, and if I put the police on to the two men I mentioned they will have a tolerably clear case against you. You needn't expect anything from Merrill; he will certainly go back on you."

Robertson's face grew vindictive. "He held the thing over me, but we never meant to kill the man. He tried to knife one of us, and, anyway, it was his heart that made an end of him. We didn't know until afterward that it was wrong. But go on."

"Well," said Jimmy dryly, "I'm not going to make a bargain with you, but at the same time I'm not quite sure how far it's my duty to work the case up for the police. In the meanwhile, I want a plain written statement as to your connection with Merrill."

The man made a sign of acquiescence, though there was malice in his eyes. "I can get even with him, anyway, and it's a sure thing he'd have sent me up out of the way if he could. Get me some paper."

Jimmy turned to the skipper. "Call one of the prospectors. We want an outsider to hear the thing."

A miner was led in, and Robertson, who had been handed pen and paper, commenced to write. The skipper read aloud what he had written, and all of them signed it. Then Jimmy put the document into his pocket, and two seamen led the engineer to his room. Early next morning, when the breeze had fallen, a steward roused the skipper. [Pg 343]

"I took in Mr. Robertson's coffee, but his room was empty," he said.

The skipper was on deck in a few minutes, but there was nothing to show what had become of the engineer. The *Adelaide* had, however, now swung with her stern somewhat near the shore, and a man who had kept anchor watch remembered having seen a big Siwash canoe slipping out to sea a few hours earlier.

"There was a man in her who didn't look quite like an Indian," he said.

"Well," said the skipper dryly, "if he's drowned it won't matter. Anyway, I'm not going to worry." [Pg 344]

CHAPTER XXX AN EYE FOR AN EYE

The *Shasta* lay safely tied up to a buoy in Vancouver Inlet, and a quartermaster stood at her gangway with instructions to see that no stranger got on board, when Jimmy sat talking to his sister and Jordan in the room beneath her bridge. It was an hour since she had steamed in, and except for an occasional clinking in her engine-room, where Fleming was still busy, there was silence on board her, though the scream of saws and the rattle of freight-car wheels came off faintly across the still water. The two ports were open wide, but none of those who sat in the little room noticed that the light was fading. Jordan and Eleanor were listening with close attention while Jimmy concisely related how he had fallen in with and towed Merrill's steamer. At last he broke off with an abrupt movement when a splash of oars grew louder.

"Another boat!" he said. "We'll have every curious loafer in the city pulling off by and by."

Then the voice of the quartermaster reached them as he answered somebody who called to him from the approaching boat.

"No," he said, "you can't see Captain Wheelock—he's busy. Keep her off that ladder."

There was evidently another question asked, and the man answered impatiently: "I can't tell you anything about the *Adelaide* 'cept that she's coming along under easy steam. Should be here in a day or two."

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Jordan glanced at Jimmy. "The men you brought down are talking already, and we haven't much time for fixing our program. When do you expect her?"

"I don't exactly know. We came away before she did when the breeze fell, but her second engineer seemed quite confident he could bring her along at seven or eight knots. He wasn't sure whether his high-pressure engine would stand anything more."

Then it was significant that both of them looked at Eleanor, who had insisted on coming with Jordan, and who was apparently waiting to take her part in the discussion. One could have fancied from their faces that they would have preferred to be alone just then and were a trifle uneasy concerning the course their companion might think fit to pursue. She leaned back in her chair watching them, with a little hard smile which seemed to suggest that she knew what they were thinking. Still, she said nothing, and Jordan spoke again.

"You are sure of the *Adelaide's* skipper and that miner fellow?" he asked. "They wouldn't go back on you if Merrill tried to buy them off?"

"I think I can be sure of them," said Jimmy reflectively. "The skipper is not the kind of man I would take to, but, in some respects, at least, he's straight; and, anyway, he's bitter enough against Merrill to back us in anything we may decide to do. You see, the man who gets his boat ashore is practically done for nowadays, whether it's his own fault or not; and I fancy we can count on the miner, too. After what those fellows had to go through to get the gold they were bringing home, they're not likely to have much sympathy with Merrill. In fact, if the others understood how near they came to seeing it go down in the *Adelaide*, it would be a little difficult to keep them from laying hands on him. In any case, there's the engineer's statement—one can't get over that."

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Eleanor stretched out her hand for the paper, and there was a vindictive sparkle in her eyes as she glanced at it.

"Charley," she said with portentous quietness, "it seems to me that the possession of this document places Merrill absolutely in your hands. You are not afraid to make the utmost use of it?"

Jordan glanced at Jimmy in a fashion the latter understood. There was something deprecatory in it, and it appeared to suggest that he wished his comrade to realize that he was under compulsion and could not help himself. Then he turned to the girl with a certain air of resolution.

"No," he said, "I don't think I am afraid, but I want you to understand that I am manager of the *Shasta* Company, and have first of all to consider the interests of my associates, the men who put their money into the concern. There is Jimmy, too."

"Jimmy!" and Eleanor laughed a little, bitter laugh, which had a trace of contempt in it. "Pshaw! Jimmy's love affairs don't count now. I think he feels that, too. After all, there is a trace of our mother's temper in him if one can awaken it."

She turned and looked at her brother, who closed one hand tightly. "Oh, I know; the girl has graciously condescended to smile on you, and no doubt you are almost astonished, as well as grateful, that she should go so far. Still, where did the money that made her a dainty lady of station come from? Must I tell you that a second time, Jimmy?"

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She stopped a moment, and gripped the paper hard in firm white fingers. "This is mine. I bought it. You know what it cost me, Charley; and what has Jimmy done in comparison with that? Do you think anything would induce me to spare Merrill now that I have this in my hands?"

