

Dan Merrithew eBook

Dan Merrithew

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CHAPTER I

The girl on the "Veiled Ladye"

The big coastwise tug *Hydrographer* slid stern-ward into a slip cluttered with driftwood and bituminous dust, stopping within heaving distance of three coal-laden barges which in their day had reared "royal s'ls" to the wayward winds of the seven seas.

Near-by lay Horace Howland's ocean-going steam yacht, *Veiled Ladye*, which had put into Norfolk from Caribbean ports, to replenish her bunkers. There were a number of guests aboard, and most of them arose from their wicker chairs on the after-deck and went to the rail, as the great tug pounded alongside.

Grateful for any kind of a break in the monotony of the long morning, they observed with interest the movements of a tall young man, in a blue shirt open at the throat and green corduroy trousers, who caught the heaving line hurtling from the bow of the nearest barge, and hauled the attached towing-cable dripping and wriggling from the heavy waters.

He did it gracefully. There was a fine play of broad shoulders, a resilient disposition of the long, straight limbs, an impression of tiger-like strength and suppleness, not lost upon his observers, upon Virginia Howland least of all. She was not a girl to suppress a thought or emotion uppermost in her mind; and now she turned to her father with an exclamation of pleasure.

"Father," she cried, "look! Isn't he simply stunning! The Greek ideal—and on a tugboat!" Her dark eyes lightened with mischief. "Do you suppose he'd mind if I spoke to him?"

"He'd probably swear at you," said young Ralph Oddington, with a grin. Then, seized by a sudden impulse for which he afterwards kicked himself, being a decent sort of chap, he drew his cigarette case from his pocket and, as the tug came to a standstill, tossed a cigarette across the intervening space. It struck the man in the back, and as he turned, Oddington called,

"Have a cigarette, Bill?"

The tugman's lips parted, giving a flashing glimpse of big, straight, white teeth. Then they closed, and for an instant he regarded the speaker with a hard, curious expression in his quiet gray eyes, and the proffered cigarette, as though by accident, was shapeless under his heel.

It was distinctly embarrassing for the yachting party; and partly to relieve Oddington, partly out of curiosity, Virginia Howland leaned over the rail with a smile. "Please pardon us, Mr. Tugboatman. We didn't mean to offend you; we—"

The young man again swept the party with his eyes, and then meeting the girl's gaze full, he waited for her to complete the sentence.

"We," she continued, "of course meant no harm."

He did not reply for a moment, did not reply till her eyes fell.

"All right—thanks," he said simply and then hurried forward.

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At sunset the *Veiled Ladye* was well on her way to New York, and the *Hydrographer* was plugging past Hog Island light with her cumbersome tows plunging astern.

It came to be a wild night. The tumbling blue-black clouds of late afternoon fulfilled their promise of evil things for the dark. There were fierce pounding hours when the wrath of the sea seemed centred upon the *Hydrographer* and her lumbering barges, when the towing-lines hummed like the harp strings of Aeolus.

It was man's work the crew of the *Hydrographer* performed that night; when the dawn came and the wind departed with a farewell shriek, and the seas began to fall, Dan Merrithew sat quiet for a while, gazing vacantly out over the gray waters, wrestling with the realization that through all the viewless turmoil the face of a girl he did not know—never would know, probably—had not been absent from his mind; that the sound of her voice had lingered in his ears rising out of the elemental confusion, as the notes of a violin, freeing themselves from orchestral harmony, suddenly rise clear, dominating the *motif* in piercing obligato.

When he arose it was with the conviction that this meant something which eventually would prove of interest to him. One evening some three months before, he had visited the little sailors' church which floats in the East River at the foot of Pike Street in New York, and listened to a preacher who was speaking in terms as simple as he could make them, with Fate as his text.

Fate, he said, works, in mysterious ways and does queer things with its instruments. It may sear a soul, or alter the course of a life in seeming jest; but the end proves no jest at all, and if we live long enough and grow wise with our years, we learn that at the bottom, ever and always, in everything, was a guiding hand, a sure intent, and a serious purpose.

It was a good, plain, simple talk such as longshoremen, dock-rats, tugmen, and seamen often hear in this place, but it impressed young Merrithew; for, although he had never accepted his misfortunes, nor reasoned away the things that tried his soul in this philosophical manner, yet he had always had a vague conviction that everything that happened was for his good and would work out in the end.

The words of the preacher seemed to give him clearer understanding in this regard, taught him to weigh carefully things which, as they appeared to him, were on the face insignificant. This had led him into strange trends of thought, had encouraged, in a way, superstitious fancies not altogether good for him. He knew that, and he had cursed his folly, and yet on this morning after the storm, on the after-deck of a throbbing tugboat he nodded his head sharply, outward acquiescence to an inward conviction that somehow, somewhere, he was going to see that face again and hear that voice. That was as certain as that he lived. And when this took place he would not be a tugboat mate. That was all.

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Whatever he did thereafter he had this additional incentive, the future meeting with a tall, lithe girl with dark-brown hair and gray eyes—brave, deep eyes, and slightly swarthy cheeks, which were crimson as she spoke to him.

CHAPTER II

DAN'S SEARCH FOR THE CHRISTMAS SPIRIT

Daniel Merrithew was one of the Merrithews of a town near Boston, a prime old seafaring family. His father had a waning interest in three whaling-vessels; and when two of them opened like crocuses at their piers in New Bedford, being full of years, and the third foundered in the Antarctic, the old man died, chiefly because he could see no clear way of longer making a living.

Young Merrithew at the time was in a New England preparatory school, playing excellent football and passing examinations by the skin of his teeth. Thrown upon his own resources, his mother having died in early years, he had to decide whether he would work his way through the school and later through college, or trust to such education as he already had to carry him along in the world.

It was altogether adequate for practical purposes, he argued, and so he lost little time in proceeding to New York, where he began a business career as a clerk in the office of the marine superintendent of a great coal-carrying railroad. It was a beginning with a quick ending. The clerkly pen was not for him; he discovered this before he was told. The blood of the Merrithews was not to be denied; and turning to the salt water, his request for a berth on one of the company's big sea-going tugs was received with every manifestation of approval.

When he first presented himself to the Captain of the *Hydrographer*, the bluff skipper set the young man down as a college boy in search of sociological experience and therefore to be viewed with good-humored tolerance—good-humored, because Dan was six feet tall and had combative red-gold hair. His steel eyes were shaded by long straw-colored lashes; he had a fighting look about him. He had a magnificent temper, red, but not uncalculating, with a punch like a mule's kick back of it.

As week after week passed, and the new hand revealed no temperamental proclivities, no "kid-glove" inclinations, seemingly content with washing down decks, lassoing pier bitts with the bight of a hawser at a distance of ten feet, and hauling ash-buckets from the fireroom when the blower was out of order—both of which last were made possible by his mighty shoulders—the Captain began to take a different sort of interest in him.

He allowed Dan to spend all his spare moments with him in the pilot-house; and as the Captain could shoot the sun and figure latitude and longitude and talk with fair

understanding upon many other elements of navigation, the young man's time was by no means wasted. Later, Dan arranged with the director of a South Street night school of navigation for the evenings when he was in port, and by the time they made him mate of the *Hydrographer*, he was almost qualified to undergo examination for his master's certificate.

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Mental changes are not always attended by outward manifestations, but all the crew of the *Hydrographer*, after that mad night off the Virginia Capes, could see that something had hit the stalwart mate. The edge seemed to be missing from his occasional moods of abandon; sometimes he looked thoughtfully at a man without hearing what the man was saying to him. But it did not impair his usefulness, and his Captain could see indications of a better defined point in his ambitions.

So that was the way things were with him when, on a gray December afternoon, the day before Christmas, the *Hydrographer*, just arrived from Providence, slid against her pier in Jersey City, and the crew with jocular shouts made the hawsers fast to the bitts. Some months before, the *Hydrographer* had stumbled across a lumber-laden schooner, abandoned in good condition off Fire Island, and had towed her into port. The courts had awarded goodly salvage; and the tug's owners, filled with the spirit of the season, had sent a man to the pier to announce that at the office each of the crew would find his share of the bounty, and a little extra, in recognition of work in the company's interest.

"Dan," said the Captain, as the young man entered the pilot-house in his well-fitting shore clothes, "you ought to get a pot of money out of this; now don't go ashore and spend it all tonight. You bank most of it. Take it from me—if I'd started to bank my money at your age, I would be paying men to run tugboats for me now."

"Oh, I've money in the bank," laughed Dan. "I'll bank most of this; but first I'm going to lay out just fifty dollars, which ought to buy about all the Christmas joy I need. I was going to Boston to shock some sober relations of mine, but I've changed my mind. About seven o'clock this evening you'll find me in a restaurant not far from Broadway and Forty-second Street; an hour later you'll locate me in the front row of a Broadway theatre; and—better come with me, Captain Bunker."

"No, thanks, Dan," said the Captain. "If you come with *me* over to the house in Staten Island about two hours from now, you'll see just three little noses pressed against the window pane—waiting for daddy and Santa Claus." The Captain's big red face grew tender and his eyes softened. "When you get older, Dan," he added, "you'll know that Christmas ain't so much what you get out of it as what you put into it."

Dan thought of the Captain's words as he crossed the ferry to New York. All through the day he had been filled with the pleasurable conviction that the morrow was a pretty decent sort of day to be ashore, and he had intended to work up to the joys thereof to the utmost of his capacity.

Now, with his knowledge as to the sort of enjoyment which Captain Bunker was going to get out of the day, his well-laid plans seemed to turn to ashes. The trouble was, he could not exactly say why this should be. He finally decided that his prospective sojourn amid the gay life of the metropolis had not been at all responsible for the mental uplift which had colored his view of the day.

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It had come, he now believed, solely from the attitude of the Captain and Jeff Morrill the engineer, and Sam Tonkin the deck-hand—soon to become a mate—and Bill Lawson, another deck-hand; all of whom had little children at home. Well, he had no little children at home. That settled the matter so far as he was concerned. Blithely he began to plan his dinner and select the theatre he should attend. But, no; the old problem returned insistently, and at length he was obliged to confess that he could devise no solution, and that he did not feel half as good as he had a few hours before.

At all events he would be as happy as he could. After leaving the company's office, where he received a hearty "Merry Christmas" and a fat yellow envelope, he went to the neat little brick house on Cherry Street where he had rooms, and learned that Mrs. O'Hare, his landlady, had gone to her daughter's house on Varick Street to set up a Christmas tree and help to start things for the children. Dan was sorry. He had rather looked forward to meeting this cheerful person with her spectacles and kindly old face, who mothered him so assiduously when he was ashore.

Why the devil had he not thought of finding out about those grandchildren and of buying them something for Christmas? But he had not, and now he did not know whether they were girls or boys or both, nor how many of them there were. So he had no way of knowing what to buy, or how much. Somehow he had here a feeling that he had been on the verge of an interesting discovery. But only on the verge.

He walked slowly out of the house and turned into South Street. In the life of this quaint thoroughfare he had cast his lot, and here he spent his leisure hours; not that he had ever found the place or the men he met there especially congenial. But they were the men he knew, the men he worked with or worked against; and any young fellow who is lonely in a big city and placed as Dan was is just as liable, until he has found himself and located his rut in life, to mingle with persons as strange, with natures as alien, and to frequent places which in later years fill him with repulsive memories.

At all events Dan did, and he was not worrying about it a bit, either, as he sauntered under the Brooklyn Bridge span at Dover Street and turned into South, where Christmas Eve is so joyous, in its way. The way on this particular evening was in no place more clearly interpreted than Red Murphy's resort, where the guild of Battery rowboatmen, who meet steamships in their Whitehall boats and carry their hawsers to longshoremen waiting to make them fast to the pier bitts, congregate and have their social being.

Here, on this day, the wealthy towboat-owners and captains are wont to distribute their largess to the boatmen as a mark of appreciation for favors rendered,—a suggestion that future favors are expected,—and here, also, punch of exalted brew is concocted and drunk.

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An occasional flurry of snow swept down the street as Dan reached the entrance. Murphy was out on the sidewalk directing the adornment of his doorway with several faded evergreen wreaths, while inside, the boatmen gathered closer around the genial potstove and were not sorry that ice-bound rivers and harbor had brought their business to a temporary standstill. They were discussing the morrow, which logically led to a consideration of the ice-pack, among other things, and thence to Cap'n Barney Hodge's ill luck.

"Take a hard and early winter," old Bill Darragh, the dean of the boatmen, was saying, "then a thaw in the middle o' December, and then a friz-up, and ye git conditions that ain't propitious, as ye may say, fur towboatmen—nur fur us, neither."

"True fur ye," said "Honest Bill" Duffy. "Nigh half the tugs in the harbor is in the Erie Basin with screw blades twisted off by the ice-pack, or sheathin' ripped. And it's gittin' worse. They'll be little enough money for us this year—an' I was countin' on a hunder to pay a doctor's bill."

"Well, maybe you'll get more than you think," said Dan, whose words always carried weight because he was mate of a deep-sea tug. "Captain Barney Hodge's *Three Sisters* was laid up yesterday; a three-foot piece of piling bedded in an ice-cake got caught in her screw, and—zip! The other fellows are feeling so good about it that I think they'll be apt to be generous."

"We'll drink to Barney's bad health," said Darragh, raising his glass. "I saw him half an hour gone. He looked like a dead man. Cap'n Jim Skelly o' the *John Quinn* piloted *Gypsum Prince* inter her dock last night. No one ever handled her afore but Cap'n Barney. An' the *Kentigern* from Liverpool is due to-night. Skelly's layin' fur her too; an' he'll git her. That'll take two vessels from Barney's private monopoly."

Darragh was right. The towboatmen had Captain Barney where they wanted him, and they meant to gaff him hard. He had always been too sharp for the rest, too good at a bargain, too mean; and what was more, he was in every way the best towboatman that ever lived. No one liked him; but the steamship-captains engaged his services for towing and piloting, nevertheless, for the reason that they considered him a disagreeable necessity, believing that no other tugboatman could serve them so well.

As a matter of fact, there were several tugboat-captains hardly less skilful than Captain Barney, and in the time of his idleness they bade fair to secure not a few of his customers. It was an old saying that Captain Barney, touched in his pocket, was touched in his heart and brain also—they meant to touch him in just those places.

"I see him this morning," said Duffy, "when he heard that Cap'n Jim Skelly 'd come in on the bridge of the *Gypsum Prince*. He was a-weepin' and cursin' like a drunk. Hereafter he'll have to divide the *Gypsum*, and she arrives reg'lar, too."

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"And he'll lose the *Kentigern* to-night," laughed Dan. "Well, I don't care. It'll do him good. I hope they put him out of business."

"Thankee, gents, for your Christmas wishes. I'm glad my friends are with me." The words, in low, mournful cadence, came from the doorway; and all eyes turning there saw the stout, melancholy figure of Captain Barney, his great hooked nose falling dejectedly toward his chin, his hawk eyes dull and sombre. He had been drinking; and as Duffy made as though to throw a bottle at him, the fallen great man turned and stumbled away.

A few minutes later Dan left the resort, faced the biting north wind, and walked slowly up South Street. Somehow he could not get Captain Barney out of his mind.

The year before, in violation of an explicit agreement, Captain Barney had worked in with an outside rowboatman from West Street, towing him to piers where vessels were about to dock. This, of course, got that boatman on the scene in advance of the Battery men, who had only their strong arms and their oars to depend upon. Thus the rival had the first chance at the job of carrying the lines from the docking steamships to men waiting on the pier to make them fast. Captain Barney received part of the money which this boatman made. It was little enough, to be sure, but no amount of money was too small for him. And so Dan, the Battery boatmen being his friends, was glad to see Hodge on his knees—yet he was the slickest tugboat-captain on earth.

Dan could not help admiring him for that; and now he could not dismiss from his mind the pitiable picture which Murphy's doorway had framed but a few minutes before. He tried to, for Dan was an impressionable young fellow and was worrying too much about this Christmas idea, endeavoring to solve his emotions, without bothering about the troubles of a towboat-skipper who deserved all he got and more.

All along the street were Christmas greens. The ship chandlers had them festooned about huge lengths of rusty chains and barnacled anchors and huge coils of hawser, and the tawdry windows of the dram shops were hidden by them. A frowsy woman, with a happy smile upon her face, hurried past with a new doll in her arms. Dan stopped a minute to watch her.

Something turned him into a little toyshop near Coenties Slip and he saw a tugboat deck-hand purchase a pitiful little train of cars, laying his quarter on the counter with the softest smile he had seen on a man's face in a twelvemonth.

"Something for the kid, eh?" said Dan rather gruffly.

"Sure," replied the deck-hand, and he took his bundle with a sort of defiant expression.

He saw a little mother, a girl not more than twelve years old, with a pinched face and a rag shawl about her shoulders, spend ten cents for a bit of a doll and a bag of Christmas candy.

“Going to have a good time, all by yourself?” growled Dan.

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“Naw, this is fur me little sister,” said the girl bravely, if a little contemptuously. A great lump came into Dan’s throat, and feeling somewhat weak and ashamed, he left the shop. Elemental sensations which he could not define thrilled him, and the spirit of Christmas, now entirely unsatisfied, rested on his soul like an incubus. He began to feel outside of everything—as though the season had come for every one but him.

Near Pike Street a little group of the Salvation Army stood on the curb. One of them was a fat, uncomely woman, and she was singing, accompanying herself upon a guitar. The music was that of a popular ballad, and the verses were of rude manufacture.

There were perhaps half a dozen listeners scattered about the sidewalk at a distance sufficient to prevent possible scoffers from including them in the service. Two of them were rough workmen, and they stood in the middle of the sidewalk staring vacantly ahead, trying to look oblivious. Two longshoremen sat on the curb ten feet away, and a man and a woman leaned against the door of a near-by warehouse. When the song was finished the two workmen hurriedly approached and threw nickels on the face of the big bass drum lying flat on the street, retreating hastily, as though ashamed; the woman did likewise, and one of the longshoremen.

“Buying salvation,” grinned Dan, as he walked on up the street. But the pleasantry made inadequate appeal. Every one was getting more out of the season than he was. Once he drew a dollar from his pocket and started back. But no. What was a dollar to him? He knew where there were more. That wasn’t it. He put the money in his pocket and walked on.

Dan’s mental processes leading to a determination to help Captain Barney were too clouded for clear interpretation, but he knew there was no more uncertainty in his mind after he had sought the Captain out and offered to put him on board the *Kentigern*.

Hodges fairly wept his gratitude. “Dan, Dan, you say you can put me aboard the *Kentigern*! You’ll save my business if you do. I don’t care about the towing part, because if I can get aboard and pilot her in, I can hand the towing over to those who’ll take care of me. Dan, you’re a good boy. How’ll you do it?”

“No time to tell now,” said Dan. “Meet me at Pier 3 in an hour.”

“Say,” cried Captain Barney, as Dan hurried away; “how much’ll it be? Not too much—”

Dan stopped short.

“Nothing!” he roared. “It’s—it’s a Christmas present.”

CHAPTER III

A FIGHT IN THE DARK

The short gray December twilight was creeping over the bay as Dan pulled out from the Battery basin in a boat which he kept there for recreative jaunts about the harbor. Hard pulling and cold it was, but the boatman bent his back and shot up the East River with the strength of the young giant he was. He could see Captain Barney, muffled to the ears, stamping impatiently about on the end of the designated pier. Without a word he swung his boat in such a position that the Captain could drop into it.

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Barney was delighted, so far forgetting himself, indeed, as to attempt to establish cordial understanding.

“Hello, my boy,” he said genially, “we’re a-goin’ to fix ’em!” Then noting a blank expression on Dan’s face, his jaws closed with a click and he lowered himself from the pier and into the boat without further words, while Dan shoved out into the river and started for the pier above, where Captain Jim Skelly’s tug, the *John Quinn*, was lying. She had steam up and was all ready for her journey to meet the *Kentigern*. That vessel had been reported east of Fire Island and would be well across the bar by eight o’clock. She would anchor on the bar for the night, and it was there that Captain Jim Skelly meant to board her in order to forestall any possible scheme that wily Captain Barney might devise to gain the bridge of the freighter.

As Dan paddled noiselessly around the other side of the pier, they could see the pipe lights of the Quinn’s crew. Finally the rowboat turned straight under the pier, threading its way among the greasy green piles. Reaching under the seat, Dan drew out a stout inch line.

“When I back in on the *Quinn*,” he whispered, “make that line fast to the rudder post. We’ll let her tow us to the *Kentigern*.”

“What!” hissed Captain Barney, and his face turned pale. But it was only for a second, after which he chuckled.

Slowly, gently, quietly, the rowboat slid among the green piles until the stern of the big tug loomed overhead. When it was within reach Captain Barney leaned out, made one end of the line fast to the tug’s rudder post and then, paying out about twenty feet, he fastened the other end to the bitts in the bow of the rowboat.

It seemed an hour’s waiting before the *Quinn*’s crew cast off the lines, but in reality it was not more than ten minutes. As the screw began to thresh the water and the tug to move swiftly out into the river, it required rare skill on the part of the young boatman to manoeuvre the boat so she should not be upset at the start. But Dan had the skill required and more besides, as he knelt in the stern with one oar deep in the water to the port side.

In the course of a few minutes they were fairly on their way, and Captain Jim Skelly was losing no time. He had full speed before the tug was a hundred yards from the pier, and the spray and the splintered chips of ice flew back from the sharp bow, smiting the faces of the two men in the little boat dragging astern with three-quarters of her length out of water. Dan, kneeling aft, watched with eagle eye each quirk and turn of the tow-line.

It is the hardest thing a man has to do—to tow behind a tug or ferryboat, even under fair conditions. In this case, the conditions were far from fair, for there was the ice, lazily

rolling and cracking in the heavy wake of the tug, grinding against the sides of the rowboat, until it seemed that they must be crushed. There was great danger that they would be. There was danger also that the tow-line might slue both men into the icy waters and upset the boat.

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Captain Barney was tingling with fear. Dan knew it, and smiled. It was not often that any one had the privilege of seeing Captain Barney frightened.

As the tug veered to starboard to round Governor's Island the tow-line slued to port and thence quickly to starboard. The rowboat was snapped over on her gunwales and the water poured in like a mill-race. A roar of an oath escaped Captain Barney's lips, but before he had closed them the boat had righted.

"Shut up, will you?" hissed Dan. "Do you want them to discover and drown us? Ugh—she skated clean over that ice-cake!"

"You've got me out here to kill me, Dan," whimpered Captain Barney. "'A Christmas present!' I see—now."

"Will you keep still?" whispered Dan. "If they hear us, you'll find out who wants to kill you. The root she took that time was nothing. There'll be worse ones—this boat is not through rooting yet."

Neither was she. Ahead the tug loomed, a great dark shape; and the pulse of her engines was lost in the roiling water rising from the screw blades and the hiss of it as it raced by the row-boat. There was a dim blur of light from one of the after-cabin portholes and the shadow of figures passing to and fro inside could be seen. The decks were deserted. It was too cold to brave the night wind except under necessity—a night wind that cut through the pea-jackets and ear-caps and thick woollen gloves of the two men in the rowboat. Captain Barney felt a fierce resentment that the *Quinn's* men should be so warm and comfortable while he was shivering.