Jimmy looked up sharply, and saw the flush of color in her cheek, and that the blood had crept into his comrade's face. His own grew suddenly hot.

"Ah!" he said, with a thrill of anger in his voice, "I begin to understand. She got the information you acted on out of that brute, Carnforth. You knew that, Charley, and you—you countenanced it."

He half rose from his seat with a brown hand stretched out as if to tear the paper from the girl, but while Jordan swung around toward him Eleanor laughed.

"Sit down," she said imperiously, "you simple-minded fool! Do you think I would let Charley's opinion influence me in an affair of this kind?"

Jordan made a gesture of resignation. "She would not," he said. "That's the simple fact. But go on, Eleanor—or shall I tell him? Anyway, it must be done."

The girl silenced him, and though the next two or three minutes were, perhaps, as unpleasant as any Jimmy had ever spent in his life, it was with a certain deep relief that he heard his sister out. Before she stopped she held up a white hand.

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"Once," she said, "once only, he held my wrist. That was all, Jimmy; but I feel it left a mark. If it could be removed that way, I would burn it out. Now you know what the thing cost me—but I did it."

The men would not look at each other, and if Eleanor had left them then it would have been a relief to both. Her suppressed passion had stirred and shaken them, and they realized that the efforts they had made were, after all, not to be counted in comparison with what the girl had done.

It was Jordan who spoke first. "Well," he said, with the air of one anxious to get away from a painful subject, "we have got to be practical. The question is, how are we to strike Merrill? Seems to me, in the first case, we'll hand him a salvage claim. I'll fix it at half her value, anyway, and he'll never fight us when he hears of the engineer's statement. So far as I know, he can't recover under his policy, and we could head him off from going to the underwriters if he can. The next point is—are the miner fellow and the *Adelaide's* skipper likely to take any independent action on their own account? I don't think that's very probable."

"Nor do I," said Jimmy. "It isn't wise of a skipper to turn around on a man like Merrill, unless it's in a court where he has the law behind him, and the prospector would scarcely attempt to do anything alone. Besides, without the document to produce, they would have very little to go upon—and what is more to the purpose, both of them promised to let me handle the thing." [Pg 349]

Jordan nodded as if satisfied. "That," he said, "makes it easier. We're going to collect our money on the salvage claim, and when Merrill has raised it he'll have strained his resources, so he won't count very much as an opponent of the *Shasta* Company. The man's crippled already."

The fact that his comrade was apparently not desirous of proceeding to extremities afforded Jimmy a vast relief, but it vanished suddenly when Eleanor broke in.

"Can't you understand that the affair must be looked at from another point of view as well as the commercial one?" she asked.

It was a difficult question, and when neither of them answered her the girl went on:

"It doesn't seem to occur to you that what you suggest amounts to covering up a conspiracy and allowing a scoundrel to escape his deserts," she said. "There is another point, too. You will have to inform the police about the Robertson affair, Jimmy, and his connection with Merrill is bound to appear when they lay hands on him."

"That," said Jimmy, with a trace of dryness, "is hardly likely. The man will be heading for the diggings by this time if he isn't drowned, and there's very little probability of the police getting hold of him there."

Eleanor laughed, a very bitter laugh, as she fixed her eyes on him.

"So you are quite content with Charley's plan—to extort so many dollars from Merrill?" she said. [Pg 350]
"It has one fatal defect; it does not satisfy me."

"Now——" commenced Jordan, but the girl checked him with a gesture.

"I want him crushed, disgraced, imprisoned, ruined altogether."

"Anyway, I owe it to my associates to make sure of the money first."

"And after that you feel you have to stand by Jimmy?"

The man winced when she flung the question at him; but when he did not answer she appeared to rouse herself for an effort, leaning forward a trifle with a gleam in her eyes and the red flush plainer in her cheek.

"Still," she said, "if Jimmy is what I think him, he will not ask it of you. I want him to go back six years to the time he came home—from Portland, wasn't it, Jimmy?—and stayed a few weeks with us. Was there any shadow upon us then, though your father was getting old? I want you to remember him as he was when you went away, a simple, kindly, abstemious, and fearless man. It surely can't be very hard."

Jimmy face grew furrowed, and he set his lips tight; but he said nothing, and the girl went on:

"It was not so the next time you came back. Something had happened in the meanwhile. The bondholder had laid his grasp on him. He was weakening under it, and the lust of drink was crushing the courage out of him. Still, you must remember that it was his one consolation. Then came the awful climax of the closing scene. I had to face it with Charley—you were away—but you must realize the horror it brought me."

Jordan turned toward her abruptly. "Eleanor," he said, with a trace of hoarseness in his voice, "let it drop. You can't bear the thing a second time." [Pg 351]

She stopped him with a frown. "I want you to picture him deluding Prescott with one of the pitiful, cunning excuses that drunkards make. Wasn't it horrible in itself that he should have sunk to that? Then it shouldn't be very hard to imagine him bribing a lounge outside to buy him the whisky, and the carousal afterward with a stranger, a dead-beat and outcast low enough to profit by his evident weakness. Still, he was your father, Jimmy. Then there was the groping for matches and the upsetting of the lamp. Somebody brought Charley, and when he came your father lay with the clothes charred upon his burned limbs, still half-crazed with drink and mad with pain. Must I tell you once more what I saw when Charley brought me? I am willing, if there is nothing else that will rouse you. You have heard it before, but I want to burn it into your brain,

so that however hard you try you can't blot out that scene."

Jimmy's face was grim and white, but while he sat very still his comrade rose resolutely.