"Christmas Eve!" he exclaimed. "Fine, ain't it?" and he flailed his arms about to keep the blood in circulation.

"Christmas Eve," said Dan solemnly, as though to himself, "the finest I ever spent"; and he added apologetically, "even if I am making an eternal fool of myself."

On they sped. Frequently the tug would hit a large stretch of clear water, and at such times the jingle-bell would sound in the engine-room and the *Quinn* would shoot forward at a rate that fairly lifted the rowboat out of the water, while Dan, kneeling astern, oar in hand, muscles tense, and mind alert, was ready to do anything that lay in his skill to prevent an untoward accident.

Swish! Zip! and the rowboat would suddenly shoot to one side or the other, compelling Dan to dig his oar way down into the water, bending all his strength in efforts to keep the bow straight.

“She’s rooting every second,” he grumbled, opening and shutting his hand to drive away the stiffness and then casting a vindictive glance at Captain Barney, the source of all the trouble.

And as for the tugboat-skipper, he sat and watched his companion, and resolved that, after all, there were a few things he did not know about watermanship.

Between the shadowy banks of the Narrows shot the *Quinn*. Out of the harbor in a rowboat! Even professional Battery boatmen do this about once in a generation. The immense, shadowless darkness smote their eyes so that they turned to the cabin light for relief.

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There was likely to be little ice out there, and the northwest wind had knocked the sea flat, as Dan knew would be the case when he figured his chances at the start. It was bad enough though, for there was certain to be something of a swell—and other things; and now that he was in the midst of it, he had grave doubts as to what would happen. But his strange exaltation rose supreme to all fears; no danger seemed too great, no possibility too ominous, to dampen the ardor of this, his first big act of self-sacrifice. The song the Salvation woman sang passed through his mind.

“Gawd is mighty and grateful;
No act of my brother’s or mine
Escapes His understandin’,
In the good old Christmas time.”

“As soon as we get near the *Kentigern*,” he said, “we’ll cut loose from the *Quinn*, and while she is warping alongside we’ll make a dash, and you can hail ’em and get ’em to lower a ladder. You can beat Skelly that way. That’s what I’m banking on.”

“You just put me alongside and I’ll see to the rest,” replied the Captain impatiently. He would have attempted to scale the steel sides of the vessel themselves, if only to escape from that little boat, tailing astern of the *Quinn* in the heart of the darkness, rooting, twisting, threatening to dive under the water.

“What are you goin’ to do after I get aboard?” asked Captain Barney, rubbing his hands as though the victory were already won. “I declare, I never thought of you! You can’t row back.”

Dan raised his head angrily and started to utter a sneering reply, when the first good swell caught the boat—a great lazy, greasy fellow. The *Quinn* went up and then down, and after her shot the rowboat, like a young colt frisking at the end of her tether, then careening down the incline on her side as though to ram the stern of the tug ahead, which, fortunately, was climbing another hill.

What the rowboat had been through before was child’s play to this, and Dan’s face grew very stern. Reaching down with one hand, he seized the other oar and shoved it along to Captain Barney. “Put that down on the port side. Hang on for your life and keep her steady!” he cried.

Then he gave his attention to his side of the boat while Captain Barney struggled in the bow. It was a fight that would have thrilled the soul of whoever could have seen it. But that is always the way in the bravest, most hopeless fights—no one ever sees them. They are fought alone, in the dark, on the sea; and sometimes the lion-hearted live to make a modest tale of it around a winter’s fire; but more often the sequel is, “Found drowned”—if even that.

Captain Barney, frightened into desperate courage, and Dan, in grim realization that the measure of his good deed this night was the measure of the soul he was getting to know, fought sternly. They were on the open sea with all its mystery and lurking fate, and the dark was all about. There was not even the impression of distance; the swells arose as though at their elbows, tossed them with great, slimy ease, let them down again, plucked them this way and that, while the humming tow-line ran out to the vague, phantom, reeling tug ahead.

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There was a suspicion of snow in the veiled sky, and the wind stabbed like a knife. Twice the tug cut through a field of ice making out on an offshore current, and the thumping the little row-boat received seemed likely to rend her into drift-wood. But that was only one of the chances; and the two men went on into the icy blast with jaws so tightly clenched that their cheek muscles stood out in great knots.

The silence, the danger, the vagueness hung heavily. As Dan cast his eyes gloomily into the wake of the tug, he saw a dark object shoot out of the foam and dart down upon them like a torpedo; in fact a torpedo could not have worked more serious effect upon the boat than did that heavy, water-soaked log.

“Starboard your oar!” shouted Dan, at the same time digging his own oar deep down on the port side and pulling upon it with all the magnificent strength of his arms until it bent like a reed. There was just time to avert the direct impact, not to escape altogether.

It was a glancing blow just above the water line; it punched a great, jagged hole and gouged out the paint clear to the stern. Dan drew a long breath and murmured in a half-sick voice, “They might as well kill a man as scare him to death,” while Captain Barney’s face made a gray streak in the darkness.

The *Quinn* was now past the point of Sandy Hook and was skirting the shore. The muffled beat of the breakers could be heard through the gloom, which was riven every second by the great, swinging search-light in the Navesink. Not a mile ahead was the bar; and the masthead light of the *Kentigern* could be seen, twinkling like a planet.

In twenty minutes the dark hull of the *Kentigern* came looming out of the night. A hail shot from the *Quinn*, and a faint reply came back. Dark figures could now be seen, outlined by the cabin lights in the forward section of the tramp.

“Hello, what tug is that?” sounded from the bridge. “Is that you, Captain Barney?”

“No, it’s the *Quinn*, Cap’n Jim Skelly. Hodge is laid up to-night; I’ll take you into dock.”

“All right; come aboard,” and after a minute’s scurrying of figures on the deck a flimsy companion-ladder rattled down over the side of the freighter.

Dan heard it and ground his teeth in disappointment.

“Gripes!” he exclaimed. “They’ve that ladder down an hour before I thought they would. Now we’re up against it, sure.”

With a growl Captain Barney whipped out his knife and made a pass at the tow-line. He missed it and dropped back in the stern as Dan struck at him with his oar.

“Wait!” hissed the young boatman. “We’d have no chance at all. We’ve got to get nearer. The tug ’d beat us a mile. Sit tight, you old fool!”

Captain Barney recognized the wisdom of the words with a groan. He was far past the arguing point. The tide was boiling past the side of the vessel, swashing like a mill-race. All they could do under present conditions was to cast off when the tug was very near the freighter, cut in across, and get under the ladder before the tug could properly warp alongside.

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Nearer lumbered the *Quinn*. When within twenty feet of the *Kentigern* she swung broadside on, ceasing all headway and drifting into position on the tide.

"Now, then," cried Dan, suddenly leaping into the thwarts and manning the oars. "Haul on the line. Bring her right under the Quinn's stern and then cut, quick!"

Hand over hand hauled Captain Barney and the rowboat came under the stern with a jump. Then he cut the line. Dan dug his oars into the water and the slim boat shot for the ladder, while the great tug came down, more slowly, on the side. Ten, twenty strokes; and then, as Dan with a great sigh unshipped his oars, Captain Barney chuckled, seized the sides of the ladder, and hauling himself on the bottom rung, skipped up with the agility of a monkey.

With a swish and a splash up pounded the *Quinn*.

"Look out!" roared Dan, "there's a boat here!"

It saved him; for a bell clanged in the engine-room, and the tug began to make sternway. It saved him for but a minute, though.

Thoughtless, selfish, and for once an utter fool, the exultant skipper of the *Three Sisters* sought to gloat over his rival.

"On board the *Quinn*," yelled Barney. "Say, Jim Skelly, this is Barney Hodge talkin'. You didn't know he had friends in the rowboat business, did you?"

A curse rang from the Quinn's pilot-house, and Dan did not wait for anything else. Well he knew what would happen next, and he bent all his strength to his oars. He heard the jingle of a bell, and the tug started right for him.

"Look out!" yelled Dan, working the oars like a madman. But not a word came from the tug, moving silently, inexorably upon him like, some black, implacable monster.

Suddenly Dan cast aside his oars and dived over the side. The next instant the sharp, copper-bound nose of the tug struck the rowboat fairly amidships, grinding it against the steel side of the freighter, crushing it into matchwood.

A great numbness passed over the man. He was dazed; and as wave after wave splashed over his head, he struggled dumbly to reach the ladder. Then under the reaction from the icy shock, an electric thrill of energy and vitality passed through his body.

He saw that he had been carried to about amidships, and the ladder was well toward the bow. With lusty strokes he struck out along the steel sides, rising over the waves

like a duck. Five minutes elapsed, and then with a sudden fear, Dan realized, in glancing at the bow, that he had not made ten feet in all that time and effort.

It was the current, which was ripping along the hull at the rate that would have affected the speed of a powerful steam launch. Dan had not noticed it before. He struggled desperately, but to no avail, and then he uttered his first cry for help. He could not see the deck, being so close to the hull; and for the same reason he could not have been seen had his cry been heard. Again he called for assistance, but there was no answer, no sound, save that of the water buffeting past the vessel.

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He ceased to waste his strength in fruitless cries, devoting all that remained to his struggle to reach the ladder. But his strokes were weaker than before and he found he was being carried back upon the current instead of making headway against it. Fight as he would, he could feel that sliding, hopeless drag against which he was powerless to combat. His strength vanished ounce by ounce. His arms grew so numb with fatigue and cold that he could do nothing but move them up and down, dog fashion. On he went, down toward the stern of the vessel.

He was moving as swiftly as the current was, whirling, twisting like a piece of wood. His mind dulled. He longed for death now. Instinctively he wished to get out of all the worry and struggle against dissolution. His one dominant idea was to throw up his hands and go down, down the deep descent. With a great cry of relief he yielded to the alluring thought. Up flew his arms above his head—and he felt so warm and cheerful! Something struck his outstretched hand and the fingers closed upon it. For a minute they gripped the swinging piece of rope. Then he opened his eyes to find he was hanging to a flimsy Jacob's ladder, suspended from the stern. With a new strength born of hope he flung up his feet, shooting them through the hempen rungs; and there he stayed for a while—it seemed almost an eternity. Then laboriously climbing the ladder, he made the deck and there dropped as insensate as a log.

It was the happiest Christmas Day that Dan had ever known, and he told himself so as he walked slowly down South Street. Unschooled in the ethics of self-sacrifice as he was, he yet knew he had done something for a fellow man, for a man he despised; and something indefinable yet unmistakable told him it was very good. He felt bigger, broader, felt as though he had attained new stature in something that was not physical. And always, vaguely, he had been as anxious to feel this as he had been to get on in a material way. He had lost his rowboat in the act. And yet withal there was a certain fierce satisfaction in his loss—he had caught the spirit of Christmas. How much wiser, how much stronger he was to-day than on the previous afternoon.

So deep were his thoughts that he almost ran into Captain Barney.

"Hey, there!" snarled the tugboatman, most ungraciously, "I just left a new rowboat down in the Battery basin for you." And that was all he said.

And Dan, as he trembled with rage, knew that Captain Barney might have said the right word and made Christmas Day all the more glorious. But he had said the wrong thing, done the wrong thing, and he had by his words and in his act taken much from Dan's Christmas happiness. Dan knew it well; something told him so. He gazed at the tugboatman silently for a minute,—and then he knocked Captain Barney to the sidewalk.

CHAPTER IV

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DAN STAKES HIS LIFE, AND WINS

Before the Winter passed, Dan had taken his master's examination with flying colors and was made Captain of the *Fledgling*, owned by the Phoenix Towboat Company. She was a new boat, rugged, powerful, one hundred and twenty-five feet water line, designed and built to go anywhere and do anything.

The Phoenix Company was known as a venturesome organization, as willing to send its fleet ramping out through the fog to the assistance of a distressed liner as to transport arms to West Indian or Central American revolutionists. Before Dan had commanded the *Fledgling* many months he had done both, and was beginning to be known up and down the coast as a captain to be called upon in emergencies verging upon the extraordinary, not to say extra-hazardous.

All of which he accepted joyously, as the portion of youth in search of experience that life has to offer. He was sufficiently introspective to rate the temper of his spirit at something approaching its real value, and he knew it was to be cherished, guarded, lest the fine edge be lost. As the world reckons things it was a humble calling upon which he had entered, a calling hardly qualified to enlist the pride of the family whose name he bore.

As a matter of fact, the pride of his few relations was not enlisted. He had been made to feel that. He did not complain. He appreciated their attitude. But that did not curb a high-hearted ambition to lift his vocation to the ideals he had formulated concerning it—and the future lay before him.

But he was not thinking of these things now. The face of the sea was gray in sullen fury. From a blue horizon, dulled and almost obliterated by long, jagged layers of steely clouds, came the ceaseless rush of deep-chested waves, as even, as fascinating as the vermiculations of a serpent. And the wind, tearing along the floor of the sea, whipped off the wave crests and sent them shivering, shimmering ahead, like the plumes of hard-riding cavalry.

The storm had passed. The effects remained, and Dan Merrithew shifted his wheel several spokes east of north and took the brunt bow on. She bore it well, did the stout *Fledgling*; she did that—she split the waves or crashed through them, or laughed over them, as a stout tug should when coaxed by hands of skill, guided by an iron will. The Long Island coast lay to port, a narrow band of ochre, and all about lay the heaving gray of mighty waters, in which the *Fledgling* was a black speck.

Dan's hat was off and his red-gold hair was flying wild; his teeth were bared. He was always thus in a fight. This was one; a dandy—a clinker! He gave the wheel another spoke and the *Fledgling* slued across a sea and smashed down hard. From below came a sliding rattle, a great crash of crockery, and then a series of imprecations. The

next instant Arthur M’Gill, the steward, dashed up the companionway and burst into the pilot-house.

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"Doggone it all, Cap'n!" yelled the angry man, "why in hell don't ye let me know when ye're goin' to sling 'er across seas? Here I had the table all set fur breakfast, an' ye put 'er inter a grayback afore I could hold on to anything; and smash goes the hull mess on the floor—plates, forks, vittles. Holee mackerel!" he exclaimed under increasing impulse of anger, "what am I?—a steward, or a—or a monkey?"

Dan, clutching grimly at the wheel, turned a genial smile upon his cook.

"Sorry, old man. Fact is, I forgot. But never mind. Pick up the best you can." He smiled again. "Just a little bit dusty out here, eh, Arthur?"

"That's what it is, Cap'n," replied Arthur, mollified by Dan's words of regret.

The steward looked at Dan admiringly. In a way he was the skipper's father confessor, not alone because he had a glib, advising tongue, but because he was possessed of a certain amount of raw, psychological instinct and knew his Shakespeare and could quote from Young's "Night Thoughts." Arthur had something of a fishy look and a slick way with him; but he was a good cook.

"It seems funny to call such a kid 'Cap'n,'" he said. And then he added apologetically, "It's 'cause I've sailed under so many grayheads, ye know."

"Oh, I'll be gray enough before long," laughed Dan, and his momentary inattention to his duties at the wheel was promptly seized upon by the wily sea, which smacked the rudder hard and nearly spun the wheel out of his grip. "Stop talking, will you!" roared Dan, wrestling at the spokes. "Do you want me to put you all into the trough?"

Mulhatton, the mate, stumbled into the pilot-house and glared at the cook.

"Artie," he cried, "you go below, or I'll just gently heft you down! I went in to git grub just now and 't was all on the floor. Go on now—git!" And Arthur went, grumbling and sighing that a man's stomach should govern his temper.

"Take the wheel a while, Cap'n?" said the mate; and as Dan nodded he stepped in close, braced his feet, and took the strain as Dan's hands left the spokes.

"We'll both be on the wheel together before long," remarked Dan, sitting heavily on the chart locker and opening and shutting his stiffened fingers.

"Where is she and what's ashore?" asked Mulhatton. "You jumped us out in such a hurry this morning, I ain't had time to ask you."

"It's an old lumber hooker, and she's ashore on Jones Inlet bar; stranded just before midnight last night. Lord knows how much there is left of her by this time. But I took it a good salvage job to go after. Cripes!" The *Fledgling* on her altered course had topped a

wave forward, which wave, travelling swiftly aft, had withdrawn from the bow the support of its mighty shoulder. Down went the bow with a great slap and up went the stern, screw racing and racking the engines, sending Mulhatton crashing to the floor. But bruised as he was and dazed, he was on his feet with the quickness of a cat, and seizing the spokes, assisted Dan in bringing up the tug's head to where it ought to be.

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"It's a-goin' to be lively work salvin' any hooker to-day," said the mate.

"It is," replied Dan, "but I'll tell you this, Mul; we'll land her if anybody can. For I've a tug under me built under my very eyes. I know every beam and bolt in her. And I've a crew of rustlers," he added, gazing proudly at Mulhatton's broad back—Mulhatton, with round, red, bristly, laughing face and eyes like raw onions.

The next minute Dan, in all the delight of the struggle, was making his way along the lower deck to the engine-room door. The water was racing past the rail like a wet blur and the deck sloshed ankle deep. High up a wave climbed the *Fledgling*, and as she paused on the top for a downward glide, Dan hastily opened the door and clambered down the iron ladder.

"Well, Sam, how are they working?" he shouted to Crampton, the chief, bending over a fizzing valve bonnet.

Sam rose, pushed back his oily peaked cap until the straight raven hair flowed out from under like a cataract, and gave his thin, waterfall moustache a twist, while his swarthy, parchment face cracked into a hundred smiles.

"Workin'," he said, "as sweet as a babe breathin'."

Up reared the stern, lifting the propeller clear of the water. The engines expending their force in air, raced free. The clatter was infernal; the pistons seemed trying to jump out of the cylinders, while the throws and eccentrics lost all semblance of good order.

"Oh, damn!" cried Sam, who, being hurled to the iron floor, swore as though he enjoyed it.

Whitey Welch, the fireman, burst into a huge guffaw, in which Sam finally joined.

"You're all right down here," laughed Dan, "as happy as a sewing circle! There may be some pulling to do later."

"You get something to pull; we'll tend to the rest," and Sam Crampton grinned.

Emerging on deck, Dan collided with Pete Noonan, the deck-hand, with shoulders as big as Dan's and a bigger chest. Pete smiled genially.

"This'll put hair on yer teeth, eh, Cap'n, this will," he said, while from the galley below floated Arthur's voice in a deep sea chanty:

"I'll go no more a-roaming,
No more a-ro-o-o-a-ming with you, fair maid."

“Go on back to harbor, you little lobster pot; we’ll take care of the wreck.”

The corpulent captain of the great wrecking tug *Sovereign*, lying outside the breakers off Jones Inlet, megaphoned this insult to the deck of the *Fledgling*, as she drew near the scene of the wreck, rising and falling on the waves like a piece of driftwood.

It was a deadly day. The promise of the sunlight had waned with the earlier hours, and heavy blue-black clouds palled the heavens. Not one hundred yards apart lay the two tugs, rolling and pitching in the seaway; the *Fledgling* trim and stanch, the *Sovereign* big and cumbersome, the funnel belching thunderclouds of sepia, her derrick booms creaking and rattling and slatting infernally.

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Straight on ahead, where the line of swelling waves burst into breakers, where the spume sang like whip-lashes, and where the whine of the wind tore itself into a nasty snarl, lay the wreck of the schooner *Zeitgeist*. She lay half on her side and the waves licked up and over the faded gray hull, completing the work that time already had begun. One mast was very far forward, the other very far aft—Great Lake rig; and between the two was a deck-load of thousands of feet of Maine lumber. The topmasts had snapped off, leaving the stumps.

Lashed in the foremast were two men; and in the mainmast were Captain Ephraim Sayles and three more of his crew. At first glance they seemed lifeless; at first glance, indeed, they seemed nothing more than faded lengths of canvas. But an occasional lifting of a hand, a flash of a gray face, showed that they were men and that they still lived and hoped. Under them, over the deck raced the breakers, waist deep, each one a swift, excited trip-hammer. It was only the lumber that was holding the aged hull together. As it was, sections of the sides had ripped out and planks and pieces of deal issuing from the gashes littered the waters. Three times had the life-savers launched their boats, and three times they had been cast on the beach like logs, while thrice had the lines from their mortars fallen short.

“Go on back; we’ll take care of her.”

And Dan, his teeth bared and coated with blood from anger-bitten lips, gave the wheel to Mulhatton, ran from the pilot-house, and shook his fist at the big wrecking tug.

“Why don’t you take care of her then, curse you! Why don’t you take care of her? Don’t you see there are lives to save? Oh, you cowardly beasts!”

“Nothin’ doin’ till the sea goes down,” came the reply, and Dan sobbed aloud in his rage as he entered the pilot-house, where most of the crew were gathered, peering out of the windows at the tragedy across the waters.

The men in the rigging could be seen plainly now. There was no excitement. They kept very still, watching the futile efforts of the life-savers, waving their hands occasionally as though in token of their thanks and their knowledge of the utter futility of human efforts. No, there was no excitement; the uncertainty that breeds that was lacking. Fate was simply clamping its damp hand down over those men. Such things are always quiet—there is nothing to thrill the heart or stir the soul in them. It is just a mighty thing dealing death to weaklings, that is all. And we wonder whether the All-seeing Eye does not sometimes close in sheer pity, to shut out the inequality of it.

While they looked, a venomous wave got under the bow and lifted it high. Then down it went as a man would crash his palms together, bursting out the forepeak like a rotten apple. Thus weakened forward, the loss of the foremast was an imminent certainty. And there were two men in the fore rigging! Captain Ephraim leaned far out from the

mainmast; the tug men could see him plainly as he pointed at the tottering mast and then at the deck.

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“He wants them to leave the mast and go into the mainmast,” cried Mulhatton.

“But they won’t—see, they are shaking their heads ‘no,’” shouted Dan. “They couldn’t; the breakers would sweep them away in a minute.”

“Look!”

For man is brave and man does fight, even in the face of injustice, in the face of odds. Thus did Martin Loughran, in the fore rigging of the *Zeitgeist*, as with set jaws he struggled upward toward the stump of the topmast. Between the trucks of the fore and maintopmasts ran a horizontal line of wire. It is called the “triatric stay,” and Loughran was climbing to it. Dan—all the *Fledgling’s* crew and the crew of the *Sovereign*—foresaw his intention, and stentorian shouts, “You can’t do it!” bounded over the water. But the sailor did not pause, if, indeed, he heard their warnings.

Slowly, laboriously he climbed. He stretched up one hand and grasped the stay. Up went the other hand. Then out against the glooming sky was limned the swaying form, working its way along the triatic stay hand over hand, in an effort to reach the mainmast. A faint cheer came from the men in the main rigging, while two of the *Fledgling’s* crew cheered, and two bowed their heads in agony, and Dan sobbed aloud.

“Look at him,” cried Dan. “Oh, God!”

“A sandy man cashin’ in,” muttered Mulhatton solemnly.

Out, out worked the swaying form. But he had more than one hundred feet to go. Twenty-five feet—progress ceased. It hung there silent, that figure—it seemed almost an eternity. It hung as silent as a piece of sail and as fitfully swaying. Suddenly one hand relaxed and fell limp. It was as though something had sucked the breath from every onlooker. The hand was feebly raised in a futile clutch to regain the lost hold. It fell again. Still there was silence.

A dark form cleaved the gloom and lay in a black huddle upon the lumber amidships, until a boarding wave kindly removed it and spurned it upon the beach as it would a drowned dog. Ten minutes later the foremast went and the life-savers, dashing into the surf, took out of the rigging a dead sea-cook.

And still the tugs lay like vultures awaiting carrion. Both had come down to the wreck in the hope of getting a line over her and pulling her from the sands, for which there would have been ample reward. But it was too rough to approach her and she was too far gone to warrant salving, even were it possible. But there were men dying before their eyes and no one was lifting a hand. Dan was in a red-headed glare of emotion. He was too young to look upon such things calmly. He turned his eyes from the wreck to

the *Sovereign*, just as her bow went up on a wave, showing the red underbody. And it reminded him of the yawning mouth of some sea monster hungry for prey.

“We’re lying here like bloodsuckers!” he yelled. “Waiting for salvage while good men are dying! Dying—and we’re doing nothing! Fellows,” he roared, “I’m going to take the tug in to her. I’m not afraid of a risk to save the lives of brave men.”

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"All right, Cap'n," said Mulhatton, "you know we'll go with you. But there's no use in bein' fools. Take the tug in—yes. But how'll you take her out again?"

Dan glared across the heaving waters with bloodshot eyes. "No use; you couldn't, couldn't get her out again. No, you couldn't." He repeated this several times. "Is there anything that could?" he added finally.

He looked at his men for the answer, but their eyes were still fastened on the wreck with almost hypnotic fascination.

"Her deck-load's beginning to shift. It'll be clear off soon and that'll take the other mast," announced Noonan.

One of the men in the rigging, a giant, tow-headed fellow, suddenly went crazy,—at least so it seemed. For his lips writhed in a haunting scream as he whipped out his knife and cut his lashings. Then he turned a bloodless face toward the *Fledgling*, uttered a short, rasping shout, and jumped into the sea. A great wave seized him greedily and swirled him high. Dan caught a fleeting glimpse of that face, turned reproachfully, it seemed, toward him.

It set him crazy too. His mind was working like lightning.

"Mul," he screamed, "launch the lifeboat, with you fellows holding on to a line from her bow! We're to windward, and she'll drift right down to the wreck. Then you can haul us back again. It's been done before. God, why didn't I think of it sooner!"

Mulhatton looked at his Captain closely.

"One chance in a thousand that our boat would live to make the trip, Cap'n," he said.

Dan snarled his impatience.

"One chance in ten thousand, one chance in a million, I'll take it!" he cried in a sharp, metallic voice. "I never saw a man die until to-day—I'll see no more, God willing."

Without a word Mulhatton turned and rushed for the lifeboat.

"Remember, I go in that boat," yelled Dan as he followed his mate. But Mulhatton only turned back a defiant look. Together they wrenched the boat from its blocks and lowered it to Noonan, standing below on the main deck astern. Crampton, the engineer, was at the wheel, while Whitey Welch stood by the engines. As the lifeboat was straining on the top of a swell, Mulhatton attempted to leap in, but was viciously punched back by Dan, who then sprang out five feet and sprawled in the stern sheets.

“Damn!” cried the disappointed mate as he sprang to Noonan’s side and seized the line, which was already paying out.

Into the riot went Dan. There was neither mercy nor tolerance in the waters,—the waves ripped all about in wanton fury; the spume cloaked the face of them in wet clouds and the sea hollows lay like black pits. But merciless and intolerant as were the waters, Dan asked no odds of them. Crouching in the stern with one oar dug deep, he was hurled on his errand of mercy. The *Sovereign* whistled its commendation, while ashore the spectators

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and life-savers stood breathless. A stealthy wave slashed the oar, almost pulling his shoulder from its socket, but he kept the oar. Aye, he kept it and cursed the wave that sought to take it away. On, on, as determined, as indomitable as the elements. A wave cut the boat full. It skidded on its side and righted. A comber rose green behind, hiding the *Fledgling*. It caught the lifeboat before it broke. It hoisted it high and then, passing on, expended its crushing force against the wreck ahead. And Dan laughed, and the spindrift flying like buckshot beat against his teeth. On, on, until the wreck, boiling in water, loomed ahead. On past the stern of the wreck shot the small boat, until it was just under the lee of it. There he signalled to his men to pay out the line no more.

“Jump!” he called to the three men in the rigging. First jumped Daniel James, and Dan caught him out of the waters and hauled him in. And he caught the next, the boat careening, shipping a rush of water. As Captain Ephraim crouched for the leap, the sough of the rotten hull, working and heaving like the carcass of a shark, was bursting out in a score of places and the lumber deck-load rose and fell and quivered and flailed huge planks into the waves. The end was near. Dan shouted the skipper to hurry. Ephraim obeyed, and had fought his way through the caldron to the boat and was dragged aboard, when suddenly, with a great straining sigh, the hull of the wreck parted amidships, both ends sinking in the waters. A comber rushed in between, swelling and hissing. The lumber deck-load rose in the air like a living thing. The remaining fastenings holding it to the deck parted, and there was a rending and grinding as it slued off into the sea, carrying with it the main-mast, which crashed down and impaled the bar on which the wreck rested.

The currents had carried the rowboat almost—quite, in fact—in front of this terrible heaving mass of wood, one hundred feet long and chained together to a height of ten feet—and only the mainmast, which seemed to be serving as a sort of anchor, held it. Dan saw the danger, and the shouts of those on the *Fledgling* told him that they had seen it too. The line leading from the boat to the tug was taut and singing, evidence that the men were hauling upon it. But the pull of the shoreward rushing waters was as great as their strength. The boat made no movement out of her dangerous position. Dan was sculling like mad, but his efforts, compared to the might of the sea, were puny. In deep silence the mass of lumber worried at its unforeseen anchor. It ripped free and, rolling and twisting in spineless abandon, bore down upon the lifeboat with crushing momentum. On it came. They began to pay out the line in order that the boat might keep ahead of it for a few extra minutes. But Dan knew there could be no salvation in that. He could see every foot of the advancing mass. He could see the hundreds of planks flailing out in the air like arms; he could see the thick water spurting through thousands of cracks and crevices; could hear the gnashing of plank on plank. Nearer it came, as powerful, as inexorable as the glacial drift. It rose before him in all its crushing might.

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Then he felt the boat, as though suddenly endowed with life, start forward, and, glancing at the *Fledgling*, saw that she had made a tangent course to the wreck in order that the boat could be pulled outward from it and away. Dan knew in an instant that they had lashed the line to the stern bitts and had taken the desperate chance, the only chance, of making the tug pull her lifeboat from danger. Could the little line stand the strain? That was the question. It was so tight that it vibrated like thin wire, and it was humming musically, monotonously. It held—the boat was moving! But the lumber was moving too. On it came. Ten feet—a plank wrenched clear of the mass and shot on ahead, ramming out the lifeboat's stern-board, above the water line. Another plank, as though hurled by some sinister force, sailed clear over Dan's head. Ten feet—the line was fraying out at the ring bolts. Just a second now—five feet. With one bound the lumber swept down, and past the stern of the boat, and Captain Ephraim fell to his knees and thanked his God.

The fight off Jones Island Inlet came at a time when it meant much to Dan. It was the deep sea, and he had measured his might with it. And as a man is dignified by the prowess of his opponent, so was Dan dignified by the prowess of the sea. Perhaps that was why the sea had always called Dan—faintly, dimly; far away sometimes, but always unmistakably. It came in every wind that blew; a voice that involved not the sea alone, but the things it stood for—a broader, deeper life and bigger things; more to do, a final and definite place to make. He had never met or been influenced by the big men—the men who think and teach and sing and do the world's work. His environment in these, his early years of manhood, had been far from them. He could touch them only in books, which were not entirely satisfactory. And so he learned from the sea and it spoke to him of breadth, and power, and determination, and majesty of character. Dan was instinctively seeking all these things, and in the work he was now doing he felt that he was nearer to them than he had ever been before.

CHAPTER V

THE LOSS OF THE "FLEDGLING"

One Fall afternoon, six months after the rescue of the men of the *Zeitgeist*, the *Fledgling*, as though sentient with the instinct of self-preservation, was struggling through the riot of wind and waves, seeking the security of the Delaware Breakwater, while ten miles back, somewhere in the wild half gloom off Hog Island, three loaded coal barges which she had been towing from Norfolk were rolling, twisting, careening helplessly to destruction—if, indeed, the seas had not already taken deadly toll of them.

Dan and two of his men were at the wheel spokes, which had torn the palms of their hands until they were raw and bleeding, and the dull light flooding in through the windows revealed the indomitable will of these men, the death-fight spirit which actuated them.

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Dan's face was bloodless and strained, and his hair fell across his eyes, while crouching beneath him, with hands on the under spokes, were the gigantic shoulders of his mate, the sweaty gray hair and the red, thick nape of the neck suggesting the very epitome of muscular effort; and on the other side, writhing and quivering, was the deck-hand, a study in steel and wire.

The afternoon was still young, but the heavens were darker than twilight, and the rocking sea was as black as slate, save where a comber, as though gnashing its teeth in fury, flashed a sudden white crest, which crumbled immediately into the heaving pall.

"Now, boys, together! Catch back that last spoke we lost!"

And while Dan's words were being shattered into shreds of sound by the shriek of the gale, the three men bent their backs in a fresh effort to put the *Fledgling's* nose a point better into the on-rushing waves.

They did it too. With a hiss and a crunch the bow swung in square to the watery thunderbolts and the stanch craft, survivor of a hundred perils, a ten-foot section of her port rail gone, a great dent in the steel deck-house forward, began to climb over the water hills with much of her usual precision—down on her side, clear to the bottom of a hollow, then settling on an even keel with a jerk, climbing the slaty incline, stiff as a church, then down, down, half on her side again, then up once more.

"She's making good weather of it," and Dan took his hands from the wheel, stood erect, and gazed through the after windows, searching a horizon which he could see only when the tug climbed to a wave top. He turned to his mate.

"There's no use hunting for those barges," he said tentatively. "When that tow-line broke back there, it seemed as though one of my heart strings went too. But there was nothing to do about it; nothing we could do. It was all we could do to work the *Fledgling* through."

"Most captains would 'a' cut them barges adrift long before the line broke," replied the mate; "no use thinkin' about them now; they've gone, long ago."

Dan worked his way along the pitching floor to the side windows. His face was tense and drawn. He had never lost a tow before—this was a part of his reputation. And now. . . . He turned slowly to resume his place at the wheel, when suddenly, as the tug was sidling down a wave, the tail of his eye caught a glimpse of a buff funnel protruding above the wave tops a good quarter of a mile away. His first impression was that the water had claimed all but the funnel. He was not sure. He waited. It seemed an age while the tug climbed to the top of the next comber. Slowly, slowly the buff funnel again came into view, and then as the tug still climbed he saw it all—a white, broad-waisted yacht cluttering in the grip of the waters, throwing her stern toward heaven, reeling over,

taking water on one rail, letting it through the opposite scuppers, sticking her bow into the waves and rising, shaking off the water like a fat spaniel. Puffs of steam were escaping jerkily from the whistle valve, and, although Dan could not hear, he knew she was whistling for assistance.

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It was all a quick, pulsating scene, as one views something in a kinetoscope, and then it was lost as the waters rose between them. Dan stumbled over to the wheel. He was not a man of many words.

"Boys, there's work for us to do. There's a yacht in distress about a quarter of a mile off on the port hand. We'll go over and see."

"It'll mean throwing her head off from seas that we've been bucking since morning," said the mate. And the inflection cast into the words suggested no protest, only a reminder that it would be no child's play.

"Yes," said Dan simply, leaning forward to take advantage of the uproll of the tug to locate the yacht more exactly. "There—there—throw her off three points—— That's it," he added, as the tug floundered on her new course,—a course no longer into, but across, the waves, which now began to come from everywhere, buffeting the tug, keel and bow, rail and pilot-house—crazy cross-seas, fighting among themselves, slashing, crashing, falling over one another.

But on the *Fledgling* went, climbing the waves insanely now, sometimes bow on, sometimes crab-wise—but ever on. Each wave that was topped gave a better view of the yacht, also enabling those on that wallowing craft to see the tug, as evidence of which the continuous blasts of the whistle were borne to the towmen's ears.

Nearer, until the yacht was never lost to view. Evidently she was not under control; but, even so, it was plain that no high degree of intelligence was being exerted in handling her. She was not steaming at all, merely drifting in the trough, and none of the means to bring her head into the seas which sailors utilize at a pinch had even been attempted. Whatever was the matter with the yacht, Dan and his men were sure that the officers and crew were nothing less than blockheads.

Making a wide detour, they brought the tug around under the lee of the craft and about fifty yards away, where Dan, leaving the wheel to his men, seized a megaphone and ran on deck.

"What's the matter with you?" he shouted angrily through his megaphone, aimed toward a group of men on the shattered bridge. "Are you trying to see how quickly you can sink? Why don't you put her head up?"

A young officer in a wet and bedraggled uniform crawled along the swaying platform to the megaphone rack and, seizing a cone, shouted from a kneeling posture:

"Help us, for God's sake! Our thrust shaft has cracked!" The words came faintly. "Our Captain was washed from the bridge. . . . Tried to put out sea anchor, but couldn't make

it hold without steerage way. . . . It broke adrift. . . . This . . . the *Veiled Ladye*, with Mr. Horace Howland and a party aboard."

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The *Veiled Ladye*! Absorbed as Dan was, he felt a momentary flash of surprise that the announcement of that name came to him almost as a matter of course. Through the long course of nearly two years the conviction that a time would come when he should once more meet the girl who had spoken to him from the *Veiled Ladye*'s deck at Norfolk had strengthened inexplicably, until he had come to accept it as an assured fact. Was she aboard that yacht now? Aboard that laboring section of gingerbread, in the hands of incompetents and poltroons? Was she? It could not be otherwise. And this was the nature of the meeting which had colored his dreams and intensified the ambitions of his waking moments!

A strange thrill quivered through him, and he glanced dazedly at Mulhatton, as a stout man in yachting garb stumbled to the officer's side and snatched the megaphone from his hands.

"On board the tug!" he cried. "I'm Horace Howland of the Coastwise and West Indian Shipping Company. We're helpless; we can't last an hour unless you hold our head up. Engineer making a collar for cracked shaft . . . have it made and fitted in twelve hours. Twelve hours. Hold us up that long and we are safe! Do you hear me . . . twelve hours!"

Dan looked at the yacht, rolling to her beam ends almost every minute. It would be a bad business fooling with that craft; and with iron will he fought back his surging emotions. He had his tug and his men to consider, if not himself. His tug was weakened by her long struggle, and to the best of his judgment he knew it would be wiser for his own interests to go his way, leaving the yacht to her life fight, while the *Fledgling* fought hers. And yet he could not go away. Aside from the wild theory that the girl might be aboard, there were lives to save over there. That was it. There were lives to save over there. Duty called—a stern, clear call; at least, Dan so heard it, and he was willing to answer it with his life, if necessary. But he did not think of that part of it. It was the lives of those imperilled persons that concerned him. He and his tug were there that they might live. There were women aboard; he had seen their white faces gazing imploringly at him through the cabin portholes—bright, beautiful lives—and men in the glorious prime of their youth. His heart went out to them, and as Mr. Howland laid aside his megaphone the problem was clear. He waved his megaphone in assent and then, levelling it at the yacht, he cried:

"All right. Float a hawser down to us; you are pitching too wild-eyed to come within heaving-line distance." Passing the pilot-house on his way below, he nodded and smiled at the men inside. There had been no need to question them. They had been too long with Dan, and too faithful, not to catch his drift of mind in all emergencies long before he expressed it in words; too brave and hardened to danger, in fact, to care what Dan wanted, just so that he was willing to lead them—to share with them the work to be done.

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In the course of a few minutes a small raft, bearing a heaving-line which the yachtsmen had streamed, drifted down upon the tug, clearing the bow by a few feet. Dan leaned out and caught it with his boat-hook, bringing the line aboard. Then he and his fireman tailed on to the end of it, bringing in the attached hawser hand over hand. This they hurried to the stern bitts, taking a pass also around the steam winch. Leaving the fireman to watch it, Dan dashed into the pilot-house and sounded the jingle-bell in the engine-room.

For a few minutes the churnings of the screw were discounted by the bulk of the yacht plus the elemental forces which sought to keep her head just where it was—in the trough of the sea. The tow-line vibrated itself into a blur, the tug strained and quivered and groaned.

“Why don’t you help us in some way, you fools!” roared Dan, struggling at the wheel. “You can at least steer, or—”

Before he could proceed there was a report like the bark of a cannon and a torn and shredded end of hawser came writhing and twisting up out of the sea, sluing across the face of the pilot-house as though possessed of all the venom of the living thing it resembled—a python.

There was silence on both the tug and the yacht for a full minute. Dan watched the distressed craft as she tossed up her bow and glided sternward from his view behind a jet of black wave, while the *Fledgling* seemed to slide from under his feet in the opposite direction. As the yacht came up again he could see that this mishap had scattered all semblance of fortitude to the winds. Except for the young second officer, Mr. Howland, and a sailor, all holding their places pluckily on the bridge, terror reigned. Sailors, men in yachting costumes, and women with hair flying flashed along the decks or in and out of doorways, while forward a group of three young men lashed to a big anchor held out their hands toward the tug.

Dan turned to his deck-hand, his face hard and determined.

“Pete,” he said, “go down and get out the double cables. Welch is astern and will help you. I’m going to swerve the tug in close and you heave the lines aboard when we re near enough. We won’t trust any more to their rotten hemp.”

As a knight, with reckless abandon, might have urged his steed into the very midst of his foes, so Dan urged the *Fledgling* up to the wildly pitching yacht. Nearer the tug advanced, so near that the tugmen could see the streaks through the red underbody. Nearer yet, head on, and then the wheel was swung broad, while Dan leaned out of the pilot-house, looking down at the two men forward, who were whirling weighted heaving-lines about their heads like lariats. “Now, now then!” yelled Dan, as the mate in response to a wave of his hand began to sheer off from the yacht. “Aye, aye,” came the

replies from below, and a second later two lines whistled clean over the forward decks of the white craft. Eager hands seized them and hauled in the great cables and made them fast.

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Just for an instant Dan and the mate peered at the yacht to see if the lines had carried, an instant of which the wily sea took full advantage. An oily wave reared the bow of the yacht while the swell of its predecessor slued the *Fledgling* in and around and upward, so that the two craft reared, side by side, bows up and not more than five feet apart. A scream fluttered from the bridge; men's voices raised in curses at the clumsy yacht were borne from the pilot-house. Dan, however, had not time for words; he stood with hands on the wheel watching the red, reeking bow rearing almost in his face; watched it, cool, ready to take the first chance of escape, if the present danger offered such a chance. Slowly, easily, the wave passed, and down came the two bows with a crash. The bow of the *Veiled Ladye* just grazed the *Fledgling's* weather rail, tearing off a fender, while Dan signalled full speed astern. It was fortunate that he had his wits about him, for the erratic yacht, instead of falling back as she naturally should have done, suddenly moved forward under the impulse of a swell, butting the tug, almost gently, about ten feet from the bow. Then the tug backed clear, and, breasting the waves, began to take up the slack cables. A hundred yards she went and then stopped headway with a jerk as the men slipped the cables over the bitts.

The collision had not hurt the tug apparently, although there was no telling whether or not the jolt had weakened her structurally. But Dan was not the man to worry about eventualities. An hour's straining and hauling resulted in bringing the yacht's head full into the seas, and then at four o'clock Dan snuggled his craft to, for the long eleven hours' fight.

The afternoon waned into twilight, softly, impalpably, and the twilight wavered into night. A few lights quivered from the reeling yacht and her mast-head lamps described glimmering arcs against the heavens. Silent and grim, the tug took the brunt of all the seas had to give—nose piercing the very heart of the waves, splitting them with beautiful precision, rising, falling, reeling, pitching, but, through all, hanging to the yacht with undying tenacity. So she fought, as she had ever fought.

Contrary to the promise of the afternoon, the gale had not abated; the seas, if anything, raced more fiercely, and the wind, which tore the dark with a wailing moan, departed with a venomous shriek. Dan and his mate stood hard at the wheel, Noonan, the deck-hand, was stationed astern, and Crampton, the stanch old chief, and his fireman were down in the heart of things, nursing the engines.

They were well nursed, too. The steady throb, the clank of the throws, and the hum of the eccentrics rose to the pilot-house in cadence as regular as the heart-throbs of a healthy ox. And the while Dan and his mate gingerly manipulated the wheel so that the strain on the tow-line was constant and even, with no slack or sudden jerks, which were truly to be avoided in the face of the mad sea.

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The sea grew indefinite in the dark,—as indefinite as the undulations of a black shroud. It was as though the tug were tossing through some mysterious agency. There were times when the tall mast-head lights astern showed not a foot above the rim of that more intense darkness which marked where the water ended and the horizon began.

Again there were times when the glowing specks seemed to scale the heights of a sable vacuum. Once a section of the rail went ripping away in the gloom and once a shredded small boat was torn and hurled into the waters.

One hour, two hours, three hours, four hours—and still the wild night went on, and still the *Fledgling* held to her work. Crampton, the chief engineer, struggled up from the engine-room at nine o'clock, his swart face lined and creased.

"She's like an old man dyin'," he said, and his voice quivered. "The old injines are drivin' as hard and brave as a man with a club; but a lot of the kick has gone out of them. Nothin' the matter of 'em that I can see—but just feel. My old injines are feelin' about fur an excuse to cave in."

"Well, hang on," replied Dan, "and don't tell me what you feel may happen; I can think up enough things myself."

"Well," and Crampton hesitated. "I didn't come up here fur anythin' I've said—Cap'n," he added in a low voice; "we're takin' in water."

An imprecation trembled on Dan's lips, and one of his hands left the wheel in an involuntary gesture of resignation. Then he shut his teeth tight and talked slowly through them.

"Where the yacht hit us?" he asked.

"Yes, forward; it's opened up a little under the floor plates—about twenty strokes a minute I should say; the force-pump's kept it level so far."

"Good," said Dan; "there's nothing else to do but keep it going."

"Nothing," said the chief, and he reeled out of the pitching pilot-house.

Two, three, four hours more—the water had gained nine inches, so the chief reported through the speaking-tube. But still the *Fledgling* held her tow, and Dan and Mulhatton stood silent at the wheel, the rush of the wind, which had long torn out the double windows, swirling their hair into their eyes and numbing their torn and bleeding hands. The elements, as though divining the weakening of the tug,—a tug which often had laughed them to scorn,—were making mad work of it; there were strange sounds, unforeseen blows—but still the tug hung on.