"Eleanor," he said, "if you attempt to recall another incident of that horrible night I shall carry you by main force out of the room."

The girl turned to him with a little gesture. "Then I suppose I must submit. You have a man's strength and courage in you—or I think you would be afraid to marry me; but one could fancy that Jimmy has none. The daughter of the man who ruined his father has condescended to be gracious to him. Still, I have a little more to say. She is his daughter, his flesh and blood, Jimmy, and his pitiless, hateful nature is in her. That is the woman you wish to marry. The mere notion of it is horrible. Still, you can't marry her, Jimmy. You must crush her father, and drag him to his ruin. After all, there is a little manhood somewhere in you. You will take the engineer's statement to the underwriters and the police. You must—you have to."

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Jimmy stood up slowly, with the veins swollen on his forehead and a gray patch in his cheek. "Eleanor," he said hoarsely, "I believe there is a devil in you; but I think you are right in this. Jordan, will you hand me that paper?"

He stood still for at least a minute when his comrade passed it to him, and the girl watched him with a little gleam in her eyes. His face was furrowed, and looked worn as well as very hard. There was not a sound in the little room, and the splash of the ripples on the *Shasta's* plates outside came in through the open ports with a startling distinctness. Jordan felt that the tension was becoming almost unendurable. Then Jimmy turned slowly toward his sister, and though the pain was still in his face it had curiously changed. There was a look in his blue eyes that sent a thrill of consternation through her. They were very steady, and she knew that she had failed.

"I can't do it. It was not the girl's fault, and she shall not be dragged through the mire," he said. Then he looked at his comrade. "What I am going to do may cost you a good deal of money, and my appointment to the *Shasta* is, of course, in your hands. I am going straight from here to Merrill's house."

"Well," said Jordan simply, "it may cost us both a good deal, but I guess I must face it. If I were fixed as you are, that is just what I should do."

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Jimmy said nothing, but he went out swiftly, and Eleanor turned to her companion with a very bitter smile when the door closed behind him.

"Ah!" she said, "has that girl beguiled you too? You had Merrill in your hands, and instead of crushing him you are going to smooth his troubles away."

"No," said Jordan dryly, "I don't quite think Jimmy will do that. In some respects, I understand him better than you do. He wants to save the girl all the sorrow and disgrace he can, but he is going to run her father out of this city. Jimmy's not exactly clever, and it's quite likely he'll mix up things when he meets Merrill; but, for all that, I guess he'll carry out just what he means to do. Somehow, he generally does. That's the kind of man he is."

He stopped a moment, and a smile crept into his eyes. "I don't know what the result will be, and it may be the break-up of the *Shasta* Company; but I can't blame Jimmy."

"Ah!" said Eleanor, "you, the man I counted on, are turning against me as well as my brother."

Then the sustaining purpose seemed to die out of her, and she sank back suddenly in her chair with her face hidden from him. Jordan crossed the little room, and stooping beside her slipped an arm about her.

"My dear," he said, "you can count on me always and in everything but this. It's because of what you are to me that I'm standing by Jimmy."

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CHAPTER XXXI

MERRIL CAPITULATES

Merril was not in his house when Jimmy reached it, but it appeared that he was expected shortly, and the latter, who resolved to wait for him, was shown into a big artistically furnished room. He sat there at least ten minutes, alone and grim in face, with a growing disquietude, for his surroundings had their effect on him. The house was built of wood, but expense had not been spared, and those who have visited the Western cities know how beautiful a wooden dwelling can be made. Jimmy looked out through the open windows on to a wide veranda framed with a slender colonnade of wooden pillars supporting fretted arches of lace-like delicacy. The floor of the room, which was choicely parquettted in cunningly contrasted wood, also caught his eye, and there were Indian-sewn rugs of furs on it of a kind that he knew was rarely purchased in the north, except on behalf of Russian princes and American railroad kings. The furniture, he fancied

by the timber, was Canadian-made, but it had evidently been copied from artistic European models; and though he was far from being a connoisseur in such things, they had all a painful significance to him just then.

They suggested wealth and taste and luxury; and it seemed only fitting that the woman he loved should have such a dwelling, while he realized that it was his hand which must deprive her of all the artistic daintiness to which she had grown accustomed and no doubt valued. He, a steamboat skipper of low degree, had, like blind Samson, laid a brutal grasp upon the pillars of the house, and he could feel the trembling of the beautiful edifice. This would have afforded him a certain grim satisfaction, had it not been for the fact that it was impossible to tell whether the woman he would have spared every pain might not be overwhelmed amid the ruin when he exerted his strength. It must be exerted. In that he could not help himself.

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While he sat there with a hard, set face, she came in, dressed, as he realized, in harmony with her surroundings. Her gracious patrician quietness and her rich attire troubled him, and he felt, in spite of all Eleanor had said, that it would be a vast relief if he could abandon altogether the purpose that had brought him there, though to do so would, it was evident, set the girl further apart from him than ever, since her father's station naturally stood as a barrier between them. Still, he remembered what he owed the men who had sent him on board the *Shasta*—Jordan, Forster, old Leeson, and two or three more; he could not turn against them now.

Anthea stood still just inside the door, looking at him half-expectant, but with something that was suggestive of apprehension in her manner, and Jimmy felt the hot blood creep into his face when he moved quietly forward and kissed her. In view of what he had to do, it would, he felt, have been more natural if she had shrunk from him in place of submitting to his caress. She appeared to recognize the constraint that was upon him, for she turned away and sat down a little distance from him.

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"Jimmy," she said, "I'm glad to see you back. I have been lonely without you—and a little uneasy. Indeed, though I don't know exactly why, I am anxious now."

Then she looked at him steadily. "It is the first time you have been here. Something unusual must have brought you. Jimmy, is it war?"

The man made a deprecatory gesture. "I'm afraid it is," he said. "I don't think there can be any compromise."

"Ah!" said the girl, with a start, "you don't look like a man who has come to offer terms."

Jimmy was still standing, and he leaned somewhat heavily on the back of a chair. "I have to do something that I shrink from, but it must be done. If there were no other reason, I daren't go back on the men who have confidence in me; that is—not altogether, though in a way—I am now betraying them. Anthea, you will not let this thing stand between us?"

"No;" and the girl's voice was steady, though a trifle strained. "At least, not always. Still, I have felt that some day I should have to choose whom I should hold to—my father or you. It is very hard to face that question, Jimmy."

"Yes," said Jimmy gravely; "I am afraid you must choose to-night. You know how much I want you, but I have sense enough to recognize that I may bring trouble on both of us if I urge you to do what you might afterward regret."

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Anthea said nothing for almost a minute, and because of the restraint he had laid upon himself Jimmy understood the cost of her quietness. It seemed necessary that both should hold themselves in hand. Then she turned to him again.

"You are quite sure there can be no compromise?"

"It is for many reasons out of the question. In fact, I think the decisive battle will be fought to-night. I have strained every point to make it easier for you, or I should not have come at all, and it is very likely that my comrades will discard me when they hear what I have done. I am willing to face their anger, but, to some extent, at least, I must keep my bargain with them."

He moved a pace or two, and stood close by her chair looking down at her. "If you understood everything, you would not blame me."

Anthea glanced at him a moment, and he fancied that a shiver ran through her. "I do not blame you now, though it is all a little horrible. I cannot plead with you, and if I did I see that you would not listen. You must do what you feel you have to."

Neither of them spoke for a while, though Jimmy felt the tension was almost unendurable. It was evident that the girl felt it too, for he could see the signs of strain in her face. So intent were they that neither heard the door open, and Jimmy turned with a little start when the sound of a footstep reached them. Merrill was standing not far away, little, portly, and immaculately dressed, regarding them with an inscrutable face.

"I understand you wish to see me, Mr. Wheelock," he said. "Anthea, you will no doubt allow us a few minutes."

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The girl rose and moved toward the door, but before she went out she turned for a moment and glanced at Jimmy. Then it closed softly, and he saw that Merrill was regarding him with a sardonic

smile.

"I heard that you had made my daughter's acquaintance, but I was not aware that it had gone as far as I have some grounds for supposing now," he said.

"That," said Jimmy quietly, "is a subject I may mention by and by. In the meanwhile I have something to say that concerns you at least as closely. As it has a bearing on the other question, we might discuss it first."

"I am at your service for ten minutes;" and Merrill pointed to a chair.

Jimmy sat down, but said nothing for a few moments. Apart from the trouble that he must bring upon Anthea, he felt that it was a big and difficult thing he had undertaken. He was a steamboat skipper, and the man in front of him one skilled in every art of commercial trickery whose ability was recognized in that city. Still, he felt curiously steady and sure of himself, for Jimmy, like other simple-minded men, as a rule appeared to advantage when forced suddenly to face a crisis. He felt, in fact, much as he had done when he stood grimly resolute on the *Shasta's* bridge while the *Adelaide*, sheering wildly, dragged her toward the spouting surf. Then he turned to Merrill.

"I called on you once before to make a request," he said.

"And your errand is much the same now, though one could fancy that you feel you have something to back it?" his companion suggested dryly.

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"No," said Jimmy, "I have nothing to ask you for this time. Instead, I am simply going to mention certain facts, and leave you to act on the information in the only way open to you; that is, to get out of Vancouver as soon as possible. I am giving you the opportunity in order to save Miss Merrill the pain of seeing you prosecuted. You are in our hands now."

Merrill scarcely moved a muscle. "You are prepared to make that assurance good?"

"I am;" and Jimmy's voice had a little ring in it. "If you will give me your attention I'll try to do it. You have no news of the *Adelaide* yet, and, to commence with, you will have to face the fact that she is not on the rocks. She was just ready to steam south with a derangement of her high-pressure engine when I last saw her."

Though his companion's face was almost expressionless, Jimmy fancied that this shot had reached its mark, and he proceeded to relate what had happened since he fell in with the *Adelaide*. He did it with some skill, for this was a subject with which he was at home, and he made the feelings of her skipper and second engineer perfectly clear. Then, though he had not mentioned Robertson's confession, he sat still, wondering at Merrill's composure.

"It sounds probable," said the latter, with a little smile. "You expect the skipper and the second engineer to bear you out? No doubt they promised, but when they get here the thing will wear another aspect. In fact, in all probability it will look too big for them. You see, they have merely put a certain construction upon one or two occurrences. It's quite likely they will be willing to admit that it is, after all, the wrong one."

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"Since we intend to claim half the value of the *Adelaide*, they would have to answer on their oath in court."

Merrill shook his head. "Half her value! I commence to understand," he said. "An appeal to the court is, as a rule, expensive, as I guess you know. It is generally wiser to be reasonable and make a compromise."

The suggestion was so characteristic of the man that Jimmy lost a little of his self-restraint.

"There will be no compromise in this case," he said. "If it were necessary we would drag you through every court in the land; but, as a matter of fact, there will be no need for that. You made a mistake in your opinion of the courage of your skipper and your second engineer. You also made a more serious one in putting the screw too hard on Robertson."

"Ah!" said Merrill sharply, at last, "there is something more?"

Jimmy took a paper from his pocket, and gravely handed it to him. "I am quite safe in allowing you to look at it. It wouldn't be advisable for you to make any attempt to destroy it. You will excuse my mentioning that."