There came an hour in which she did not rise to the waves as she had been doing,—an hour when the leak gained terribly, and when the *Fledgling*, struggling bravely, if wearily, upward to meet a wave, would stop half-way with a jerk and a sigh, the wave gouging along the deck—breaking over the stern-board.

They could feel her going in the pilot-house. But she hung on to her lines with the grip of death. Dan stood at his mate's side, his eyes fixed straight ahead into the darkness. He had cast his die; he had chosen his lot—now the toll was to be paid. He thought, too, of the men who, without question, had taken their stand with him. He reached out his left hand and placed it gently on his mate's shoulder.

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“Good boy, old Mul,” he said, in words which, however inadequate, revealed all the heart of his meaning. And Mulhatton simply shifted his feet and gazed ahead, his hard, light eyes as expressionless as marble disks.

The dawn came filtering across the raven waters as the bloodless hand of an old man quivers across a chess-board,—gray dawn, cold dawn, even more merciless than the night, in that it heralded the rise of the sun to smile over the evil wrought in the darker hours. Astern, the white yacht alternately pierced the sky with her bow and sought the depths.

Suddenly a long, triumphant scream of a whistle rang across the dawn—a roll of water parted a retiring wave. The big white yacht moved of her own power. Again the whistle sounded, as though in joy that the vessel had at last found herself. Once more. . . . She mounted the waves in proud defiance. . . . The tow-lines slackened.

“Cast off, cast off!” megaphoned an officer, while two of his sailors threw the ends of the cables into the sea. The deck-hand and fireman started to bring them in, while Dan gave the signal for Crampton to go ahead.

The tug started timidly forward and then hesitated and trembled. A wave hit her, and she rocked like a cork. The jump had all gone out of her. Another wave struck her and almost hove her down, and then another wave snapped her back again, jerking out the funnel, which hissed overside into the sea. Half on her side, she clanked into the trough. She struggled to right herself and had partly succeeded, when a mighty wave smote her viciously on her listed side. She went over to her beam ends and lay there a second, while Dan and his men shot through the windows, off from the deck, into the sea. Another instant and the *Fledgling* rolled her keel to the morning light and swiftly disappeared.

As Dan rose on a wave he saw her go, saw too, the white face of his engineer framed in the engine-room doorway, which a wave filled just as she turned, obliterating the face forever.

The next few minutes were nothing but a buffeting, swirling confusion. Suddenly a line struck Dan’s face . . . his hands closed upon a circular life preserver. . . . The next instant he lay gasping on the deck of the *Veiled Ladye*, beside his deck-hand and mate.

Half an hour later, Dan, in warm clothes, sat upon the pitching deck of the yacht, at the doorway of the saloon.

The *Fledgling* gone and Welch and Crampton—that was all he could think of as he sat gazing into the gray of the waters, which in closing over the black tragedy immediately presented a surface as free from all evidence of guilt as the placid surface of a mill-pond. He had made himself in the *Fledgling*,—had rounded to the measure of a man



aboard of her,—had grown in the plenitude of man's strength and will and courage and success. He felt the loss of his tug; it hit him hard; he suffered in every mental corner and cranny. And when the two men who had given their lives for him and for the yacht came to mind in all the clearness of their personality and devotion to him, his head sank on his hand and he groaned aloud.

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A hand was laid gently on his shoulder, and looking up, he saw Mr. Howland and a tall, beautiful girl by his side, both gazing at him from the doorway with eyes filled with compassion.

"You were the captain of the tug?" asked Mr. Rowland.

"Yes, Captain Merrithew," and Dan ceased speaking and gazed at the deck.

"You owned the tug?"

"No," replied Dan.

"Captain Merrithew, I cannot say anything adequate. I appreciate what you have done—I cannot say how much."

"Oh, father," broke in the girl, "tell him it was noble!"

[Illustration: "Oh, father," broke in the girl, "tell him it was noble!"]

"It was noble," resumed Mr. Howland. "It was big and fine—you saved a score of lives, and for them you gave your tug and part of your crew. I cannot reward such men as you—I can pay just debts, though. Your men shall not suffer; neither shall the families of those who were lost."

Then he paused a minute and reached behind the door jamb, bringing out a water-soaked bit of plank. "One of our best men picked this from the water. You had been clinging to it. I thought you might like to have it in your cabin."

It was the name board of the *Fledgling*.

CHAPTER VI

THE BRAVE AND THE FAIR

As Dan seized the strip with its gilt letters and was about to reply, the yacht slung sideways, and a wave arising amidships smote the deck-house a lusty, full-bodied blow. It suddenly occurred to the tugboat captain that the craft, all the time he had been aboard trying to collect his bewildered senses, had acted strangely. He turned to Mr. Howland.

"What's the matter with your yacht?"

Howland was a good deal of a thoroughbred, and yet he could not conceal his eagerness as he spoke.

“The yacht was just what I wanted to speak to you about, Captain,” he said. “I know I have no right to ask anything more of you, but if you have pulled together, I think we seem to need your assistance. Our Captain was washed off the bridge, and the first mate is below with a broken leg. The situation, I am afraid, is beyond young Terry, the second mate; I—”

As the import of what Mr. Howland was trying to say flashed across Dan’s mind, he turned abruptly, without waiting for the completion of the sentence, and ran for the bridge.

Without a glance at the second officer, who seemed on the verge of a complete funk, he shouldered the two sailors from the wheel and hauled on the spokes with all the strength of his long arms. As the yacht began to respond he seized the indicator crank and called for full speed ahead. The whistle of the bridge speaking-tube sounded viciously, and Dan, placing his ear to the receiver, caught the words of the old chief engineer as they flowed up in profane vehemence.

“Say, do you know what you want up there? If I had a man down here who knew an engine from a plate of fruit, I’d ‘a’ been up there and snaked you off the bridge long ago. I’ve been on my back under that triply damned shaft for twelve hours and now—” the rest of the sentence was an assortment of well-chosen oaths.

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The outburst greeted Dan's ears sweetly. Evidently Howland had a man down below the water line, anyway. He grinned as he clapped his lips to the tube.

"I've just come aboard to take charge of this craft," he yelled; "now you do as I say and do it quick. See!"

A great relieved, blasphemous roar came up the tube, and the next instant the engines were laying down to their work.

The bow began to cut nicely into the waves, and Dan turned to the two sailors.

"Here, you boys, tail on here and steer as I tell you." Whereupon, fingering a pocket compass, he called the course, after which he fastened the little instrument to the wreck of the binnacle.

"We will pull through," he said, turning to Mr. Howland, who, with his daughter, had followed him to the bridge. "We are somewhere off the Winter Quarter Shoals; if I can get the sun at noon I'll know exactly; anyway, we will make Norfolk if that shaft holds. If it doesn't—well, banking on that engineer you've got down below, I think it will hold." Then inclining his head in the direction of Miss Howland, he added, "I'd advise you to go below, Miss Howland." He thrilled as he uttered her name, "You're wet; and then—I may have to swear."

"I should love awfully to hear some one swear to some purpose," she replied. "Oh, I want to stay," she cried, speaking to her father, as Dan suddenly turned his back and spoke to the second mate. "Father, I am going to stay. The rest are seasick or frightened to pieces. I feel braver up here."

She was perfectly candid. She did feel braver there on the bridge. For Dan was the one dominant personality aboard the yacht. In her eyes he typified bravery, skill, strength—safety, in a word, for all. It was as though out of the wrack of despair and the overriding elements had arisen the spirit of a man and all that at best he stands for, to reclaim the lost honors of the darker hours. And so she clung to him with her eyes and felt she could smile at danger; her soul went out to him and enveloped him with gratitude and tenderness. And she neither knew nor cared whether in these emotions was the uprearing of woman's submerged, primal nature, giving all to the sheer power of the stronger sex, or whether it was the result of a burden of dread suddenly lifted from her heart—it made no difference which. She was living the moment—here and now—clear, serene, justified, and ennobled.

And standing thus she watched him as he snapped the yacht slantwise from the grip of succeeding sea hollows and guided her over the gray hills, panting and straining, with much of pudgy deliberation, but surely.

“We will make it easily,” said Dan, “if nothing happens.”

“Good,” cried Mr. Rowland, and, taking his daughter by the arm, he added, “come below, Virginia, and give them the good news. Your friend Oddington has forgotten his cigarettes for a full twenty-four hours, and the Dale girls are candidates for a sanitarium.” There was a chuckle of relief in his voice.

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Dan turned to watch the girl as she followed her father from the bridge. He was certain he had never seen anything so inspiring as Virginia Howland standing braced square to the wind, her trim blue skirt winding and unwinding; her cap in her hand; the wind tossing her heavy hair in myriads of glowing pennons, which beat on the blush-surged cheeks, alternately hiding and disclosing the sparkle of the deep gray eyes or the flash of perfect teeth from between parted lips.

It was a picture upon which he permitted himself to ponder but an instant, however, for the wind was shifting again from the northeast, growling ominously, and the yacht, humping along at a ridiculous speed of six knots, made the situation less satisfactory than it had been. He spoke to Terry over his shoulder.

"As you see," he said, "we're running into some new sort of hell," and he glanced impatiently at the potential riot ahead. "Have these men keep the course and look out for things, will you? I'm going down to the engine-room for a few minutes."

"Very well, sir," said the young officer.

Dan found old Jim Arthur, the chief, swearing softly as he moved about his engines with a long-spouted oil can.

"It is beginning to breeze again," said Dan. "I'm the new Captain and I came down to tell you I don't think much of your machinery, and to ask if the shaft will hold out."

"The shaft'll hold," said the engineer. Then he paused and looked at Dan in supreme disgust. "Engines!" he snorted. "I've been holdin' 'em together with my fingers since we left San Domingo. Cap'n, they'd been fine for a Swiss cuckoo clock. Why, they're only held together by gilt paint and polish. See how old Howland's had 'em painted—like a bedizened old maid! I do believe he's got 'em perfumed. Well, they may hold—"

Dan, who had been glancing about the engine-room, interrupted the engineer's pessimistic outburst.

"What are your force pumps going for?" he asked.

"Well, it ain't fur to water no flowers," said Arthur, beckoning Dan to the shaft tunnel, where a foot and a half of frothy water was rolling to and fro, slushing against the stuffing box, laving the engine-room bulkhead.

Leaking! Dan's first impulse was to drop his hands then and there and let the yacht sink or do what she would for all he cared. He had fought out his fight with a better craft than this and had lost her. He did not yield to this; in truth, before he could think of yielding there came a second impulse—to relieve his mind of several hundred accumulated metaphors, to which inclination he surrendered unconditionally, while Arthur, in the face of the verbal torrent, gazed at the source in humble admiration.

“How—how much is she taking in?” the young man finally gasped.

“About thirty strokes a minute. I’d ‘a’ whistled up the tube about it before, only I thought you had enough to fill your mind.”

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"How does it strike you?" asked Dan.

"It's gained only six inches in the past hour. I will say that much. But if you ask me my honest opinion, I'd say this rotten old pleasure hull is a-gettin' ready to open up and spread out like a—like a—balloon with the epizooetic."

"All right, when she begins, come on up with your men without asking leave. Report every half-hour. I'll be on the bridge, of course. If I can pick up a steamship I'll call her and desert ship; if not—well, we're somewhere outside the Winter Quarter light-ship. I'll need about five hours of the speed we're making to pick up the light vessel and beach the yacht in the lee of Assateague; maybe not quite five hours, I can't say exactly."

"I think we can keep ahead of the water we're makin' that long," replied Arthur, cheerfully.

As Dan regained the bridge, the bad news he had received below was slightly compensated for by the fact that the storm seemed to be taking a new kink, swirling away to sea. The gray combers, however, were still disagreeably to be reckoned with. The second officer had by this time pulled himself together, and as he reported to Dan, the young Captain was happy to feel that he had at least a lieutenant who could be counted on. Now if Mulhatton were only with him—but "Mul" was below, flat on his back, suffering technically from submersion, and so were the other men of the *Fledgling* who had been pulled aboard the yacht.

At ten o'clock Arthur reported that the water had gained another six inches.

As Dan snapped back the tube a burst of laughter from the saloon reached his ears. Seasickness, fear, everything evil had been forgotten in the spirit of confidence and assurance of ultimate safety which Dan's skill and personality had infused throughout the wallowing craft. He shrugged his shoulders, staring vacantly into the angry sea.

At length his eyes turned to the distress signals he had ordered hoisted; and suddenly the gulf between his lot in life and theirs, which the merriment suggested, disappeared, and his emotions thereby aroused,—emotions not untinged with self-pity, changed to deepest sympathy for those light-hearted ones who might soon be plunged into that gloom which heralds death. Grim, silent, he turned to his work, determined that so far as in him lay no shadow of death should invest a single one of those persons who must find so much in life to make it worth while. Another hour passed while the yacht stumbled her clumsy course to safety. Arthur reported another half-foot; in all three feet six inches of water swishing against the engine-room bulkhead.

"It will keep seepin' through," he said, "and wop! Suddenly the whole bulkhead'll go."

“Don’t get caught,” replied Dan. “Give us three more hours, chief. Oh, I say, there’s not a drop getting into the fire room yet? Thank God for that!”

“For what?”

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He faced about quickly and looked into the eyes of Virginia Howland. She was pale, but her face was brave. "I had just come out on deck," she said, "because somehow I was getting nervous—I wanted to be—to be near the Captain." She smiled. "I heard you talking through the speaking-tube; I didn't mean to listen—pardon me; I couldn't help it. We're in danger, then, are we? Don't hesitate to answer truthfully, Captain Merrithew."

"Why," replied Dan, "we—steady there, Mr. Terry; you men at the wheel attend to your business. Excuse me," turning to the girl, "danger—why, we've been in danger all the time; else I wouldn't be up here."

"You are evading," said the girl, slowly. "But perhaps you are right. I can say I trust you, Captain—we all do. I want to tell you again how we all appreciate your—what you have done—putting the yacht straight and—"

"I am doing it for myself as much as for you. More, perhaps; who knows?"

The girl gazed intently at his square-cut, bronzed face. Then she looked straight into his steel-gray eyes, peering hard ahead from under the flat peak of a cap he had picked up on the bridge.

"Yes," she said, as though speaking to herself, "I think I know." Then she started with an involuntary gesture.

"Haven't I seen you somewhere before, Captain Merrithew? Yes, yes, I have. Where could it have been? Do you recall?"

"Yes," was the simple reply. "I recall. It was about two years ago, at Norfolk, when you were at the coal docks on this yacht."

Virginia flushed eagerly and was about to say something, when some flashing thought, perhaps a realizing sense of their relative positions, closed her lips. "I remember very clearly now." She spoke quietly, then she closed her eyes for a second; when she opened them they were stern and hard.

"Captain Merrithew," she said, as though to hasten from the subject, "I know we are in danger. Your silence has said as much. Yet the yacht seems to be going finely—"

Dan made no reply.

"Do you think I am a coward? Is that the reason you are silent?"

Dan made no attempt to conceal his annoyance.

“Well, Miss Howland, if you are not a coward, if you can keep what you know to yourself, listen: We’re taking in a little water. It’s a race between the yacht and the leak; the yacht ought to win out. Now you know as much as I do.”

“I am not frightened; my curiosity is natural. Is there a chance that the yacht may not get where you are taking her?”

“To the Assateague beach—no, I don’t think there is—if all goes well.”

“If all goes well! Then there is a chance—a chance we may—”

“Oh, we’ll be all right.” Dan was temperamentally straightforward and honest, and his assertions were uttered with a tentative inflection which fell far from carrying conviction to the aroused senses of the girl.

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She stepped closer to Dan.

“May I say something? We are in danger. I have been thinking of things since you came aboard—since I have been sitting in the saloon with the men who are different—”

Dan could see that the girl, always evidently one of dominant emotions, was overwrought, and something told him she had no business to express the thoughts which filled her mind, that she would be sorry later that she had spoken. He had interrupted her by a gesture. Now his voice came cool and even.

“Miss Howland, don’t. I’ve got to take care of this yacht.”

A quick sense of just what he meant shot through the girl’s mind. She raised her eyes and looked at him straight. They were blazing, not altogether with anger. She trembled; she flushed and moved uncertainly. Then, without a word, she turned and left him.

“A half-foot more water in the last half-hour,” reported Arthur.

As Dan turned to Terry, that officer silently pointed to the northward, where a tall column of black smoke seemed to rise from the waters. A steamship! Yes, but was it coming toward them? Was it going away? Or would it pass them far out to sea? For fifteen minutes he watched it through his binoculars, and then he glanced down to the deck and called to a sailor to send Mr. Howland to the bridge.

“Mr. Howland,” said Dan, as the owner approached him, “I suppose Miss Howland has told you our fix.”

“Yes, but she has told no one else.”

“Bully for her!” exclaimed Dan.

“She said you were hopeful.”

“More so now than ever before, I was making for the beach, but now—there’s a steamship coming down on us. I wasn’t sure at first, I am now. That smoke out there is heading dead for us. I am going to slow the boat down to steerage way and wait for her to come up. It’s better than trying to make for Assateague; it’s better to wait.”

“Will the bulkhead hold?”

Mr. Howland asked his question in the even monotone which had characterized all his questions.

“I think so; if it doesn’t, we’ll get everybody off in the rafts and the launch; the sea is going down by the minute.”

Mr. Howland glanced down at the deck where the crew of Scandinavians, inspired by the cool, cheerful commands of their new Captain, were working nonchalantly in preparing for eventualities. From amidships came the clatter of men trying to repair the launch, the one boat which had not been carried away in the night's storm. Others were clearing the life rafts so they could be launched without delay. He glanced at Dan with admiring eyes.

"I want to compliment you, Captain Merrithew," he said. "You have your crew well in hand."

"Thank you," replied Dan, "if you will keep your party in hand there'll be no danger at all. I don't care what happens, with the sea falling."

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Another half-hour. The steamship, a stout coaster, had now climbed over the horizon. Mr. Howland, through the glasses, had picked out her red-and-black funnel and recognized her as one of his own boats. But it had plainly come to a race between the steamship and the straining bulkhead. No need now to tell any one of the situation. The *Veiled Ladye* was plainly settling astern. The engine-room bulkhead was quivering, ready to break. Arthur and his men had piled up from the engine-room, the engines still pulsing with no one to watch them. The sailors were splendid, going about their work quietly, calmly. They had carried the injured mate, groaning with his broken leg, to the deck. Mrs. Van Vleck, Mr. Rowland's sister, the chaperone, sat with her niece's arms about her, passing in and out of successive attacks of hysteria. A sailor had knocked one of the young men of the party down to quiet an incipient exhibition of panic. Ralph Oddington and Reginald Wotherspoon stood at the rail, trying with nerveless fingers to roll cigarettes. Two of the girls were weeping in each other's arms. The water bubbled under the turn of the yacht's counters. Two of the sailors were discharging blank shells from the rifle astern in hopes of calling attention to the plight of the craft. The deck was a conglomerate, nervous confusion of smart yachting costumes, uniforms, and greasy overalls.

Dan, noting the flutter, leaned back from the wheel.

"Don't get excited down there," he roared. "If the bulkhead holds, we're all right. If it doesn't, there'll be plenty of time for all. Do you understand? We can float for a week on the ocean the way it is now."

"It won't hold long, Mr. Howland," he added to the man at his side, "but it will hold until that steamship reaches us. She's seen us and is coming like hell."

A few minutes later a joyous shout sounded from the men on the bridge, a cry vibrant with electricity, which thrilled through the yacht and finally trembled on all tongues. For the steamship had sized the situation and was fairly leaping toward them. Great clouds of smoke were belching from her funnel. They could see sparks mingling with the thunderclouds of sepia, and the *Veiled Ladye* hobbled woundily to meet her. On came the freighter; her hull was plainly discerned now, picking the waves from under her bluff bows and throwing them impatiently to either side.

Cries of joy and appeals for the succoring vessel to hurry sounded from the yacht's decks.

As the vessel drew nearer. Miss Howland ran to the bridge and took her father by the arm.

"Father!" she cried. "You must come now. Isn't there anything in your cabin you want to save?" With a muttered "By George!" Mr. Howland dived below and the girl faced Dan.

“Captain Merrithew—”

Oddington’s voice thrilling in joyous, cadence sounded from beneath the bridge.

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"Virginia, Virginia, where are you? Oh, up there! Come down quickly! Don't you see we are coming alongside? And Merrithew, old chap—Virginia, will you come! You are to be put aboard after your aunt. Hurry!" There was a half-note of proprietorship in his voice.

As the girl turned to leave, Dan gave the wheel to Terry and ran to the deck with a speaking-trumpet in his hand. As he passed Oddington, who had assisted Miss Howland from the bridge, he spoke to him quietly.

"The man with the broken leg leaves this ship first."

Below there was a dull crash and clouds of steam burst through the ventilators and the engine-room gratings. The bulkhead had succumbed, but no one cared now. The steamship was turning in about a hundred yards away. Dan directed his trumpet to the bridge.

"Scrape close alongside," he yelled. "Open one of your cargo ports and we'll board you through it."

The freighter's Captain had already anticipated this suggestion, and as the vessel slid alongside, Dan ranged the sailors along the deck.

In perfect order the mate with the broken leg was slid into the port as though he were merely being passed into another room. Then went the women, then the men of the party, and after them the sailors. Dan and Mr. Howland alone were left now. As the elder man prepared to enter the port he looked at Dan a moment and smiled.

"Some day I hope to cancel this debt."

They were simple words, but potentially they meant much to Dan. He was to find they involved the realization of dreams, ambitions he had long held; another rung on the ladder which eventually—— But there was no time to think of the future now. Turning from the porthole he ran along the deck, calling to make sure that every one was off. When he returned, Miss Howland and several others were leaning over the rail above.

"For heaven's sake, Captain Merrithew, will you please come off that yacht!" The girl's voice rang imperiously.

With a last look at the bridge upon which he had passed the recent thrilling hours, he leaped aboard the freighter, and when ten minutes later the white *Veiled Ladye* threw up her bow with a great clanking sigh and slid swiftly from view, Dan Merrithew was fast asleep in the Captain's cabin.

CHAPTER VII

DAN IS COMMANDED TO A PARTY

A week later, Dan, in accordance with an engagement made with Mr. Howland when parting with him at the railroad station at Norfolk, whither the rescuing vessel had taken the shipwrecked party, called at the office of the Coastwise and West Indian Shipping Company in the Bowling Green Building and asked to see the president.

It was a large office, filled with clerks and all of them busy. The young man who received the caller's request looked at him sharply and shook his head.

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"Mr. Rowland's engaged now," he said, "at a company meeting. If you'll call in an hour or two I'll find out if he will see you."

Dan drew from his pocket a card with a pencilled memorandum and glanced at it.

"He made an appointment with me for eleven o'clock to-day. So I guess I'll have to ask you to take in my card."

The clerk shrugged his shoulders and walked away. When he returned a few minutes later all signs of mistrust had vanished. Opening the gate with a sort of flourish he said:

"Mr. Howland says for you to come right in."

As Dan entered the president's office, Mr. Howland arose from a long, polished oaken table littered with papers, at which several men were seated, and advanced to meet him.

"Captain Merrithew," he said, "I am glad to see you again. And now," he added, the formalities of introducing Dan to the various officers of the company being completed, "I have gone into the matter of the men lost when the *Fledgling* sank and have sent a check for five thousand dollars to the wife of your engineer, Crampton, who I understand carried some life insurance, and a check for three thousand dollars to Welch's mother." His voice was crisp and business-like, but his manner intimated clearly the sympathy and gratitude which had dictated his gifts.

"Yes, sir, they are adequate," replied Dan, feelingly.

"I have sent checks to your mate, Mulhatton, who, I am informed, is still in the employ of the Phoenix Company, as well as that fellow Noonan and the steward; which brings us to you."

"Mr. Howland," said Dan, flushing, "I'm simply not—"

"Just a moment, if you please," interrupted Mr. Howland; "I assume you are qualified to navigate the ocean?"

"Yes," replied Dan, trembling slightly; "I've the best of broad ocean papers and seven harbor endorsements."

"That ought to be enough," smiled the vice-president, Mr. Horton, who seemed perfectly in touch with the trend of the situation.

"Yes," resumed Mr. Howland, "what I am getting at is this, Captain Merrithew. The Coastwise Transportation Company is looking for men like you. We want you with us, in short. As you probably know, we have a fleet consisting of steamers of various sizes,

but all pretty much the same type; that is to say, seaworthy, comfortable, and well engined. We cannot place you in command of one of our newest vessels, of course. But there is the *Tampico*, the commander of which, Captain Harrison, we are to retire for age. She is a good boat, running to San Blanco, and she is fitted for passengers; so you will find opportunity to develop your social proclivities, if you have any to develop.”

As Mr. Howland was talking the color had slowly departed from Dan’s face, and now, as the president ceased speaking and regarded the young man, he spoke haltingly, with dry lips.

“Do I understand you to mean that you are going to make me Captain of the *Tampico*?”

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"You are to understand that we have," corrected Mr. Howland.

"Mr. Howland, gentlemen," said Dan, "I—I can't say anything except—thank you—I—" He hesitated, confusedly.

"There's nothing for you to say," interpolated the president, "except that you'll go down to the ship, which is loading at Pier 36, East River, and assume command. Captain Harrison will remain aboard for two or three trips to break you in to the trade." There was that in his voice which intimated the end of the interview, and Dan with a bow was turning to leave, when Mr. Howland uttered an exclamation.

"Oh, by the way," he said, "here is a note my daughter asked me to give you. It will explain itself, I think; and since you are now serving under the house flag of this company, I can say only that obedience to orders contained therein is imperative. We all obey orders from that source," and with a chuckle Mr. Rowland turned to his confreres and was speedily immersed in other important affairs of the company.

Dan did not open the envelope in the office. First of all he wanted fresh air. The quick, calm, business-like manner in which his promotion had taken place; the noiseless, well-ordered, automatic opening of another door leading to the future of his ambitions, so utterly at variance with preconceived ideas in this regard, had all but unnerved him. He had always held it as assured that some day he should walk his own bridge. But until a half-hour ago, this day seemed still to lie far ahead, a day to be attained, well, he could not say exactly how—but at least with a sort of metaphorical roaring of guns and waving of flags, and great spiritual exaltation.

But now—a few short sentences, a handshake, and presto! Captain Merrithew, of the Coastwise line steamship *Tampico*, by your leave. The wonder of it all dazed him; yet withal he knew he had never before been so stirred to the very depths of his being. He was not yet in a position to estimate his good fortune in comprehensive terms. As a matter of fact, he did not try. One thought alone kept flaming through his brain—his age. Twenty-six, twenty-six; the numerals flew through his mind as though the years of his life were the most important elements in the situation.

By the time he reached the Battery sea-wall, he had somewhat adjusted his mental attitude, and, gazing with a degree of calmness over the waters of the bay toward the hills of Staten Island, he recalled the note from Miss Howland.

All along it had lain a pleasant substratum in his mind, and now as he tore open the envelope and read the contents, a peculiar, grim smile lighted his eyes for a second.

"DEAR CAPTAIN MERRITHEW:—Next Thursday we are going to have a reunion of the castaways at our house. It will be for dinner, and we have all agreed it will not be complete without the man who made this gathering possible.



"I am not going to let you make any excuse, for my dinner-party will have an empty space without you. It will be very informal. Father for several years has refused to wear evening dress at dinner, so none of the other men will. Now remember, I shall expect you on Thursday evening, at seven; you need not bother sending an acceptance.

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"Very sincerely yours,

"VIRGINIA WALTON ROWLAND."

Virginia met her aunt at the foot of the stairs, and, slipping an arm about her waist, laughed nervously.

"Well, my dear, to-night we entertain the tug-boat hero. It's horrid to feel so, but do you know I wish I had suggested to father that we have the dinner on one of his vessels. Do you remember last Fall, what fun it was? I have the impression, don't you know, that things would be less strained than here. He would find the atmosphere more adaptable."

"He? Oh, the tugman," laughed her aunt. "I shouldn't worry if I were you."

"I'm not worrying about that," protested the girl; "but oh, I don't know—I hate to have the success of a dinner in the air, especially when you have a sort of reputation in that way, don't you know."

"Nonsense," replied the older woman, glancing admiringly at the tall, lithe girl in her white evening gown as she moved through the drawing-room to the dining-room, where the butler was adding the final deft fillips to a centrepiece of roses, in which a candy yacht was sinking.

"You see," said the girl, pointing to a dinner card bearing Merrithew's name, "I am going to place him between you and me. Will you—won't you arrange things so he'll take you in. No; never mind! I'll arrange that—you're always such a dear about such things, and you won't mind, will you?"

"Certainly not," smiled her aunt, "I shall ask him to tow me in."

They both laughed. Their understanding was perfect. Ever since the older woman had entered her brother's house, years before, to care for a motherless child, the bond of sympathy between the two had been of the strongest, and throughout she had remained the best friend and counsellor, if only because she was the wisest.

When Dan entered the Howlands' drawing-room all the guests had arrived. He accomplished this difficult feat, which is considered an art in fashionable schools, with easy grace and unconsciousness and received Virginia's welcome courteously.

He wore a well-fitting blue suit of conventional cut and neither his hands nor his feet seemed to bother him a bit. And yet among the men of the company he stood out in sharp contrast. Miss Howland marked this particularly when Oddington presented himself with an air of good-humored camaraderie,—he, the successful young lawyer, with a growing reputation as a man about town and the glamour which surrounds the

most popular all-around man at his university still about him; a man who did well everything he tried to do, and able to give the impression that the things he could not do were not worth the attempt; whose every action, every word, every expression was marked with the undefinable stamp of the metropolis, and the various lessons it teaches. Merrithew, on the other hand, standing tall and broad-shouldered, looking about him as he talked, with quick, observant

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glances; a face weather-beaten, but not rough, a typical Anglo-Saxon fighting face, but kindly withal; certainly not truculent. Miss Howland had met young army and navy officers who had aroused in her similar impressions; she had, in fact, no difficulty in defining Merrithew's type. He was of the class which does strong things out of the beaten track; men who in the process of civilization have retained some of the wandering or combative or predatory instincts of earlier ages and have been set apart in the scheme of natural selection to fight battles, explore countries, kill wild beasts, navigate waters, to the end that a greater proportion of their fellow men may peaceably advance the interests of commerce, science, the arts, and, other affairs of a humdrum world.

Oddington took Miss Howland in. At the last moment her father had telephoned from the office he would be late and not to wait for him. This necessitated a hasty rearrangement of the dinner cards; and Mrs. Van Vleck was further disturbed by the butler, who was batting his eyes fiercely at the cringing second man, token that something had occurred, or more probably had been about to occur, to mar that service which was his pride.

Dan, therefore, who sat at her right, finding relief from the rapid-fire conversation which she had directed at him, obviously with intention to put him at his ease, found time to glance up and down the table. There were perhaps a dozen persons, and he recognized most of them as members of the *Veiled Lady's* party. Reginald Wotherspoon, upon dry land once more, out of danger, sure of himself, was bantering one of the girls across the table, in the dry, masterful tone of one who fancies he understands women; and the rest were laughing at the confused indignation which marked her replies.

Dan recalled this girl. She had been especially cool aboard the yacht; and certain pictures of Wotherspoon flashing through his mind, an amused smile lighted his eyes for an instant. Miss Howland, who at the moment had turned from Oddington, caught the smile, and following his gaze, instinctively divined the cause. She was not annoyed. On the contrary, she was pleased, for it indicated to her that Dan was perfectly at ease, and she noted, moreover, that he was dealing with the various courses with a greater degree of *savoir faire*, so to speak, than she had thought probable. She dismissed forthwith all fears she had entertained regarding Wotherspoon's prediction that "among the features of the dinner would be a lifelike imitation of a towboat skipper swallowing his knife."

He followed Mrs. Van Vleck's leads in conversation, and once responded with crisp cleverness to a gay remark addressed to him by a girl across the table. But he seemed to take it for granted that Miss Howland would be occupied with Oddington; and in fact

he had spoken to her but once, and then to thank her when she pushed a dish of almonds toward him.

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The girl had noted a similar tendency of late on the part of other men, but had thought of it only in as far as it had impressed upon her the fact that she and Ralph had grown to understand each other rather well and were very good friends. She had arrived at that age where she had begun to feel that perhaps, after all, this might be what the world called love and that women who attributed to the word emotions deeper, more absorbing, more thrilling, were mere sentimentalists, who derived their plans and ideas from a world of dreams or from fiction both classical and popular; or else they were women of deeper feeling than she knew herself to be.

It was all a problem. She had reason to feel that a time was approaching when Oddington might reasonably expect a clearer, better-defined relation. Whether she would be willing to grant this was another matter. It was possible she might; it was possible she might not. She did not know. It was a situation which perplexed if it did not inspire her, which interested if it did not thrill.

And yet now Dan's tacit aloofness piqued her. She admitted she did not understand him at all. Here was a man, a tugboat captain, of course a product of the water front; primarily, no doubt, a dock-rat, and yet a man who had not tangled himself in the use of his forks, who spoke in even, well-modulated tones, and looked like a gentleman. Miss Howland was not snobbish in these thoughts. She had never been a snob; she was simply considering facts. And she did not want him to be aloof.

"Captain Merrithew," she said in a tone designed to draw him and the others into general conversation, "Ralph—Mr. Oddington, has been saying things again about my favorite cousin Percy Walton."

Ignoring the polite chorus of mild expostulation, Miss Howland turned to Dan, speaking with great vivacity.

"Percy, you know, was educated to win football games for Yale, and at the last moment went to Princeton. But he did not play there, because Uncle Horace, his father, in a fit of disgust, made him go to work." She glanced smilingly at Oddington. "Mr. Oddington and Mr. Wotherspoon say he was proselyted by Princeton. We've had more fights about it—"

"Well, he was proselyted," laughed Oddington, "stolen from us bodily."

"Wasn't it some time ago?" asked Dan.

"Why, that's just the point," said Mrs. Van Vleck. "It was at least five or six years ago. I am afraid Ralph and Reggie will never be able to realize they are not undergraduates."

Oddington smiled.

“Oh, I don’t know,” he said. “At all events, it keeps us young. As for Walton, I’d be ashamed to own him for a cousin,” winking at Dan. “Why, Merrithew, all his family had been Yale from great-grandfather down.”

“There; you hear him, Captain Merrithew,” cried Miss Howland; “don’t you think that’s a horrid way to talk?”

Dan smiled, tapping lightly on the table with his fingers.

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"I don't believe he was stolen," he said slowly, as though not quite certain whether he ought to venture an opinion. "Whether he was or not, I don't believe he'd ever have made the Yale team or the Princeton eleven either."

Virginia started in her chair and glanced at him swiftly.

"Indeed!" she said, flushing. "You don't mean to say—what do you know about Percy Walton?"

"Now you're in for it, Merrithew," grinned Oddington. "What do you know about Walton?"

Dan picked up his dinner card and spun it between his thumb and forefinger for a few seconds, and then with a slight smile replied:

"Why, not a great deal. Next to nothing, personally." He paused a moment, and then glancing down at the table added, "I was captain of the eleven on which Walton played at Exeter."

* * * * *

After the guests had gone, Virginia, her father, and Mrs. Van Vleck sat for a few minutes in a small apartment between the drawing and dining rooms. The girl's eyes were bright.

"Well, father, I actually believe you could have knocked me down with a feather to-night."

Mr. Howland drew his cigar-cutter from his pocket and slowly inserted the end of a perfecto.

"I suppose you refer to Merrithew."

"Certainly," said Mrs. Van Vleck; "why in the world didn't you tell us, Horace?"

"Yes, why didn't you?" The girl had arisen and approached her father's chair. "You might have known, father dear, that both Aunt Helen and I lay awake nights wondering whether he would bring a boat-hook or a sou'wester to the dinner, and do—oh, all sorts of outlandish things, making us the joke of the season. And to think—a football captain in Percy's class at prep school, quiet, easy-mannered—"

Mr. Howland snapped the end from his cigar and placed the cutter in his pocket.

"Are you quite through, Virginia?" he said.

"Quite," replied the girl, who thereupon disproved her assertion by beginning where she had left off. "And I do believe you knew all the time and were simply teasing us."

"That is not exactly true," smiled her father. "Of course I looked him up a bit before offering him the command of the *Tampico*. He comes from near New Bedford. You know my mother's family lived there."

The girl nodded. "Yes? Go on."

Mr. Howland lighted a match and held it burning for a while before applying it to his cigar.

"You know," he said, "there are no better people in the world than some of those New England seafaring families. The Merrithews, I believe, were very substantial. . . . So you see where your supposed wharf-rat acquired the manner which you marked in him, and his good English, and—and well, whatever else you marked."

"What is he going to do now?" asked Mrs. Van Vleck. "Oh, of course, the *Tampico*. Is he qualified to be a captain?"

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"Why, naturally; I haven't the slightest doubt of it. But Harrison will stay with the ship for two or three more trips to break him in thoroughly. Both companies by whom he was employed while in tugboat work speak of him in the highest terms. It's all rather a departure. But I feel I owe it to Merrithew; and besides, I have an idea he is the sort of man we want. This West Indian trade is not all beer and skittles."

"It is very interesting," said Virginia, stifling a yawn. "I hope to see something more of him; he's a new sort and worth studying. And—oh, father, is there any chance that we'll have that house-party at our San Blanco estate next Spring? I mean—of course you've promised that. What I meant was, will we go on the *Tampico*? Now don't smile, father; you have said a dozen times you were through with steam yachts."

"I'm not smiling," said Mr. Howland. "It is quite possible we'll go down on the *Tampico*—unless Merrithew manages to sink her in the meantime."

"Bully," cried the girl. "Good-night. . . . I think," she said, speaking slowly over her shoulder—"I think we had a very successful party." She paused and looked doubtfully at her father. "The only difficulty is that, now we know he is not hopelessly impossible in one way, we have to face the fact that he is all the more impossible in others."

"Yes," said her aunt, laughing, "as an interesting social freak we might have used him; but as an ordinary, well-behaved steamship captain—" Mrs. Van Vleck shrugged her shoulders expressively and raised her eyebrows.

"Well," said the girl, "he'll be eminently eligible for the Captain's table of the *Tampico*. Somehow I wish he had done something unusual to-night. I had developed all sorts of strange fancies concerning him."

Now, as a matter of fact, she did not wish that at all.

CHAPTER VIII

WITS VERSUS MACHINE GUNS

Dan brought to his new duties a well-grounded knowledge of the fundamentals of his calling, and his deficiencies, such as they were, were skilfully eliminated by his white-haired mentor, Captain Harrison. Among other things, this prince of ancient mariners, who had taken a great fancy to Dan, was at infinite pains to impress upon him the fact that in the duties of captain of a vessel calling regularly at the ports of small Latin republics many requirements aside from mere ability to navigate a ship are involved. Seductive arts, such as verbal or financial propitiation; knowledge when to give a dinner and when to threaten to invoke the "big stick"; when to hold to a position and when to recede from it;—all these attributes of diplomacy were acquired by Dan under Harrison's tutelage, so that when the old Captain finally retired to his well-earned rest on

a Long Island farm, he “allowed” that young Merrithew had the stuff in him of which smart officers are made.

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On his own account, Dan, by keeping his mouth shut and his eyes open, learned not a little of the methods which characterized the relations of his company with various Governments; and while not all that he learned could in the widest implication of the phrase he designated as morally—or, say, rather, ethically—elevating, it afforded an interesting side-light upon the business character of Horace Howland.

In this connection it is well to state that the ultra clamorous days in San Blanco had long ceased, and that the new *Presidente*, Rodriguez, who had arisen to his honors out of the midst of the travail of fire, powder, and a modicum of bloodshed, was conducting affairs of state much to the liking of the San Blanco Trading and Investment Company, of which company Mr. Howland was the brains and guiding spirit. Need it be suggested that this amounts to saying that Mr. Howland was the brains and guiding spirit of the San Blanco Republic as then constituted?

At all events, with peace smiling over troublous San Blanco, Mr. Howland sent word to Dan that early in April he, his daughter, Mrs. Van Vleck, and a party of ten, would sail on the *Tampico* for Belle View, the Howland estate, just outside of San Blanco City.

Dan was not altogether surprised at this message. The passenger accommodations of the *Tampico* were elaborate, and hints of Mr. Howland's intention had reached him in one way or another. But now with definite assurances in hand life took on added zest. He had not seen Miss Howland since the dinner; but it would have been futile for him to attempt to convince himself that she had not formed a more or less vague background for many of his thoughts and moods since that epochal event. Occasionally he saw her name in the newspapers, and one of them once printed a picture purporting to be her photograph. But it was not. Otherwise he might have been tempted to cut it out.

Now, with her presence aboard the *Tampico* assured, the steamship became involved with a new significance. He pictured her on the bridge with him. He selected her place at the table in the saloon, and dreamed of all the life and laughter and grace and beauty she would bring to it.

As for himself, he had the proud realization that in measuring his opportunities on the broadest possible gauge, he had lived up to them sincerely, and he knew the results to be good. On his own bridge he had faced the blind fog with the lives of passengers hanging upon his judgment; he had met the elements at their work, and out of the ordeal he had come with greater self-reliance, broader, kindlier, better. For the first time in his life he was looking beyond his dreams, although the work in hand was all-absorbing; there would be more for him to do. He felt it, he knew it, for such is youth.

One beautiful April morning, a company, wonderfully well selected according to the view-point of Virginia and her aunt, boarded the *Tampico* and merrily set sail. Not the least of that company was Howland himself, who, standing upon the bridge beside Dan,

smiled as he thought of the dozen Hotchkiss guns and the two very grim eight-inch rifles resting in the darkness of the forward hold, and then spoke almost in parables.

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"It is always well, Captain, to divine the trend of the wind before weather vanes give information to all who care to look for it."

"Yes?" replied Dan, not comprehending.

"Yes. Those playthings, strategically placed at the capital, will insure an era of Government integrity for some time to come; and that will be very good; for the kind of integrity existing there is much to my liking. Vasquez is restless; Sanches is uneasy; but there will be no radical action for some time to come. When it does—well, Captain, I have taken the liberty to store some pieces of ordnance below—they appear as household furniture in the manifest of cargo. I consider them qualified to maintain all sorts of Government integrity."

"No doubt," smiled Dan; "if you have any one down there to handle them."

"I have a very large office staff in Domingo City, unusually large. I did not hire the men for their penmanship, nor for their ability as clerks, either." Here Mr. Howland raised his eyebrows slightly, and Dan, taking his cue, raised his eyebrows too.

And so the *Tampico* sailed peacefully south-ward. The April sun softened the air, the sea was like glass, and by the time the steamship had picked up the Southern Cross, the little company had been tried in the balance of propinquity and found not wanting.

It was brilliant moonlight, and eight bells chimed sweetly over the silvery waters from the forecastle head, as Dan, with a cheery good evening, followed the first mate to the bridge. The second mate smiled genially, gave the course as south half east, and, with his dog-watch ended, went to bed. A gruff voice rolled along the deck.

"The watch is aft, sir!"

Dan's voice hurled astern before the echoes died.

"All right. Relieve the wheel—and the lookout!"

Virginia, addressing a merry group on the hurricane deck, just below and aft the bridge, paused in the middle of a sentence and listened to the sharp, crisp words. Then she smiled slightly and resumed her discourse.

Dan paced up and down with the mate, taking up the thread of the talk where it had been left the previous watch; but neither was in a talking mood, and they soon fell silent. Presently a girl's rich voice rose to the accompaniment of Oddington's banjo, an instrument but poorly adapted to the motif of the music, which was plaintive, yearning. The deep contralto notes brought full meed of meaning, although the words were German; low, deep, uncertain at first—the ponderings of love, of devotion, of doubt—

then swelling loud and full and free at the end; love justified, undying, triumphant, overpowering.

“Koennt’ fuehlen je das Glueck das ich wuerd nennen mein
Haett’ ich nur Dich allein! Haett’ ich nur Dich, nur Dich allein!”

Then suddenly in wild rapture she broke from the German, repeating the refrain in English—

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“ . . . The rapture that would be my own
If I had you . . . if I had you . . . you.”

Piercing sweet it ended, filled with tenderness. Just you, you, you, going on far across the moon-lit waters into infinity. Dan walked to the lee of the bridge and with hands on the dodger's ridge, leaned forward, peering bard and straight to the rim of the sea.

For every heart there is a song, and for every song a heart; for this earth is not so big that the dreams, the passion of some song-maker, humble or not, may not strike a responsive chord, at the other end of the world, it may be. And this for Dan; this simple love song with its swelling iterations. It awakened sleeping poetry in the heart of the young commander, awakened a tenderness long hidden under the rough exterior of a tumultuous life.

There was no mistaking the identity of the singer, no mistaking those deep, full notes, vibrant, rounded, and so melodious. To whom was she singing? Could a woman sing like that, sing as Miss Howland sang, to no one? Impersonally? Dan turned his face down at the group. The women were muffled in greatcoats, for the soft evening, which had tempted them to the deck, was growing chill, and he could see the dark forms of the men and the red lights of their cigars. Wotherspoon had just finished a comic song, and they were all laughing and applauding.

Somehow it all emphasized in Dan his aloofness. He heard Oddington address some jocular remark presumably to Miss Howland, for he caught her laughing reply. And the thought came, how eminently eligible Oddington was to sit at her side; how fitting that he should be there—wealthy, distinctly of her set, a good fellow at the university, and now a law partner in the practice which his hard-working father had prepared for him. For the first time, perhaps, in his life Dan felt himself humbled, and a great wave of bitterness flooded his mind. . . . And yet Miss Howland had been very kind to him. Ah, but that was not the point. He did not want persons to be kind; that suggested charity, or pity. No; he wanted exactly what he earned—what he could take with his bare hands and his bare soul. He wanted equality—or nothing; and if at the end of his struggle it had to be nothing, all right—but the end was not yet.