Merrill unfolded the document, and Jimmy noticed that the half-contemptuous toleration died out of his face as he read it. Then he quietly handed it back, and sat very still for at least a minute before he turned to his companion again.

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"That rather alters the case. You have something to go upon. Do you mind telling me what course you purpose to take?"

"As I mentioned, I don't purpose to take any. Still, the *Shasta* Company will send in a claim for salvage to-morrow, and afterward sue you—or whoever you entrust with your affairs—unless it is met. The *Adelaide* should also be here in the course of the next day or two, and you will have your skipper and second engineer, as well as the miner who witnessed the statement, to face. They appear determined on raising as much unpleasantness as possible, though they were willing to hold back until I had taken the first steps."

He stopped a moment, and then leaned forward in his chair with a little forceful gesture. "Though it would please me to see you prosecuted and disgraced, I will at least take no steps to prevent your getting out of this city quietly."

"Ah!" said Merrill, "you no doubt expect something for that concession?"

"No," and Jimmy stood up, "I expect nothing. It would hurt me to make a bargain of any kind with you, and it would, I think, be illegal. Still, I have the honor of informing you that I purpose to marry Miss Merrill as soon as it appears convenient to her, in spite of any opposition that you may think fit to offer."

Merrill showed neither astonishment nor anger. Instead he smiled quietly, and his companion surmised that he had already with characteristic promptness decided on his course of action.

"You have no objections to my sending for her?"

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Jimmy said he had none, and five minutes later Anthea appeared. She stood near the door looking at the men, and saw that Jimmy's face was darkly flushed. Her father, however, appeared almost as composed as usual. Jimmy felt that he dare not look at her, and the tense silence, which lasted a few moments, tried his courage hard. It cost him an effort to hold himself in hand when Merrill turned to the girl.

"I understand from Mr. Wheelock that you are willing to marry him. Is that the case?" he said.

"Yes," replied Anthea simply, while the blood crept into her cheeks. "That is, I shall be willing when circumstances permit."

"Then, in the meanwhile, at least, you would consider my wishes?"

Anthea glanced at Jimmy. "I think he understands that."

Merrill said nothing for almost half a minute, and sat still regarding them with a sardonic smile, though his eyes were gentler than usual.

"Well," he said at last, "that is no more than one would have expected from you. Mr. Wheelock is, however, quite prepared to disregard my opposition. In fact, one could almost fancy that he will be a little grieved when I say that I do not mean to offer any."

Jimmy was certainly astonished, for he had at least expected that the man would make an attempt to play upon the girl's feelings. However, he said nothing, and Merrill turned to her again.

"Well, I fancy that he has shown himself capable of looking after you, and there is a certain forceful simplicity in his character that, when I consider him as my daughter's husband, somewhat pleases me. With moderate good fortune it may carry him a long way."

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It seemed an almost incomprehensible thing to Jimmy that the man should show no trace of vindictiveness, and perhaps the latter guessed it, for he laughed softly.

"Mr. Wheelock," he said, "as you have no doubt guessed, I never had much faith in the conventional code of morality, but since you seem determined to marry Anthea, I am in one respect glad that you evidently have, though that is perhaps not a very logical admission. I was out after money, and allowed no other consideration to influence me. It is probable that I should have accumulated a good deal of it had not everything gone against me lately. Well, if I showed no pity, I at least seldom allowed any rancor to betray me into injudicious action when other people treated me as I should have treated them; but, after all, that is not the question, and we will be practical. You will not see or write to Anthea for six months from to-day, and then if neither of you has changed your mind you can understand that you have my good-will. She will advise you of her address—in Toronto—in the meanwhile. It is not a great deal to promise."

Jimmy glanced at the girl, and turned again to Merrill when she nodded.

"I pledge myself to that," he said.

"Then," said Merrill, "you will leave us now. I have a good deal to say to Anthea."

Jimmy moved away without a word, and went down the corridor with every nerve in him tingling.

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CHAPTER XXXII

ELEANOR RELENTS

Jordan, who waited some time on board the *Shasta*, saw no more of Jimmy that night. This was, however, in one respect a relief to him, since Eleanor, who was evidently very angry with her brother, insisted on remaining as long as possible in the expectation that he would come back again. It was, in fact, only when the hour at which she had arranged to meet Mrs. Forster arrived

that she very reluctantly permitted Jordan to take her ashore, and he felt easier when he handed her into Forster's wagon. It did not seem to him that a further meeting between her and her brother would be likely to afford much pleasure to anybody. He had been at work some little time in his office next morning when Jimmy walked in, and, sitting down, looked at him quietly.

"I have no doubt that you know why I have kept out of your way so long," he said.

"Well," replied Jordan dryly, "I can guess. What did you say to Merrill?"

"I told him what had happened, and left him to act upon it. Now I'm quite prepared to resign the command of the *Shasta*."

"If it's necessary, we'll talk about that later. In the meanwhile we'll get our salvage claim in. Leeson should be here at any moment. I saw him last night."

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He set to work, but there were two or three points it was necessary to discuss with Jimmy, and he was still busy when there was a rattle of wheels in the street outside, which was followed by the sound of voices on the stairway. Jordan laid down his pen with a gesture of embarrassment and dismay.

"It's Forster, and he has brought Eleanor along," he said. "I'm 'most afraid you're going to have trouble, Jimmy."

"It's more than probable," and Jimmy smiled somewhat grimly. "I'm quite prepared for it."

Then the door opened, and Eleanor, Forster and Leeson came in. The girl sat down without a glance at her brother, and the rancher turned to Jordan.