Toward nine o'clock the deck party began to break up. Some one had suggested bridge, and some opposed the suggestion. At the end of a laughing discussion Oddington and three others went to the smoking-room, while the rest dispersed in various directions. Dan, filled with his thoughts, was in the act of lighting his pipe, when the clicking of footfalls and the rustling of skirts sounded on the bridge steps. The next instant Virginia stood before him. The moonlight fell upon her, outlining the girl distinctly in her long, blue, double-breasted coat and the wealth of rippling dark hair flowing from under an English yachting cap. She was smiling.

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"Do I intrude upon your sacred precincts?" she asked, "or am I welcome? I want to talk to you."

"You are welcome, Miss Howland," said Dan, knocking the fire from his pipe and stuffing the briar-wood into his pocket, at the same time glancing quickly toward the wheel where the mate and the quartermaster were busy over a slight alteration in course.

"I feared that incident at the table—Reggie Wotherspoon's behavior, I mean, might have upset you. Of course you know he meant nothing by it. We all understand how he hates to be beaten in an argument. Really he admires you—which is well for him, I can assure you."

Dan, deeply embarrassed, muttered something about understanding perfectly about Wotherspoon, and that he knew him to be a decent enough sort of chap.

"Do you know," went on the girl, "I myself was rather startled at first when you said that no man—that you could not tell whether you would flunk in time of danger. I was so glad when you made your reservation that in the past, at least, you had not shown the white feather. 'What the past has shown,'" she quoted, "'who can gainsay the future?' Oh, it was glorious," she exclaimed impulsively, "the night you stuck to our yacht until your own tug was battered to pieces! I suppose I have said that a hundred times; but it grows more thrilling every time I think of it."

She looked at him with open interest. His uniform became him well; the trim sack coat fitted his great, deep chest and almost abnormal shoulders snugly; and above were the square, smooth face, the steady gray eyes, and the red-gold hair; and the long, straight limbs supported a lithe, almost aggressive poise.

She started slightly forward.

"Have you ever thought how much we owe you? Oh, I have so often wished I could show you how much we appreciate all you did, in some way!"

"You must not think of it in that way."

"Why not, please?" Miss Howland was a straightforward girl who faced a situation squarely.

"Why, because the debt is all on my side. Your father has given me my first command; and you—you have been fine to me. I have had more than an ordinary sailor deserves."

"But you are not an *ordinary* sailor," said the girl quickly. "Father knows of your people —" She paused. "Oh, I beg your pardon," she cried.

“Listen,” said Dan, quietly. “When I was younger, about to enter college, a careless, happy life ended. I began all over again then. I date everything from that beginning—from the time I went aboard a tug-boat—the Lord knows why—and tried to do something. What I have done, what I shall do, dating from that time, I stand on. Before that my battles were fought for me. After that the fight was my own. And I have never regretted one bit of it; nor am I ashamed of one single minute from the time I slung hawsers on the *Hydrographer* until I commanded the *Fledgling*. And I shall always rejoice, and my friends must rejoice, in that part of the fight, and never seek to hide a single incident. It’s all behind now, but it was worth while. And a man must go on—”

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"Yes, I know," replied the girl, softly. She turned her face from the silvery path on the water.

"And you are not going to stop fighting. Oh, you will not stop! You will go on and on. Men like you never stand still. I know it is the truth. What difference can your past life make to your friends? It is never what a man was or might have been that counts, or what he may be; it is what he is."

And then she turned and left him.

One evening as the dark came creeping over the purple waters, the *Tampico* cluttered up to the mouth of the harbor of San Blanco City. Captain Merrithew and Mr. Howland stood on the bridge, while Virginia and most of her guests were assembled at the rail, all eyes straining shoreward. A rattle of musketry tore through the evening air—a muzzle-loading cannon spoke grouchily; then all was still. A sailboat was drifting out to sea and the fishermen, being hailed, informed those on the steamship that revolutionists were pounding at the city walls and pounding hard, but thus far without avail. The uprising, as usual, they said, had its inception in the fastnesses of Monte-Cristi and, spreading through the country, had brought up with a bang against the walls of the city itself.

Mr. Howland was seriously perturbed.

"We must get in quickly and land our guns, Captain," he said. "It's too bad we have this party with us. However, you must not consider their comfort. If you land this cargo of ordnance, we can break the revolution easily and pleasantly."

He glanced at the Blancan navy—two gunboats, formerly pleasure yachts, and a "battleship," once a steam-lighter—which lay at strategic intervals across the harbor mouth and moved impatiently.

"The scoundrels!" he ejaculated. "Why don't they shell those insurgents? They could end this promptly if they wished to. I shall have something pleasant to say to them and to Senor Gaspard of the Marine when I see him. Still, perhaps they are waiting for me. President Rodriguez expects us."

Mollified at this thought, Mr. Howland straightened to a dignified and commanding posture. The honors accorded an arriving Howland vessel were the honors accorded a United States warship, and he scanned the fleet eagerly for the first sign of the invariable welcome. He turned to Dan.

"Better dive into your cabin, Captain, and get on your double-breasted regalia," he said. "There will be a round of diplomatic calls and felicitations generally—and of course they will ask for wine; for of all half-starved, thirsty natives, give me those of this bob-tailed republic."

The fighting had evidently stopped for the night, and Mr. Howland waved his hand at the flag-ship. He dearly loved all the punctilio of international etiquette and the deference that had ever been his portion in San Blanco.

And so this captain of industry smiled and hearkened for the first gun of the expected salute. But it did not come. There was silence somewhat grim and certainly sullen. He ground his teeth impatiently, angry disappointment growing as they drew near the fleet. "What is the matter with those rascals?" he growled, turning to Dan, who, resplendent in blue and gold, had just joined him on the bridge.

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"They don't seem to be happy to see us," replied the Captain, shortly.

"Not happy!" exclaimed Mr. Howland, who began to feel that the situation approximated *lese-majeste*. "Not happy? Confound them! When we're bringing guns to support their mangy and tottering Government!"

"Well," replied the young commander, who scented trouble and thought of the party on board, "they don't seem to be, anyway."

A sharp hail rang out from the nearest gun-boat, the flag-ship.

"What vessel is that, and whither bound?"

Mr. Howland tore at his collar and stuttered in purple fury.

"Impudence! Impertinence! Lunacy! Here, Captain, tell them they know very well what ship this is—and—and—wait!" as Dan raised the megaphone to his lips. "Don't waste time talking to the villains. Tell them—tell them to go—well, you know what to tell them."

And Dan demonstrated that he did—so vigorously, so eloquently that the answer came in the shape of a blank shot across the *Tampico's* bows.

Dan looked gravely at the owner.

"The thing is pretty plain, Mr. Howland," he said; "the navy has evidently joined the insurrection. Why they have not bombarded the city I don't know; but you can be sure they are going to. We will have to stop," and without waiting for a reply he jerked the signal indicator, to cease headway. Mr. Howland was at no pains to conceal his chagrin.

"A mighty bad stumbling-block; a mighty bad stumbling-block if the navy has revolted, Captain Merrithew. If this Government falls, it means a great deal to me; means the loss of considerable money—and prestige. I must look to you to land those guns, Captain."

Dan did not reply, but gazed earnestly toward the city as though meditating a dash. But that was out of the question, considering those aboard. As the chug of the engines died out and the cough of the exhaust hit the glooming air and the clumsy black hull slid to a gurgling standstill, a gig was lowered from the *El Toro*, the flag-ship, and the officer, Admiral Congosto, was soon stumbling up the gangway of the freighter. Mr. Howland was inclined to have him thrown overboard at once, but the better counsel of the Captain prevailed.

"Very well," growled the ruffled owner, "have your fling."



Admiral Congosto was a pompous Spaniard, obese, with bristling brows and moustaches, who wrinkled his forehead and winked his eyes constantly.

“So,” he said, with unctuous dignity, as Dan met him at the rail, “the Capitan?”

“Yes; the Capitan,” and Dan bowed courteously.

“You are for San Blanco with supplies?—and—and—ah!” The Admiral completed his sentence with a significant shrug of the shoulder. Dan was equally cautious.

“We were putting in for water, for fresh water,” he said. “Our condenser’s filled with bread crumbs or something, and we can’t make enough for our boilers, let alone drinking.”

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With an ample shrug of his shoulders, the Spaniard suggested that the Captain might obtain all the water he wished if he would go in, leaving his cargo outside. And then, as though weary of the subject, he turned to more congenial topics. He thirsted for good wine; that fact was early elucidated, after which he rambled along indefinitely, allowing Dan to gather that all the officers of the fleet were also thirsting for wine. At last he came straight to the point.

"A case—a dozen bottles—it would suffice—it would be appreciated—ah!"

Dan had an idea, and began to build upon it forthwith.

"Admiral," he said, "there is much of what you seek aboard. As you well know, Senor Howland never travels with empty lockers—there is much of a certain wine that sparkles—see?"

"I see, but I do not hear what I mean," replied the perplexed Admiral, indulging nevertheless in anticipatory internal gratulations.

"Why, hang it, man, champagne!" The Admiral's beady eyes danced. "Mr. Howland desires me to say that it is his wish that the friendly relations between his officers and those of the navy of San Blanco shall never wane. There will, in short, be a dinner in half an hour to the officers of the fleet."

"A dinnaire!" Congosto sprang forward and embraced his prospective host, and five minutes later was speeding to his ship, the bearer of glad news. For, behold, where he thought to meet an enemy, devious and tricky, he had encountered instead, a friend, generous, hospitable!

"I fail to see your play, quite, Captain Merrithew," grumbled Mr. Howland.

"Well," interpolated Virginia, "it was a very interesting play. Captain, I had no idea you could be so eloquent."

"Thank you," laughed Dan. "Mr. Howland," he added, "I shall make my play plain very shortly. All I ask now is that you have your party assemble at the rail when the officers arrive and receive them as though they were representatives of the British Navy. They will be conducted to the saloon. Let no one of the party follow them in. Please make that clear."

The guests came—in gigs, in launches, dinghies, and longboats—came with laughter, came with rejoicing, for they were to dine with the senor of the open hand, Senor Howland, who always opened wine as they would open tins of beef. The gods never repaired more blithely to a Bacchanalian revel on Parnassus. Two by two, in rigid order of rank they were escorted into the saloon, and the eloquent popping of corks was as

music in their ears. The Admiral took his place at the head of the table; the rest disposed themselves suitably.

With a muttered excuse, Dan slipped out of a near-by door; the stewards disappeared; every one on the *Tampico* stole quietly away.

Admiral Congosto had no sooner raised his glass for the first toast than the two iron bulkhead doors slid together with a clang, followed by the rasp of bolts flying home. The Admiral of the fleet and his lords commanders were hopelessly imprisoned amid the luxury of saloon surroundings, as hopelessly imprisoned as though they had been shut into the darkness of the lower hold.

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In the meantime, the *Tampico*, from hold to masthead, was blazing like a tall Sound steamboat. Dan gained the bridge and gazed at the illumination with a smile; for all this splendor of electrical display was for a purpose.

"You've locked them in, eh?" said Mr. Howland, abruptly. He had been pacing the bridge, the victim of many doubts.

"Yes," replied Dan; and there was a sharp inflection in the monosyllable which precluded further questioning. The owner had instructed his Captain to land the guns which were lying in the hold of the steamship, and the young Captain was intent on the matter in hand.

He pulled a certain crank, upon which the steam winches began to revolve with ghostly creakings, bringing the anchor up out of the mud. Then he signalled for full speed ahead. There was a creaking, a sound of roiling water, and then, still blazing with light, the steamship made out for the open sea.

They had gone but a quarter of a mile when those who were left on the fleet suddenly came to a realizing sense of the diabolical plot hatched under their very noses. A gun boomed, a six-pounder shell squealed past the bridge, but the *Tampico* slipped on her way seaward, while the funnels of the fleet belched clouds of smoke blacker than the velvet skies. From the saloon came muffled shouts and ineffectual poundings on the bulkhead doors.

"The walls are good and thick," said Dan, grimly. "I doubt they will be heard—unless some one of the craft gets within a hundred yards of us. They ought to have full steam up by this time. I might as well stop her right here; this is about right."

As the steamship swung heavily on the tide, the Captain shouted an order, which was taken up on deck and carried down a hatchway. The next instant the lights in the lower part of the hull went out. A few minutes later, another stratum of lights disappeared, and still later the deck lights. Then out went the port and starboard lamps. Then there was a ten-minute wait, while Mr. Howland, Virginia, and the rest of the party who had ventured on deck, thrilled and delighted with the situation, held their breath. Dan pulled another switch and the masthead lights went out. The *Tampico* was now a part of the night.

"Oh!" exclaimed Virginia, "I see. You have given them an imitation of a vessel disappearing hull down in the darkness. How clever!"

An exclamation from Mr. Howland broke the silence. "Oh!" he cried. "I see." And he placed his hand on Dan's shoulder.

The stillness was intense. The water swept softly past the hull; the extremities of the vessel were lost in a blur of black. Mr. Howland became impatient.

“What can be the matter with those fellows? Why don’t they chase us and be done with it?”

Dan touched him on the shoulder. From the outer darkness floated a mysterious bourdon, which rapidly outgrew that definition and became a veritable commotion. One light twinkled, then another, and still another. Finally the swift pulsation of engines at high pressure rived the night.

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"They are coming." The Captain turned to those who had gathered on the bridge, adding, "Now I want this place cleared, please. If this scheme falls through, we shall have our perch raked with machine guns. Go down on deck and either keep below, or to the side of the forward steel deck-house, which is away from the warships—and no noise. Not a sound! Understand?"

Virginia, Mrs. Van Vleck, Oddington, and two others of the party decided to take their position in the shelter of the deck-house, where they could see and yet be protected if the vessel were fired upon. All amusement had gone from the situation for Virginia. She knew that her father, who insisted upon remaining on the bridge, might at any moment be placed in jeopardy. And there was another emotion, which she sought not to deny—the Captain, what if he should fall? Ah, she did not want that—particularly now he was risking himself, not for honor, not for any interest of his own, but because he was her father's employee. Then, too, she wished to study, to know him better; yes, that was what she wanted, and she had been conscious of it all along, to see, to learn, to know more of him. She could distinguish his tall, straight figure against the darkness, moving swiftly.

She had forgotten about the pursuing warships and what might follow, until her aunt tugged at her sleeve.

"They are coming, Virginia," she said.

They were indeed, and angry craft they were, a spectacle to marvel at, viewed from the shrouded *Tampico*, lying black and motionless, with every light out, with tarpaulins over the engine-room hatches and gratings; with even the ventilator hoods blanketed.

"There they are!" The whisper shot through the *Tampico* like a draft of cold air. Virginia was quivering with excitement. She could see the leading boat as it passed not three hundred yards away, and the next, both spouting flames from their funnels, throwing up water, which fell in silvery, phosphorescent spray—racketing, clawing the restless sea, chugging, hissing with shouts of vengeance hurtling from their decks, First ploughed the flag-ship *El Toro*, next *El Teuera*, and last the "battleship" *El Manuel*, sitting almost on her stern, plugging along doggedly in a Herculean effort to be first in at the death of the presumptuous kidnappers.

It was alarming, too, and the young people, trembling behind their shelter, gave a great sigh of relief as the last avenger passed, and the head of the *Tampico* swung slowly around in the direction of the harbor. Virginia again turned her eyes to the bridge. The young Captain was standing like a statue, with his hands on the engine-room indicator, jumping the *Tampico* across the waves under full headway. He was looking back over his shoulder, and the girl, following his gaze, saw to her great trepidation that the flag-ship, *El Toro*, had ceased headway and was lying motionless, as if those aboard her had divined the trick and were pausing a moment for fresh bearings.

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Suddenly came a crash of heavy glass; a girl screamed. One of the saloon dead-lights had crashed out, the thick glass rattling down the steel hull to the sea. There was another crash and a yellow glow flared into a bright blaze, illuminating the hull of the shrouded vessel.

"Now they've done it!" cried Oddington. "They have soaked a table-cloth with kerosene; it's all off now! So much for Captain Merrithew's scheme. I—" A voice rang from the bridge.

"Everybody down, quick!" The warning was none too soon, for a second later a rain of lead from the *El Toro* swept through the top of the funnel. Then with straining engines the gunboat made a swinging detour, with the intention, plain to every one, of heading off the freighter.

The firing was incessant now, and every one of the Howland party, as well as the crew, grovelled flat on the deck and heard lead whistling above. Virginia, glancing at the bridge in an agony of terror, saw the Captain crouching just a trifle, but still at his post. One man, a quarter-master, knelt at the wheel. But she missed her father, and a great dread filled her mind. It was but momentary, however, for Mr. Howland joined the party behind the deck-house.

"Oh father!" cried the girl, "I feared you were hurt. Why doesn't Captain Merrithew stop the boat and leave the bridge? Surely his life and those of his men there are of more value than your interests in Blanco!"

"I told him to stop, to throw ourselves upon the protection of our flag," and Mr. Howland laughed nervously. "But it was no use. I believe I reared a Frankenstein monster when I selected him as the man to land our guns. Frankly he as much as told me to mind my business. He's in a fighting mood now; his jaws are set like steel-traps—I know his kind. And do you know, Virginia, he will land us and the guns, too. You wait!"

The *El Toro* had stopped firing, and was bending all energies to heading off the freighter; it looked as though she would do it, too, for she had once been a private yacht and had evidently lost none of her speed. It was a mighty race. The *Tampico* was by no means a slouchy craft, and she ripped her way through the waters, clawing for the harbor mouth and San Blanco City like a thing possessed. Swinging on a tactical semi-circle, the trim little flag-ship flew like a white ghost, tearing the waters, curling them up on deck until they ran out of the scuppers. She unlimbered another gun and the leaden hail swept away the *Tampico's* port lifeboat, crumpling the stanchions and davits like thin wire.

"Their marksmanship is bad, as usual," said Mr. Howland, trembling nevertheless, in suppressed excitement.

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But if their marksmanship was bad their speed was not. The *El Toro* was, in fact, shooting up rapidly; and as she began to circle in on the freighter it was plain to every one that her path would cross that of the fugitive. There seemed nothing to mar the success of the gun-boat in her efforts to prevent the steamship entering the harbor. Dan could judge of this better than any one else. And yet he kept on. His spirit dominated the entire vessel. Virginia, as she watched him, with all that anger that a loser must feel, knew that she was brave, too, felt that to be otherwise would be a sacrilege. Suddenly her eyes were riveted on the Captain; she saw him run to the megaphone rack and take up a cone. Then she saw him dash it to the deck and turn and speak a few words to the man still kneeling at the wheel. The man nodded and moved aside, and Dan took his place, erect, immovable.

As he did so, the pursuing gun-boat, not more than four hundred yards away, let fly another rain of lead, and a few minutes later she slowed down, swinging broadside across the course of the *Tampico*, firing a six-pounder shell over the bow of the advancing steamship.

"Too late, too late!" exclaimed Mr. Howland. "All this trouble and danger for nothing! Now we are caught! But some one will pay—"

His daughter seized his arm.

"Father! Oh, father! We are not stopping. Look!"

It was true. The *Tampico* was not stopping; she swept on as if endowed throughout all her length of great black hull with her master's burning energy and fierce resolve to succeed. A sharp cry came from the gun-boat, a cry sharply in contrast with its crew's former yells of triumph. There came another six-pounder shell, this time cutting cleanly through the *Tampico*'s bow. But that was the last. On, on like an avenging sea-monster swept the *Tampico*, sullen, silent, with the potential energy of dynamite lurking in the force of her momentum. And straight, inexorable, Captain Merrithew stood on the bridge with his hands on the wheel spokes. No longer was he young in the eyes of Virginia Howland. No, he was old, old as the avenging ages and as cruel, as cold as the march of time. Straight he made for the pretty white side of the gun-boat, as some grim executioner might measure for the blow of the sword which was to sever the white neck of some captive maid, some Joan of Arc. And the girl caught his spirit and became cruel too. She laughed at the gun-boat, as she fired again; she laughed as the *Tampico* quivered and went to the heart of the quarry; she laughed as Dan, with another twist of the wheel, made more sure of his victim.

The screw of the gun-boat revolved desperately. She was backing; but it was too late. Another sound now! A heaving swell rose in between and threw the bow of the steamship slightly off. With an angry cry Dan jerked at the wheel. But the lost point could not be regained, and the *Tampico*, instead of hitting the gun-boat amidships and

cutting her in two as intended, struck the quarter obliquely, slicing off a triangle of the hull and stern as a big knife cuts a cheese.

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There was a terrible crash and grinding, shrill screams, with the sharp, taunting laughter of Dan ringing clear, as his vessel swept clear of the wreckage, flashing by the crowded small boats which had been lowered a few seconds before the crash came. Hardly knowing what she was doing, utterly beside herself, Virginia turned to her friends, her lips parted, her eyes flashing.

"There!" she cried, "did you ever see a man? I recommend you to look at Captain Merrithew—"

"Yes, Virginia, it was bully." Oddington's cool, thoroughbred manner chilled her ardor like a cold blast. "It was mighty fine. You are excited, girl." And the young man removed the cigarette which had been between his lips. Virginia regarded him steadily.

"You are right, Ralph," she said at length; "I was excited."

In the meantime, the *Tampico* was dashing into the harbor at full speed, her whistle blowing like mad, bringing all officialdom, including the *Presidente*, to the water front; for, as Mr. Howland had said, they were expected. Soldiers from the guard-boats swarmed aboard and took the rebel admiral and his fellow-officers ashore, and a few hours later well set-up mercenaries were dragging Mr. Howland's machine guns and eight-inch rifles from the quay to strategic points, where in the morning the insurrection would be broken as a strong man breaks a rattan cane.

Later, at the end of a sunrise collation, *Presidente* Rodriguez rose and, with one hand on his heart and the other clutching the stem of a wine glass, metaphorically presented the keys of San Blanco to the "Saviour of his country," and intimated not only a permanent suspension of tariff regulations in his favor, but a future statue of heroic size in the palace plaza. Whereat Mr. Howland turned swiftly to Dan at his side, and from behind his napkin momentarily altered an expression of beatific if humble gratitude, and winked almost grotesquely.

CHAPTER IX

AN ATTEMPTED ASSASSINATION

The next morning Dan stood at the rail of the *Tampico*, gazing out over the quay to the distant walls of the city, over which hung a heavy saffron pall. The faint pat-a-pat-pat of machine guns and the roar of heavier ordnance was incessant. At first he had been disposed to go out and participate in the fighting.

But second thought had altered his inclination. He had come to know something of the business methods of Mr. Howland and men like him; and while he had no doubt that his employer considered them legitimate, and could, if he had to, submit many strong reasons for various measures which capital seems to find it necessary to employ in its

relations with Latin-American Governments, yet he decided that the wholesale slaughter then in progress had far better be left to those who were employed for that purpose.

How did he know but the men who had been fighting to capture the city and were now being shot down like sheep were not the real patriots, anxious to govern their own country in their way and not in the interests of foreign corporations? As for Rodriguez, he knew enough of him to—

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Virginia Howland, coming up from behind, touched him on the arm, while her father, who followed her, placed his hand on Dan's shoulder.

"Captain," said the girl, "I am disappointed. I wagered a box of candy with father that you were already out fighting."

Dan, unable to suppress the thoughts which had filled his mind, smiled grimly.

"I don't think I have any desire to turn butcher," he said, with just a tinge of bitterness.

The girl flushed and regarded Dan for a moment with a curious expression, and then glanced at her father.

"Is it really—that?" she said.

Mr. Howland smiled easily.

"Butchery? It seems to amount to about that. Poor beggars! But war is war," Mr. Howland tapped the rail with his finger by way of emphasis, "and those who attempt to overthrow governments generally do either one of two things: they succeed, or they pay the penalty of failure."

"In this case," said Dan, coolly, "they seem to be paying the penalty."

"Yes, thanks to you," replied Mr. Howland, "which is what I wish to speak to you about."

He paused, and as Dan made no reply he continued:

"You did a mighty fine piece of work for us in landing those guns—you have placed my company considerably in debt to you; but of that more later. At the present time I want to tell you that these infernal revolutionists have burned Belle View—which," turning to his daughter, "may alter your sympathies a trifle, Virginia—and therefore necessitates more or less of a change of programme—"

"Belle View burned!" interpolated Virginia. "Why, father, what—"

"As I was saying," resumed Mr. Howland, "we've got to shift things about. In the first place, if Belle View were not burned, I should hardly feel safe in having the crowd there with conditions as they are—and things are not especially pleasant in this city. However,—how long will it take to get away from here, Captain?"

"We must take on some coal, and Hendrickson has drawn the fires and is reaming in some new boiler-tubes. We could get away inside of forty-eight hours, I think."

“Good; let’s do it, then. We’ll call at San Domingo, Hayti, Jamaica, and other places to make up for spoiling your house-party, Virginia. In the meantime I have secured good quarters for our guests at the Hotel Garcia, where to-night I give the Government a dinner. I shall expect to see you there, Captain.”

Dan would have preferred to stay away from that dinner. The thought of his practical connivance at the day’s slaughter, so obviously suggested by Mr. Howland, grated on him, and the implied command in the invitation to the dinner bothered him too. The day was to be filled with duties about ship, and he wanted the evening to himself, to sit in his cabin with his pipe and his books and mull over these and other things.

Of course he might have known what would follow the landing of the guns from the *Tampico*. He did know, as a matter of fact, but orders are orders, and duty is duty; and when you are employed by a man you accept your salary and any other accruing benefits solely upon the understanding that you shall serve his interests to the best of your ability.

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Yes, Dan could see that perfectly, and he could also see the bad taste that lay in intimating dissatisfaction with his employer's methods while wearing the uniform of Mr. Howland's company and receiving good pay therefor. And anyway, Mr. Howland had not asked him to cut Blanco warships in two and endanger the lives of the entire ship's company and guests. No, that was on his own head, his own hot head.

In the days of the present voyage he had felt a strong tendency to look beyond the bridge of the *Tampico* into the future. Of course he liked adventure, but of late he had begun to feel that perhaps he had had enough of the strenuous life to last him the remainder of his years. He certainly did not intend to grow gray on coastwise lines. Bluff, gnarled old Harrison, his predecessor on this vessel, had served as a striking object lesson. He could spin yarns of his adventures by the hour, but at best no one would call him anything but an interesting old character, a retired shell-back on half pay. Dan found no pleasure in looking forward to anything of the sort.

Since he had gained a command in the famous Coastwise and West Indian Shipping Company, he had begun to commend himself to persons who never before had played a part in his life, principally a cousin of his father's, a wealthy merchant of Boston, who had written him a long letter, received just before the *Tampico* sailed on her present voyage, expressing a desire to meet him.

"It is not possible," the letter read, "you will want to follow the sea all your life. There must be plenty of opportunities ashore for men of your evident executive ability and initiative. I want you to come to Boston at your first opportunity. I know I can give you good advice, and it may be I can prove of material assistance to you."

When he first read the letter, Dan smiled to himself, not failing to note the interest taken in him by relatives, now he seemed to be proving his ability, who, heretofore, had known little about him and cared less. But that is life, and he had a great deal rather be accepted for what he had done than because of mere ties of blood. Thus thinking, he came to attach greater significance to the letter. He would go on to Boston when the *Tampico* returned to the United States. In the meantime he was Captain of a Howland boat, and he would obey orders, he smiled grimly, and go to the dinner.

The dinner was a memorable one in San Blanco City. The revolution had been shattered. The Rodriguez Government was supreme. The *Presidente's* palace was a blaze of lights. Conspirators were being arrested and cast into prison. Vehicles of all sorts were bearing dinner guests to the Hotel Garcia and dashing away. There were foreign consuls in uniforms, and their wives; there was Rodriguez and his cabinet, and officers of the army in resplendent garb, and women who, when they threw their mantillas aside, revealed tawny necks and shoulders.

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The *Presidente*, Mr. Howland, and high officers of the Government sat on a long dais at the head of the room; the other guests, including the *Tampico's* party, were at round tables with red-shaded lamps. It was a pleasing picture, and Dan, for the first few courses, was glad he had come. However, when he found that those with whom he was seated could not speak English, while he could understand little of Spanish, the evening began to wear. At length, with the long post-prandials at hand, he arose.

Flanking one side of the room, which was large, were windows reaching from the floor almost to the ceiling, which, when the weather was fair, were opened, giving access to a garden of small, twisted trees and tropical plants with small tables beneath, to which the pleasure-loving population came at night, to sip iced drinks and listen to the music of the orchestra as it flowed out of the dining-room.

Here Dan made his way and, stepping out of one of the windows, paused on the garden's edge. The cool air was grateful, and with a sigh of relief he drew a cigar from his pocket and lighted it slowly. From beneath the trees came little patters of conversation, and the red lights of cigarettes and the glint of white gowns enlivened the darkness.

As he stood there, Virginia Howland and Oddington came out of one of the windows. The girl was talking vivaciously, familiarly, and Oddington was laughing. She was in what she would have termed one of her "Oddington moods," when his personality appealed to her most, when the congenial bond seemed closest. To-night the lights, the music, the soft air rustling the lampshades, after all the long days on shipboard, exalted her. She looked at her companion with kindling eyes.

It seemed hardly the moment to run full upon the Captain of the *Tampico*, who had just thrown his cigar away with the intention of returning to the dining-hall.

Dan realized this instinctively. He smiled at the two in an abstracted manner, as though his mind were occupied with thoughts which he did not care to interrupt, and turned toward the window, when Virginia, who had greeted him simultaneously with a smile obviously designed to convey a similar impression, and, piqued to perversity by the fact that Dan had so readily interpreted her wishes, paused in the middle of a sentence and looked back over her shoulder.

"Captain," she said, "is it possible you prefer speeches in Spanish to our company?"

Dan paused. Oddington was smiling in an exceedingly perfunctory manner, and the young Captain was about to make some laughing acknowledgment when the girl, still looking at him, said:

"Mr. Oddington and I were just arguing about the night air of San Blanco. He says it is filled with malaria. Is it?"

Dan walked slowly toward them.

“Not any more than the day air,” he replied, declining Oddington’s proffered cigarette case and drawing his pipe and pouch from his pocket. “I should say that San Blancan air is filled with malaria at all times—and with other bad things.”

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Oddington laughed.

"It is like most of these cities," he said; "things get pretty messy here, I imagine. I could not exactly commend its sanitary—"

A voice calling him from the window broke the sentence. It was Reggie Wotherspoon.

"Yes," said Oddington.

"That you, Ralph? Oh, I see you. Say, come in here like a good chap, will you? I've run across a sort of an anarchist circular about Rodriguez. I want you to come up with me while I put it up to him."

"All right," replied Oddington. "Will you go in, Virginia?"

"Thank you, I'll wait here for you. I've had enough of that dreary old dinner; at least until father speaks. And now," said the girl, smiling at Dan, "what have you to tell me that is thrilling?"

Dan looked at her as she stood framed against the light of the window, tall, straight, in the full glow of youth and health and animal spirits. One bare arm was stretched down, clutching the train of her dress. With the other hand she was idly lashing her gloves against her skirt. As she spoke she reached out a gleaming slipper, extremely small for a girl of her height, to push an overturned flower-pot away, and Dan caught the flash of the silk ankle and a foam of lace.

He felt he was viewing the girl in a new way. Hitherto he had regarded her as something almost intangible, an essence of elusive femininity, radiant, overpowering, and in nowise to be considered as a material embodiment of young womanhood.

But now, while the old spell was still potent, with the moods of the day still strong, he found new viewpoints struggling for mastery. Clearly the girl had shown a deep interest in him, and entirely on her own initiative. If it was to be in the future an interest born of friendship, why, it should be, he told himself, an engaging future for him. But he did not desire that her interest in him from now on should be offered as a sort of largess, or that he should be placed in the position of posing as an object of merely charitable attention from her. As these thoughts formulated themselves flashingly in his mind, he could not but marvel at the sudden transition in his attitude concerning her. But nevertheless, the transition had taken place, as well defined as though it had come of weeks of pondering—and unchangeable.

"I can't think of anything thrilling to talk about—unless I select you as a subject."

The girl glanced at him swiftly and then turned her face toward the harbor, where a few lights quivered on a velvet floor. She caught the new note perfectly and her bosom rose in a quick breath.

“I am sure we might select a more interesting topic. I detest personalities. Tell me how you have enjoyed your first dip into Blancan society.”

“But that would be personal,” smiled Dan.

The girl laughed.

“The women here to-night are a great deal less dowdy than one would imagine, don’t you think?”

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"I wonder if you realize your responsibility?" said Dan.

Virginia did not reply for a moment. She had not considered this outgrowing phase of her unreserved interest in the young Captain. So long as he had remained a sort of quiescent *protege*, there could be no possible harm in her attitude toward him. Evidently he did not intend so to remain. There was of course, therefore, nothing to do but reestablish their relations.

"I am afraid my responsibilities are too varied and serious for discussion with—with any one," she said at length.

"But where they concern me?"

The girl stepped back slightly, drawing her skirts about her as though recoiling, or, rather, withdrawing from the question. Yet despite her desire to end the conversation, she really was curious as to his drift; and, besides, he made the most romantic sort of picture as he stood at her side, clean cut, bareheaded, and as self-assured evidently as any man she had ever talked with. Her wish was to dismiss him with admonition, gently, if plainly to be understood. But this she could not do just then, and the realization of the fact irritated her.

"I suppose," she said slowly, "at least I have read that our responsibilities do not cease with one's friends, but extend, sometimes, even to—to acquaintances, or to persons, perhaps, whom one does not know. What have I done or not done that suggested in your mind ideas of my responsibility to you?"

Dan shook the fire from his pipe and smiled. "Why, you haven't done a thing or left a thing undone," he said. "I thought the humor of my suggestion would strike you as funny, make you laugh. But it didn't, so I'll be serious. You were decent to me on the *Tampico* and before; and to-night, I don't know, but the lights and the music and the night and all seemed to have gone into me, and I wanted to talk to a woman—to you—out here in the moonlight, not as we've talked before, but as a man and woman who feel pretty much the same way about many things might talk. This was what I had in mind when I spoke of responsibility. Not an alarming one, would you say?"

The girl gazing out into the darkness did not speak.

"I wanted you to look down at the harbor there and exclaim over the path the moon is cutting from the horizon to that queer little lighthouse on the point; and I wanted you to talk enthusiastic nonsense about the big, soft stars and the cigarette lights under the trees; and I—I just wanted to listen and, of course, agree with all you said."

Dan was smiling as he spoke; but the girl, whose eyes had fallen beneath his steady gaze, was aware that no jest underlay his light words. By no means could she construe



what he had said into impertinence, but she did feel he was presuming upon the kindly attention she had paid him.

“Captain Merrithew,” she said at length, “I have been thinking. I have been wondering whether I do not think you more inspiring on the bridge of the *Tampico*, cutting warships in two, or fighting a storm than—”

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"Than talking with you in the moonlight?" interpolated Dan.

"*About* the moonlight," corrected the girl. . . . "If we are to be friends you must not devise responsibilities—unadvisably."

Dan made a slight gesture, as though to assure her she had made her meaning quite clear.

"If we are to be friends, Miss Howland, you must not devise restrictions unadvisably."

Dan was still smiling, and he was speaking easily. But no man had ever spoken to her in that way before. She flushed, and her eyes sparkled angrily as he ceased. Her glance did not disconcert him. He stood looking at her—not masterfully, but with the quiet dignity of conviction. It was plain that if their association were to continue, it must be at the price of something more than the scientific, aloof, touch-and-go interest which had hitherto characterized her attitude toward him.

She must be his friend in all that the term implies. Until to-night, had the alternative been proposed, she would have had no hesitation in deciding, if only because she had no viewpoint other than their relative positions in the past year.

But his words had opened a new perspective. She could see that he might be regarded in a different light, that he already so regarded her. The transformation bewildered her, and when the heated reply died behind her lips and she smiled quiveringly instead, she felt for the first time in her life the thrill which all women, however strong, have when they yield to the dominant personality of a man. She tried to fight back the overpowering, undefinable surge; she succeeded partially. All she could now ask was time to think to recover her equilibrium. She put out her hand involuntarily and touched Dan lightly on the arm.

"Let us not say anything more about it," she said. "Tell me—tell me something about San Blanco."

As she ceased speaking, she turned slowly toward the banquet hall. Dan, following her, complied with what he knew to be a purely perfunctory request, talking in an easy conversational tone.

"I have looked into the history of the country a good bit," said he. "It is quite interesting. They have had just twenty-three *presidentes* and four dictators, and there have been twelve assassinations. I believe candidates for the office are liable to arrest for attempted suicide—"

The girl paused at the window. She had not been listening. Her eyes, were fastened upon the figure of a man whose skulking form she had made out where the glow of the

window almost opposite the speakers' table fell upon the garden. Now she saw him again. He had a gun in his hands and was beginning to kneel.

Breathless and rigid the girl slowly stretched out her hand and touched Dan on the shoulder; with the other she pointed silently at the crouching figure. The gun was now being raised to aim, probably at the *Presidente*, who was speaking, possibly at Mr. Howland. Dan apprehended the situation at once. In the flash of an eye he was making for the assassin like an antelope. Hearing the approaching footfalls, the man turned his head, and then, with a cry, Virginia saw him arise and shift his weapon toward Dan.

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[Illustration: In the flash of an eye, Dan was making for the assassin.]

But he was too late. At least ten feet away Dan left his feet and launched himself into one of those old-time tackles which even in Exeter had attracted the eyes of the football authorities of three universities. Hard and straight he went, head to one side, jaws shut tight. Then he struck, one brawny shoulder snapping full into the man's midriff. You have to know how to fall when tackled by a good man. This San Blanco did not. He went down like a falling tower. The gun was discharged in the air with a resounding report and flew into the bushes. The man lay still, gasping. The dinner ended abruptly and in great confusion. Guests poured out of the windows, tables were overturned.

Dan quickly dragged the prostrate man into a clump of mesquite. His first impulse had been to turn him over to the soldiers. But the defiant, if faint murmurs of the patriot, "Long live San Blanco; death to Rodriguez!" bringing back to him his emotions of the morning, caused him to decide differently. He seized the man by the collar.

"Stand up," he said, "you are not hurt; only a bit winded. I guess Rodriguez has had enough heads without yours. You thought you were acting for your country's good; I guess you were, from all I hear."

The man had been looking at the speaker wonderingly, not understanding a word. Dan turned to him impatiently.

"Get out!" he said. He pushed the man, searching his brain for the Spanish equivalent. "What the mischief—oh," he glared at the trembling prisoner. "*Vayase Vd! Largo de aqui!*"

The poor wretch needed no more. With a quick, smiling gleam of white teeth he bowed, and the next instant was loping through the garden. Dan sauntered slowly toward the hotel. Soldiers acting upon information given by Miss Howland were beating the grounds, and there was much shouting and occasionally a pistol shot.

But the hotel was deserted of the brilliant guests who had filled it but a quarter of an hour before. The spell of darkness lay upon the banquet hall. A few men and women were loitering in the court, awaiting developments. Oddington was there, and another man of the party, but the rest, including the Howlands, had evidently gone to their rooms.

"Miss Howland told us you made rather an interesting tackle, Merrithew," said Oddington as Dan nodded to him. "I am sorry I missed it. Where is your prisoner?"

Dan smiled. "The tackle was so artistic," he said, "that I jarred most of my senses out of me. He got away. Here's his gun," and Dan held up an old-fashioned carbine.

Oddington glanced at the weapon.

“Howland will be sorry you let your man escape, if only because he prevented the carefully prepared speech he had been laboring over. It was pretty nervy of you, although Howland tells me they are all the time potting at Rodriguez and missing him. Still, I should think they would give you the Order of San Blanco.”

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"I think I can struggle along without it," said Dan. "Good-night."

He turned toward the harbor and the *Tampico*. The moon had now broken from the clouds which had partially hidden it all evening, and the hotel grounds and the slope leading to the water front were bathed in light. Dan's mood was rather bitter. They might have waited for him, he thought. At least, Miss Howland and her father might have, in view of what had happened. But still, why should they? The old feeling of aloofness filled him, and all the self-assurance which had characterized his attitude with Miss Howland a half-hour before vanished. He was angry with himself for having dared to maintain such an attitude.

He turned to look at the hotel and bowed gravely.

"It seems that one Daniel Merrithew has been forgetting he is a mere steamship captain. He will remember it in future—at all times."

And then he walked slowly to his ship.

CHAPTER X

THE WRAITH IN THE MOONLIGHT

Twenty-four hours later the *Tampico* was at sea. The itinerary proposed by Mr. Howland had been altered for the reason that cable despatches from New York had contained financial tidings that made it incumbent upon him to return to the United States without more delay than was necessary; and Ralph Oddington's firm had been retained by a corporation seeking protection against assaults of the Attorney-General's office, and he was wanted in the city at his "earliest convenience," which he had interpreted as meaning "right away."

And so there was to be no stopping at various ports, but a quick run to the States. Mr. Howland imparted this information to Dan as the two sat at table in the saloon over cigars and coffee the evening after the departure from San Blanco. The other members of the party had gone on deck.

"They can do their sightseeing at Galveston and Savannah, where you can call for your cotton and naval stores as usual." As Dan raised his eyebrows, Mr. Howland shook his head emphatically. "Can't help it," he said. "You see by this despatch," pointing to a pile of papers on the table, "that the *Tybee's* out of commission for a month; and business is business, party or no party. And now, Merrithew," stuffing the papers into his pocket as though all matters concerning them were finally settled, "I want to ask you about something else. Of course you're in this Central American service here and will be for a time. I've been thinking what you said about the fighting the other morning." He lit a

cigar and pushed his case toward Dan. "I gathered you did not exactly approve of it. Didn't you?"

"Mr. Howland," replied Dan, "it was not the fighting that bothered me, it was the idea I had landed guns which your men were using to shoot down other men like sheep. It was a new sensation, and it got into me, I'll say that. Still it was none of my business; I was carrying out your instructions. I am sorry I was so unwise as to give you the impression I did."

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"Not at all." Mr. Howland gazed at his cigar a moment, flicking the ashes off with his little finger. "Is that why you let the assassin go?"

Dan rose to the situation without hesitating.

"Mr. Howland, you were fishing when you asked that question. You don't have to do that. I did let that chap go. I believed he had attempted a good job. I saved Rodriguez's worthless life and took a risk in doing it. I would not have done so, but I thought the man was aiming at you; but since I did, the only reward I was entitled to, or wanted, was to do as I pleased with the man."

"Undoubtedly," said Mr. Howland. "Of course it occurred to you that Rodriguez's life, however worthless you hold it in other ways, might be extremely valuable to the San Blanco Trading and Investment Company, which is myself?"

"Yes, I did think of that," replied Dan, "although I am employed by the Coastwise Company, I know you practically own both. I realize, too, your kindness to me in the past; but I did look on the fellow as a man honestly trying to serve his country; and when it came to deliver him up to be hanged—why I simply could not do it." Dan rose slowly. "I showed myself ungrateful to your interests. As I say, I appreciate what you have done. I am going to show that I do by asking you to consider my resignation in your hands to act upon as soon—whenever you please."

"Sit down, Captain Merrithew," said Mr. Howland, as though he had not heard the last words. "In the first place, you recognize that where there is no law and order legitimate business cannot be carried on. Where a country is governed in a haphazard manner, while it may be easy to secure contracts, it is impossible to collect on them. Business interests having connections with such countries find conditions intolerable, and where we can we rectify them. If you have studied San Blancan affairs you know that under Rodriguez (who, despite his cruelty, is honest) business here, whether controlled by myself or any one else, may for the first time in history be conducted on an honest and reliable basis. That is all I ask or have asked. I have no benefit of discriminating duties. I am largely interested in the business affairs of this country; but I obtained those interests fairly, and it is my duty to myself and my daughter and my business associates to maintain and develop them.

"I talk to you this way, Merrithew, because I have felt you were going wrong, and I wanted to set you right. I'll say frankly I know I'll not lose anything in so doing. I owe you a great deal. I am glad I do; for I like your sort. I wish I had a boy growing up as you have grown. You have a future before you—if you will only watch that damned hot head of yours."

Much that Mr. Howland had said in regard to the disinterested nature of his business activities was true; some things involved tactical evasion. In expressing his attitude

toward Dan he was sincere. The Captain did not attempt to analyze. He was completely won, just as Mr. Howland wanted him to be. As he essayed to speak, Mr. Howland placed his hand on Dan's shoulder.

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"Now, not a word, Merrithew. We'll forget it all and start fresh."

In the days of the voyage that followed, while it might not have been said that Virginia Howland snubbed Dan, neither could it have been said she was not at pains to see that she was never alone with him.

In fact, the attitude of either in relation to the other might in no way have been termed receptive. So far as Dan was concerned, he felt that, whether unwisely or not, he had made quite clear to her the terms upon which their friendship could continue; she had expressed her views no less clearly. The stand of both was irrevocable.

The second day out, feeling it to be his duty, he made tentative advances which, if not directly declined, at least left him the impression he had been gently and skilfully rebuffed. Since then he had been careful not to place himself again in a similar position.

At the table she would address him in the line of general conversation, and was at pains to greet him cordially whenever they met about the ship. But otherwise she left no doubt as to her wishes concerning him. Once she came into the saloon for breakfast before the rest of the party had taken their places. Dan was in his accustomed seat at the head of the table; he arose and wished her good-morning. She replied faintly, and then she sat toying idly with her rusk, her eyes for the most part fastened upon Dan, who had resumed his breakfast as though oblivious of her presence. She seemed trying to make up her mind to speak; but she failed. When Dan arose, bowed slightly, and left the saloon, she was still sitting silent with her breakfast untasted.