"Miss Wheelock has acquainted me with the substance of what Jimmy told you yesterday, and I came to ask what course you expect to take," he said. "I may say that she seems as anxious to hear it as I am."

Eleanor smiled. "It is not exactly Mr. Forster's fault that I am here," she said. "The fact is, I insisted on coming. He was perfectly willing to leave me behind."

Jordan's face was more expressive of resignation than pleasure, but he took up his pen again.

"This is a statement of the services rendered the *Adelaide*, and a claim in respect of them," he said. "I am going to take it along to Merrill's office in a few minutes, and one or more of you can come with me."

They went out together, but when they reached Merrill's office Jordan and Jimmy alone went in. They found a good many other people waiting there, and had some little difficulty in securing attention, while the clerk to whom Jordan spoke appeared anxious and embarrassed.

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"Mr. Merrill is not here," he said. "He went out of town last night, and executed a trust deed before he left. Mr. Cathcart, one of the trustees, is now inside."

Jordan looked at Jimmy. "I don't mind admitting that I expected this," he said. Then he turned to the clerk: "Take our names in."

They were shown into the inner office, where a gray-haired gentleman listened gravely to what they had to say. Then he took the salvage claim from Jordan, and laid it beneath a pile of other papers.

"It will be considered in its turn," he said. "I do not know whether we shall attempt to contest it, or whether there will be funds to meet it, but I may be able to tell you more to-morrow, and would ask you to take no further steps until you have seen me. I am at liberty to say that Mr. Merrill's affairs appear to be considerably involved."

Jordan promised to wait, and when he turned toward the door, the trustee, who took up an envelope, made a sign to Jimmy.

"I was instructed to hand you this, Captain Wheelock, and to tell you that Miss Merrill leaves for Toronto by to-day's express, on the understanding that you make no attempt to communicate with her. It contains her address."

Jimmy went out with his thoughts confused. All that had come about was, he felt, the result of his action, but he realized that in any case the crisis could not have been much longer delayed. They found the others awaiting them, and when Forster had quietly but firmly insisted on escorting Eleanor into a dry-goods store and leaving her there, they went back together to Jordan's office, where the latter related what he had heard.

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"To be quite straight, I must admit that I had a notion of what Jimmy meant to do last night, and took no steps to restrain him," he said. "If I had done so, Merrill would not have got away. We are both in your hands, but, while you may think differently, I am not sure that what has happened is a serious misfortune from a business point of view."

Forster said nothing, and there was a few moments' awkward silence until old Leeson spoke.

"Considering everything, I guess you're right," he said. "Cathcart's a straight man, and as they can't sell the *Adelaide* without permission from us, we'll get some of our money, although it's hardly likely the estate will realize enough to go around. Seems to me that's more than we should

have done if Merrill had kept hold. Well, it's not my proposition that we turn you out."

He stopped a moment, and glanced at Jimmy with a little dry smile. "Captain Wheelock has gone 'way further than he should have done without our sanction, but I guess it will meet the case if we leave him to his sister. It's a sure thing Miss Wheelock is far from pleased with him. Now, there's a point or two I want to mention."

The others seemed relieved at this, and when Leeson had said his say Forster went away with him. Then Jordan glanced at Jimmy with apprehension in his eyes as Eleanor came in. She stood still, looking at them with the portentous red flush burning in her cheek. [Pg 368]

"What I foresaw all along has happened. Jimmy has betrayed you to save that girl," she said.

Then she turned to Jimmy, flicking her glove in her hand as though she would have struck him with it. "Jimmy," she said incisively, "you are no longer a brother of mine. Neither Charley nor I will speak to you again."

Jordan straightened himself resolutely. "Stop there, Eleanor!" he said. "If you won't speak to him I can't compel you to, but, in this one thing, at least, you can't compel me. Jimmy was my friend before I met you, and I'm standing by him now. Anyway, what has he done?"

"Ah!" said the girl, with an audible indrawing of her breath, "he has spoiled everything. If he hadn't played the traitor Merrill would never have got away. Oh!" and her anger shook her, "I can never forgive him!"

Once more she turned to her brother. "There is no longer any tie between us. You have broken it, and that is the last and only thing I have to say to you."

Jimmy rose, and quietly reached for his hat. "Then," he said, "there is nothing to be gained by pointing out what my views are. We can only wait until you see things differently."

He went out, and Eleanor sank somewhat limply into a chair.

"Charley," she said, "it's a little horrible, but he is a weak coward, and I hate him. You had better break off our engagement; I'm not fit to marry anybody."

"That's the one thing that holds in spite of everything," and Jordan looked at her gravely with trouble in his face. "Go quietly, Eleanor. It will straighten out in time." [Pg 369]

The girl sat still for a while saying nothing, and then she rose with a little shiver. "Find Forster, and if he is not going back, get a team," she said. "I want Mrs. Forster. I can't stay in the city."

Jordan went out with her, and, though he had a good deal to do, was not sorry when he failed to find Forster and it became necessary for him to drive her back to the ranch. Eleanor, however, said very little to him during the journey, and he had sense enough to confine his attention to his team. He had also little time to think of anything that did not concern his business when he returned to the city, for the *Shasta* had to be got ready to go back to sea, and the *Adelaide* arrived early on the following day. The skipper went with him to interview Merrill's trustee, and the latter announced that no steps would be taken to contest the salvage claim when he heard what he had to say. However, he added dryly that it would probably be advisable for the *Shasta* Company to consider the compromise proposition he would shortly make. Jordan, who fancied he was right in this, went away without having found it necessary to hand him the engineer's confession, and was glad he had not offered to produce it when he ransacked his office for it a few days later.

"I certainly had the thing the morning Forster and Eleanor were here," he said. "Jimmy laid it down, and I don't remember having seen him take it up again. Still, I suppose he must have done so."

Jimmy had, however, gone north again by that time, and the compromise had been agreed to before he came back again. The *Shasta* had also made several other successful trips when he had occasion to call at Victoria on his southward run, and seeing the *Sorata* in the harbor rowed off to her. He spent that evening in her little fore-castle with Valentine, who was busy with deep-water fishing-lines. The latter wore an old blue shirt and canvas trousers stained with paint and grease, and he laid down a big hank of line when at length Jimmy, who had been whipping on hooks for him, inquired what plans he had. [Pg 370]

"So you're not going back to the West Coast to drum up cargo for us?" he said.

"No," said Valentine. "Although they didn't intimate it, I don't think your people have any more use for me. They have the trade in their hands, and the boat they put on instead of yours is coming down full every time. In fact, I believe they're buying another one, as well as a big passenger carrier for your northern trip."

Jimmy looked astonished. "It's the first I've heard of it—but, of course, it's a little while since I was in Vancouver. Where did they raise the money?"

"I believe they got some of it from Cathcart on the salvage claim, and Leeson and two or three of his friends raised the rest. The *Adelaide* and Merrill's house were sold at auction. I heard it from Jordan, who was over here a week ago, and it's scarcely necessary to say that he's going to send you in the new boat. He seems to have some notion of trying to get into the South Sea trade, too, and I shouldn't wonder if eventually you're made general supervisor of the *Shasta* Company's [Pg 371]

growing fleet."

Jimmy was sensible of a thrill of satisfaction, but he changed the subject. "You have given up your chartering?"

"I have," said Valentine, with a curious smile. "The people who hired my boat had an unsettling effect on me, and now I'm going to try the halibut fishing with a couple of Siwash hands. Austerly's was my last charter—I don't think I shall ever take another."

Jimmy nodded, for he felt that he understood. "Well," he said, "in one way it wouldn't be nice to see anybody else occupying that after-cabin. Of course, the notion is a fanciful one, but I shouldn't like to think of it myself."

Again the curious little smile flickered into Valentine's eyes. "It is scarcely likely to happen. I think you will understand my views when I show you the room."

Jimmy went aft with him through the saloon, and Valentine, unlocking a door beneath the companion slide, opened it gently. The fashion in which he did it had its significance, and Jimmy understood altogether as he looked into the little room. It was immaculate. Bulkhead and paneling gleamed with snowy paint, the berths with their varnished ledges were filled with spotless linen, and there was not a speck on the deck beneath. A few fresh sprays of balsam that hung beneath the beams diffused a faint aromatic fragrance.

"Those," said Valentine gravely, "are to keep out the smell of the halibut. I shouldn't like it to come in here. She had the lower berth. The top one was Miss Merrill's."

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Jimmy felt the blood rise to his face. Valentine's manner was very quiet, and there was not the slightest trace of sentimentality in it, but Jimmy felt that he knew what he was thinking. Besides, Anthea had slept in that little snowy berth. They turned away without a word, when Valentine carefully fastened the door, and the latter had sat down again in the forecabin before Jimmy spoke.

"Have you heard anything of Miss Austerly lately?" he asked.

Valentine lighted the lamp beneath the beams, for it was growing dark, and taking something from a box in the upper berth stood still a moment with it in his hands. They were scarred and hardened by physical toil, and the man was big and bronzed and very quiet, though every line of his face and figure was stamped with the wholesome vigor of the sea.

"I see you do not know," he said. "This is the letter Austerly sent me. As you will notice, it was at her request. She would not have minded your reading it."

Jimmy started as he saw that the envelope had a broad black edge, and his companion nodded gravely.

"Yes," he said, "there is neither tide nor fog where she has gone. There, at least, we are told, the sea is glassy."

Jimmy took the letter out of the envelope, and once or twice his eyes grew a trifle hazy as he read. Then he handed it back to Valentine, almost reverently.

"I am sorry," was all he said.

Valentine looked at him with the little grave smile still in his eyes. "I do not think there is any need for that. What had this world but pain to offer her? She has slipped away, but she has left something behind—something one can hold on by. What there is out yonder we do not know—but perhaps we shall not be sorry when we slip out beyond the shrouding mists some day."

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Neither of them said much more, and shortly afterward Jimmy went back to the *Shasta*. Next morning he stood on his bridge watching the *Sorata* slide out of harbor. Valentine, sitting at her tiller, waved his hat to him, and Jimmy was glad that he had hurled a blast of the whistle after him when some months later he heard that the *Sorata* and her skipper had gone down together in a wild westerly gale.

In the meanwhile he proceeded to Vancouver, and after an interview with Jordan, who formally offered him command of the big new boat, took the first east-going train and reached Toronto five days later. An hour after he got there he hired a pulling skiff at the water-front, and drove her out with sturdy strokes into the blue lake across which a little cutter was creeping a mile or so away. He came up with her, hot and breathless, and the girl at the tiller rose quietly when he swung himself on deck, though there was a depth of tenderness in her eyes.

"Jimmy!" she said, "why didn't you tell me?"

Jimmy laughed. "You should have expected me," he said. "The six months are up."

Anthea turned to the young man and the girl who were sitting in the cockpit. "Captain Wheelock. My cousin Muriel, and Graham Hoyle."

The young man smiled at Jimmy, who was, however, conscious that the girl was surveying him with critical curiosity. Then she asked him a question concerning his journey, and they discussed the Canadian railroads for the next ten minutes, until she flashed a suggestive glance at the young man.

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"What a beautiful morning for a row!" she said.

Hoyle rose to his feet. "I dare say I could pull you ashore in Captain Wheelock's boat," he said. "There's just wind enough to bring the yacht after us if he gets the topsail up."

Jimmy did not get the topsail up when they rowed away, but sat down on the coaming with his arm around Anthea's shoulder.

"I have just two weeks before I go north in our big new boat," he said. "It isn't very long, but I want to take you with me."

He was some little time overruling Anthea's objections one by one, and then she turned and looked up at him with a flush in her face.

"Jimmy," she said, "I suppose you realize that I haven't a dollar. Some provision was to have been made for me—but I felt I couldn't profit by the arrangement."

Jimmy laughed. "If it's any consolation to you, I haven't very much, either. Still, I think I'm going to get it. I was creeping through the blinding fog six months ago, but the mists have blown away and the sky is brightening to windward now."

Then he turned and pointed to the strip of dusky blue that moved across the gleaming lake. "If anything more is wanted, there's the fair wind."

They ran back before it under a blaze of sunshine with the little frothy ripples splashing merrily after them, and then Jimmy had to exert himself again before he could induce Anthea's aunt to believe that it was possible for her niece to be married at two weeks' notice. Still, he accomplished it, and on the fifteenth day he and Anthea Wheelock stood on the platform of a big dusty car as the Pacific express ran slowly into the station at Vancouver.

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Leeson stood waiting with Forster, and Jordan was already running toward the car, but Jimmy's lips set tight when he saw Eleanor with Mrs. Forster. In a moment or two Jordan handed Anthea down, and then stood aside as Eleanor came impulsively forward. To her brother's astonishment, she laid her hand on Anthea's shoulder and kissed her on each cheek.

"Now," she said, "you will have to forgive me."

Jimmy did not hear what his wife said, for Mrs. Forster was greeting him, and then Leeson and the rancher seized him; but five minutes later Eleanor stood at his side.

"Yes," she said, "Anthea and I are going to be friends, and you daren't be angry any longer, Jimmy."

They had dropped a little behind the others, who were moving along the wharf, and Jimmy looked at her with a dry smile.

"I'm not," he said. "In fact, I don't think it was my temper that made things unpleasant all the time. Still——"

"You didn't expect me to change?"

Her brother said nothing, and she looked up at him with a softness in her eyes he never remembered seeing there.

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"I'm going to marry Charley very soon," she said. "I couldn't have done that while I hated anybody, and, after all, it was Merrill who roused—the wild cat—in me, and we have done with him altogether. They wouldn't have him back in Vancouver, but there's a land-boom somewhere in California, and Charley hears that he is already piling up money."

She stopped a moment, and thrust a folded paper into his hand. "That's yours, but Anthea must never see it. Charley didn't know I had it, and I meant to keep it in case Merrill got rich again; but I don't want it now. Please destroy it, Jimmy."

Jimmy glanced at the paper, and his expression changed when he saw that it was the engineer's confession; but he laid his hand on his sister's arm and pressed it, for he understood what the fact that she had parted with that document signified. Then Leeson, who was a few paces in front of them, turned and pointed to a big steamer with a tier of white deck-houses lying out in the Inlet.

"The boat's waiting at the landing, and we'll go off," he said. "There's a kind of wedding-lunch ready on board her."

Jimmy said they had purposed going straight to the house he had commissioned Jordan to take for him, but the latter laughed, and Leeson chuckled dryly.

"We held a meeting over the question, and fixed it up that the house you wanted hadn't quite tone enough for the man who's to be Commodore of the *Shasta* fleet very soon," he said. "That's why we decided to put you into my big one on the rise. Guess there's not a prettier house around this city, but it has never been really lived in. I'm out most of every day, and only want two rooms. Now, there's no use protesting; it's all fixed ready, and you're going right in."

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He turned, and touched Anthea's arm. "You'll stand by me. You can't afford to have your husband kick against the man with the most money in the *Shasta* Company."

Jimmy's protests were very feeble. It had been his one trouble that Anthea would have to live in a very different fashion from the one she had been accustomed to, and he was relieved when she thanked the old man.

Leeson smiled at her in a very kindly fashion. "Well," he said, "I've been lonely for the last eight years since the boy who should have had that house went down with my smartest boat, and I want to feel that there's somebody under the same roof with me who will keep me from growing too hard and old."

Then he stopped, and chuckled in his usual dry manner. "I was going to make Jordan the proposition—only I got to thinking and my nerve failed me. Guess I made my money hard in the free sealing days when we had trouble with everybody all the time, but I felt I'd sooner not offend Mrs. Jordan, and I might do it if I didn't fix things just as she told me. She's a clever woman—but I don't want to have her on my trail."

Eleanor only glanced at him in whimsical reproach, and they moved on, laughing, toward the waiting boat.

END

Transcriber's Note: The following typographical errors present in the original edition have been corrected.

In Chapter II, **the Tyee slowly crept on** was changed to **the Tyee slowly crept on**.

In Chapter VIII, a missing quotation mark was added before **I was there two years**, and **the others gazed at the Sorata expressionlessly** was changed to **the others gazed at the Sorata expressionlessly**.

In Chapter XIV, a quotation mark was deleted after **Heave!**.

In Chapter XXII, **the Shasta did not move at all** was changed to **the Shasta did not move at all**, and **the Shasta heaved and rolled viciously** was changed to **the Shasta heaved and rolled viciously**.

In Chapter XXVIII, a duplicate quotation mark was removed after **that's the only thing to put a move on you**.

In Chapter XXX, **Then I suppose I must sumbit** was changed to **Then I suppose I must submit**.

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