At Galveston Oddington left for New York by train, but Mr. Howland, receiving more assuring despatches, decided to remain with the party. They crammed cotton into the *Tampico's* holds, and later at Savannah they put pine-tar and pitch and other naval supplies aboard; thereby increasing Dan's responsibilities a hundredfold. But business was business, as Mr. Howland had said; and Dan had but to accept his worries and keep them from the party, which had fared well at the hands of friends in the two ports.

The *Tampico* left Savannah one afternoon about an hour after a trim Savannah liner had dropped down the river. At dinner that night the merriment was supreme, for in four days the *Tampico* would be in New York, and the Howlands' guests had had about all the excitement and salt air they wanted. The air was soft; there was brilliant starlight.

Dan had spent most of the evening on the bridge, Mr. Howland having requested him to make up the coast well out to sea in order to give the party a "final soaking" of real ocean air. He had not complied absolutely. Still, the *Tampico* was a good ninety miles off shore, well outside the track of south-bound vessels.

Shortly after nine o'clock he left the bridge and walked along the deck. The party was breaking up. Miss Howland had sauntered away from the group, and was leaning over the rail with her chin resting on her hands.

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"Good-evening, Miss Howland," said Dan, pausing.

Virginia looked up quickly, and then resumed her former position.

"I don't know whether I ought to be nice to you or not, Captain Merrithew," she said.

Something in her voice gave Dan encouragement to make his reply.

"Won't you please try to be? In less than four days now you will be ashore—and then you'll probably never have any more opportunities."

The girl settled her chin more deeply into her palms.

"But *you* have not been nice. You have been horrid, ever since we left San Blanco."

Here was a phase of feminine character which Dan, not knowing, had not reckoned upon. However, he instinctively said the tactful thing.

"I—I am sorry. I thought I was pleasing you."

The girl slowly dragged her chin sideways along her palms until she faced the Captain.

"Oh, you did! Has your experience with women taught you that is the best way to please them?"

Dan, now completely at sea, simply regarded her in silence. Virginia, inwardly triumphant, smiled.

"Now what can you do in four days to atone?"

"I might jump overboard."

"That would be romantic, but hardly—"

As the girl was speaking she turned her eyes to the water rushing past the hull, just as a dull, wallowing shape flashed by the bow, assuming form right under her eyes—a dark, soughing, coughing derelict, moving in the waves spinelessly, like a serpent; black, slimy, repulsive, with broken, hemp-littered masts and rusty chains clanking over the bow.

"Oh!" Virginia jumped back with a startled cry and looked fearfully at her companion. He was smiling, and intuitively she recognized that it was not a smile of amusement, but of sympathy, reassurance.

"Oh, wasn't it horrid!"

“Yes, it was not a pretty sight,” replied Dan. “Derelicts never are. There are lots of them around here; they travel in currents, sometimes in short orbits, sometimes hundreds of miles in a straight line.”

The terror had not left her eyes, and she glanced astern to where the ugly shape was burying itself in the gloom. She was an impressionable girl, and that loathsome object, rising as it were out of the bottom of the deep, clanking, sighing, brought to her an epitome of all the fear and mystery of the great, dark, silent waste. And she looked at the Captain with new interest. Here was one of the men who brave these things, who brave great big problems, who face the unknown and a future as full of mystery, as fraught with evil possibilities as when the first mariner put out to the Beyond in a boat hollowed from a tree. In a flash that derelict taught her to read Dan better; gave her a better insight into the look that she sometimes caught in his steely, inscrutable eyes, and the grave lines in his sun-bronzed face. And in the light of this knowledge her soul went out to this man, this type of man, so strange, so utterly foreign to a girl brought up in an environment where such types do not exist.

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She held out her hand.

"I am going to my stateroom now, Captain. Good-night. We are going to be better friends, aren't we?"

"Thank you," said Dan; and he watched her tall, white form as it disappeared down the deck. He gazed moodily out at the dark horizon. Friends! He searched himself thoroughly, and he could not deny the truth as formulated in his mind. Friends! How hollow the word sounded! He knew how hollow it would seem all through his life.

Better it should be nothing. Yes, far better, instinct told him that. Miss Howland had come into his existence, radiant, pure, beautiful, and so utterly feminine; as a meteor flashing across the night pauses for a brief instant in the sky before shivering to nothingness. This simile occurred to Dan, who, though no poet, was at least a sailor and as such a student of the heavenly bodies. Yes, a meteor which had illumined his life.

He had never permitted himself to think in this way before. It is doubtful if before to-night he could have felt as he now did. It had all come over him suddenly with a rush. When he talked with her at the hotel in San Blanco he was filled with thoughts of his future, and assumed as granted his footing upon her plane. How absurd, how ridiculous this seemed now!

Why, why was it, he asked himself, that society or convention or whatever it was had drawn the grim *chevaux de frise* between those who had accomplished, or whose forebears had accomplished for them, and those who were yet to accomplish; with hosts eager to applaud the achievements of finality, but who had no adequate encouragement for those who had yet to achieve their mission, who fought their battles in the dark and won them in the glorious light, or losing, sank back into that oblivion out of which they had striven to emerge?

If fate had been different—yet if fate had been different he would never have seen her, perhaps. Yes, he should be satisfied; he had seen his star. And when it faded, as fade it must, in the vastness of the dark—why, what then? Well, at least he had seen his star; even this much is denied many. So, he would live it out and be thankful he had been permitted to feel the great thrill—to know that at least he had the heart for the greatest passion the world knows. Poor consolation, he told himself with a grim smile. And yet he who hitches his chariot to a star might well be content with less.

CHAPTER XI

THE BURNING OF THE "TAMPICO"

Just an hour later the *Tampico* lay burning at a point in the Atlantic where if the white lights of Cape Fear and Cape Lookout had converged ninety-two miles farther out to sea they would have rested full on the reeking hull.

Dan had been fearful of the results of Mr. Howland's policy in loading the *Tampico* with inflammable cargo. He had been reared with the fear of fire in his heart. From one of his voyages his grandfather, Daniel Merrithew, had never returned. A charred name board had told the grim tale, and so Dan had gone out into the world with a long, red, flaming line across his fate, as in knightly days a man might have included the bar sinister or some other portentous device among his symbols of heraldry.

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Pacing the forward deck with his pipe, thinking deeply of his talk with Virginia, Dan had seen pitch bubbling out of the deck seams and spilling into rich black pools. And thus the fire was discovered—some fifteen minutes too late, however, to effect the rescue of several of the crew, who shrieked and pounded at the bulkhead door, warped and welded tight by the heat; shrieked and pounded, until the throttling smoke bade them hold their peace.

First, Dan had the vessel swung about with her stern to the wind, the fire being forward; and the crew had piled up on deck and rushed without confusion or undue noise to their various stations. Some unscrewed deck valves over the burning hold, fastening thereto the ends of seven-inch rubber hose; while below, the engine-room staff, with soldierly precision, attached the other ends to the boilers and stood like statues until a signal gong sounded through the black depth. Whereupon they handled certain valves, and with a hissing scream great volumes of hot vapor poured into the blazing compartment. On deck other seamen dragged lengths of hose forward, forced the nozzles through narrow deck-vents, and held them there while the force pump sent up thousands of gallons of brine.

Dan, ubiquitous, cheerful, commanding, lending a hand to one set of men, directing another, came upon a station two short of its quota.

“Where are Phillips and Fagan?” asked Dan, sharply.

“They bunked in the steerage,” replied a sailor, choking in the smoke weltering up through the hose vent.

The young Captain’s breath caught; but there was no time for sentiment. He inspected the vessel, bow and stern, marshalled the members of the Howland party into the saloon and bade them stay there until otherwise ordered, and then went up to his men and fought with them. An hour passed, and twenty more minutes. The lurid tinge to the smoke, bellying up through the deck-vents, gave sharp hint of the undiminished fury of the flames raging below.

“It’s like pouring in oil,” muttered Dan to himself; and then he added aloud, “Keep right to it, men, you’re holding it,” and thus saying he left them and ran aft to where the second mate and the reserve section of eight men were growling impatiently.

“Take up your hose, men, and come with me down into hold No. 2. The fire’s going to clean out No. 1 to the skin, sure. We’ll have to keep it from breaking through to the other holds. Come on! Hurry!”

Without a word the men picked up the three lengths of emergency hose and followed their Captain. As Dan ran along the deck, leading the way to the hatch, he heard his name called, and looking up quickly, saw Mr. Howland and Virginia approaching. The

girl's hair was flying loose and she had a long blue coat thrown over her shoulders. The deck was filled with heavy smoke.

"Captain," said the shipping magnate, "how are we now?"

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Dan paused just an instant.

“Fighting hard,” he replied, and then he added quickly, “Mr. Howland, we need men. Two of the crew are gone. Ask some of the men of your party, please, to go forward and report to Mr. Jackson. And you, Miss Howland, go into the saloon right away—and stay there. Tell the others that if they appear on deck before I give the word I shall have them locked in.”

The girl obeyed silently, but Mr. Howland paused irresolutely a second, in which time Dan had turned and was hastening after his men.

“I will do as you say,” Mr. Howland called after the retreating form of the Captain, “but I want to talk to you first.”

“All right, sir, come on then. You’ll have to talk to me down in the hold, I’m afraid.”

The second mate and his men had in the meantime pried the battens from the hatch and thrown it open. The hold was about half full of cotton bales, railroad ties, oakum, resin, and the like, and they descended to them by means of a scaling ladder, clambering thence toward the forward bulkhead. One of the men had a lantern which cast a pallid glow about the immediate vicinity, bringing into vague relief the well-ordered masses of cargo, and ending suddenly against a hard wall of dark as palpable as a barrier of stone. The air was heavy with musty sweetness and with yellow smoke which streaked lazily past the lantern globe—and with silence, save for the dull roar in the adjoining hold.

“Make a stand right here,” and Dan’s voice sounded hollow through the gloom. “Stand right here. You’ve got water in your hose; I want that bulkhead kept soaked. Let her go.”

As the streams of water plunged against the steel wall Dan turned to his employer.

“You wanted to speak to me, Mr. Howland?”

“Yes, I want to compliment you on your discipline and—and what is the exact situation?”

“Not so good; but a working chance. It will be a short and sharp go; for the hold’s lined with tar and sugar reek—otherwise the cotton might go for days. It won’t in that hold, though. The fight’ll be right here. If it breaks through into this we’ve got to run; if not, it will burn out where it is.”

“What are the chances that it won’t?”

“Why, you know more about the structural strength of this boat than I do. To be honest, I never liked your bulkheads, else I would have opened a stop-cock and flooded the hold long ago. Still, what water would burst through, fire might not.”

Horace Howland, who had paid his own price for the *Tampico*, and who by the same token had his own opinion of her, said nothing.

“I have arranged about the boats,” resumed Dan. “If the worst comes, my men know what to do and they are the men to do it. It’s not too rough to launch safely. Now, Mr. Howland, I’ve wasted too much time talking. Don’t forget to send two men to Mr. Jackson,” and he sprang up the ladder and hurried forward.

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The feet of the men at work over the burning hold were blistering. Dan yanked out an inch hose and set a cabin boy to sluicing the deck where they stood, sending up dense clouds of enveloping steam. A broad tongue of blue flame curled out of the port hawse-hole, licked along the half-protruding anchor, rose above the rail, and then burst into a puff of red fire which floated away in the wind. A cargo port door warped in the heat, buckled outward, tearing plates and rivets with a rasping screech, and dropped hissing into the black waters; and the wind, blowing from astern, was sucked into the opening, fanning the flames to screaming ferocity.

The tale was plain for every one, and Dan read it to the last word. Water would be of more service elsewhere, that was certain. So he withdrew the four crews from their hose vents, ordered two of them to take their lines into the second hold, and set the others flooding the deck. He shifted two of his seven-inch steam lines to the midship plugs, and then followed the hose men, who had joined their comrades in the darkness of the second hold. Streams of water were hissing against the steel barrier and flying back at the faces of the nozzle men in hot spray.

"There's a bulge in the centre," reported the second officer.

"Yes," said Dan, who seized a lantern and held it above his head, pointing out new objective marks for the water. The smoke had grown thicker. One man gagged at a nozzle; but drinking from the pipe the air which the water brought, he lowered his head and fought on.

They fought as men should fight, in the pungent half-gloom, colliding or falling prone as the vessel pitched, eyes fixed straight ahead, following the powerful silver lines of water which ribbed the dark and splashed against the steaming steel; white-yellow smoke spirals writhed about their heads like some grotesque saraband; coatless, shirtless, their streaked, sweating bodies gleamed dull and ghastly.

One of them straightened from the nozzle and glared at his side partner; and Dan, whose eyes were everywhere, saw him and moved close to him, where his fist could do best work if necessary. Any sign of mutiny now called for decided measures.

"Say, Mike," said the man in a rich brogue, "give us a hunk o' yer 'bacca—this makes the mout' dry"; and Dan chuckled his admiration for the fighting spirit of the Irish.

Once a tiny lance of flame leaped out through some hidden crevice—leaped far out at the men as a rifle spits its deadly fire, and then, curling about a sugar sack like a serpent's tongue, withdrew so suddenly, so silently, that it seemed to those who saw it as something which had flashed through their imaginations. A stream of water sought the outlet and the flame came no more then.

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Suddenly a cry came from one of the men, and all eyes turned to a point in the bulkhead where a hectic flush glowed like a death's head. Four streams struck it simultaneously. It went out, but reappeared in another place. The water quenched this also, but it came back again and widened, and the plunging water was dried to mist at the instant of contact. The glow grew brighter, then dim, and then brighter, rising and falling as life pulses in a fevered body. A flood of smoke choked in from a viewless breach. Two of the men cried out, gurgled, fell on their faces, and turned over on their backs, struggling; then they lay still. Dan carried them to the deck, and returned with a sailor. The two had just gained the sugar sacks when the centre bulkhead quivered. A cross section collapsed into a V. A score of rivet holes yawned wide and red-hot bolts fell on the sacks and set them on fire. A line of plating, separating from its fellows, sagged open in a red grin and gave view of the raging hell within.

"Now, into it, boys!" yelled Dan, and the men, bowing their heads, advanced five feet, directing the streams into the fiery pit. For a minute the flames were driven back by the concentrated rush of water; two minutes, and then a gush of fire flared through the break. It broke as a stream hit it, but its ghost, in the guise of hot gases, choked the men.

A great roar of flame almost enveloped them, and the heat crisped their hair and seared their bodies, and they dropped their hose and raced for the ladder.

"Go on, men!" shouted Dan as they struggled out of the hold. "You've done all I can ask. Hurry! Get out!" and they got out and then turned to batten the hatch cover down. But the rush of fire was too swift to be denied. A thick-bodied pillar choked through the opening and spouted to the top of the funnel—great gouts of the devouring element pulsed softly, but with lightning swiftness, down the deck, and shrivelled a life raft. Long tongues and jets of fire were bursting everywhere out of the forward deck.

It had come at last, just as Dan had seen it coming all through the night—all through the years. His voice roared from the bridge:

"To the boats—every man to his station!"

The command was taken up and carried along, and noiseless shapes limned briefly in the fire glow, scuttled quickly to their appointed places. Mr. Howland and his party stumbled out of the saloon with blanched faces and parted lips, but quietly.

"Women to the rail!" The cry echoed out over the sea,—over the sea, which has heard these chivalrous words so often.

"Women first—women to the rail!" Dan's cry was taken up by the officers. Silent figures in trailing garments moved as they were bid.

From the port quarter a gruff voice sounded.

“Ready, men—ease away.” Came the creak of tackle, the thud of iron upon steel—then a silence—then a rattle of oars in thole-pins—then a clear hail from the darkness: “All’s well, Captain Merrithew!”

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Another boat clattered down the steel sides and cleared safely, and still another. The last boat was filling with the last of the crew.

“Everybody accounted for?” Dan’s shout as he rushed down from the curling bridge brought Mr. Howland up with a sudden fear. He had taken his daughter to the starboard boat only to find it full, and had sent her across to the third boat, while he superintended the adjustment of a wedged block. This done, he had hurried to the starboard, only to find the third boat overboard and well away. He had assumed that she was all right. But a cold rush of doubt assailed him.

“Virginia, Virginia—are you all right?” he called in tones of agony.

“I saw her at the third boat,” said the first officer. “You must look alive, Mr. Howland—we’ll have to lower directly the Captain comes. The deck’s going now.”

The ship-owner heard these words with a sigh of relief and stepped into the boat without further ado.

“Every one accounted for?” repeated Dan as he dashed along deck to the boat.

Something, a faint suggestion of sound rather than sound itself caused him to pause. He heard nothing more, though he listened for a full minute. Instinctively he turned to a stateroom in the midship deck-house.

“Captain Merrithew—are—you—coming?” The first officer’s voice arose in impatient cadence.

“Yes—hold there a minute!” replied Dan, twisting the knob of the door. It was locked. He ran back a few paces and sprang at it with his shoulder. It trembled and gave. He rushed again and the door crashed inward. The room was filling with smoke.

And on the bunk sat Virginia, her hands on her knees, her head hanging low and swaying dazedly from side to side. She was on the verge of collapse; but she looked up and smiled faintly as Dan burst in. Then her head fell again.

“I knew you would come,” she muttered.

Without a word Dan seized her by the arm and led her swiftly to the shattered door. As they reached the threshold there came a dull boom from below—the vessel shivered. A sheet of flame swept the entire forward deck, and Dan looked out into a red, pulsing wall.

In terror the men in the fourth and last boat, the fire licking their faces, let go the falls, and the little craft struck the water with a crash, but on an even keel.

Knowing he could not reach the boat even were it still on the davits, Dan left the stateroom and half led, half carried the girl toward the stern.

The forward deck was now a seething inferno. The foremast, a pillar of thin name, flickered like a pennon of gold until it broke in the middle and sent up a shower of sparks. The shrouds and ratlines which went with it had barred the black heavens with ruddy lines. From all the openings dull red clouds rolled and bellied skyward, cloud upon cloud; the funnel spouted like a blast furnace.

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But the vessel slowly, but very surely, was falling off the wind; it would soon blow astern. The shelter of the after deck-house would serve for a while, perhaps until some vessel, attracted by the terrible light, would bring them succor. Dan placed the girl behind this steel structure and then, running to the taffrail, leaned far out and called to the boats. But the roar of the flames drowned his cries, and the boats, which had moved out to windward, could not see him. Foot by foot crept the fire; but the stiff wind which finally came over the stern did its work well, and the red avalanche began to slant toward the bow. This meant respite. But he knew that at the very best it could be only a respite, and short at that.

Again and again and again he called for the boats, until his voice grew husky and faint. Then, hopeless of aid from his men, he returned to the girl. She was exactly where he had left her, slightly crouching as though to shut from her eyes the fearful red light.

The wind rush had revived her smoke-dimmed senses. When she was approaching the star-board boat to which her father had directed her she had lost her head, as persons will do in time of fire, and had wandered mechanically, unconsciously, to her cabin and locked herself in. But she was not frightened now. There was that in Dan which she trusted. She looked at him strangely and smiled. She caressed him with her eyes, trusting in, hanging upon, the strength of a man who possessed in divine measure all of man's strength.

A half-hour they crouched together, until the steel walls of their shelter burned to the touch, until the flames licked up over the forward end, ran over the roof, and looked down upon them. But still they remained as they were, while the *Tampico* circled again and brought the wind in their faces, which they drank greedily.

There came a time when the fire hissed constantly on the deck-house—when, indeed, flames plunged around it and touched the two figures. Swiftly Dan reached out his arm and encircled the waist of his companion and drew her to the taffrail.

Four feet below the gilded name on the stern was a six-inch ledge. He lifted the girl as he would a child and placed her on this ledge, bidding her hold to the rail. Then he passed a section of small chain about a stanchion, allowing the end to hang over. If the rail became too hot for their hands they could hold by the chain.

As Dan joined Virginia on the ledge the vessel slued around, bringing the wind full over the bow. With a roaring shout of exultation the fire bridged the last gap, bursting clear over the stern. It bit at their hands; they withdrew them, supporting themselves by the swinging chain.

The girl moaned. Nearer drew the hot breath. She felt Dan's arm tighten about her waist. It was like a curved bar of steel. Looking down, she saw the water racing below—she saw a wave leap up—she felt it touch her foot with its feathery head, gently,

beneficently, and yet traitorously; for how quickly would it quench the lives that it seemed to tempt from the flames!

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"Put your face tight against my chest—put your hands over your nose and mouth—quick!"

She obeyed upon the word and a thrill, not of pain, shot to Dan's brain. He could feel her, soft and trembling, against him, and her warm hair brushed his cheek. With an effort he choked back the flooding emotion. Was it fair, was it right to her—now? But his arm unconsciously tightened about her.

The red glow shone through the girl's closed eyelids—a great heat scorched the back of her neck, and she felt a quiver in the body shielding her; but the grip of the arm remained. There came a blast of God's merciful salt cold air, and she opened her eyes. He was looking down at her—and he saw what he saw. For they were two souls hanging together on the verge of eternity—alone; two souls with death all about fusing them until they were as one. She looked at him long.

"Are you hurt?" she asked. The words sounded thick.

"No—a little. It got my neck and ears. The ship was yawing, though, and that saved us. It was like snapping your hand through a gas flame."

"I'm afraid," said the girl with a sob catching her voice.

"No—don't be afraid! I'll save you—some way."

She opened her eyes and looked in his face again.

"My nobleman! my—"

"Don't!" cried Dan, interrupting her. "You don't know what you are saying. It's so different now." He well knew that impulses which might move a woman in the arms of a man, no matter who, battling for her life, might be for the moment only and lead to nothing but regret and alarm afterwards. How could it be otherwise with Virginia Howland? The girl, as though she had not heard him, as though she had forgotten the emotions which had swayed her, closed her eyes wearily and turned her face away.

The ship was yawing again. Tongues of flame reached hungrily for them, licking above Dan's red-gold hair and his back, but never touching the girl. Then the swing of the vessel and the wind again; then the fire and the torturing heat. Once Dan saw his grandfather's vessel burning as he had often pictured it in boyhood, and he trembled horribly for a second, but only for a second; then he became rigid and smiled at the apparition. The girl had evidently fainted; she hung a dead weight upon his arm. Again the wind drove the flames far out over the stern.

There came a time when the fight for life was waged mechanically, when all sense of thought vanished, and the carrying on of the struggle came down to mere animal

instinct. At such times a brave man need not be ashamed to die—the time has long elapsed when cravens perish. But the very brave, the physically as well as mentally brave, fight on to the end, instinctively. And so Dan fought. He knew that Virginia Howland hung on his arm—but the fire had gone from his ken; he was fighting something, that was all he knew, or cared, since it was for her.

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Once the red sheet enveloped them for a flashing second, but the merciful wind came to save. It could not last long, though. Dan's arm weakened about the limp form of the girl. He closed his eyes and ground his teeth and brought new force to the encircling arm. He glared down at the mass of soft hair scattering over his breast; he thought of that beautiful life and quite impersonally asked himself if all this beauty must die. Where would all the beauty of the world be then? This question ran deliriously through his mind. Eh! where would it all be? If they died together, would they wake together? And the flames came again.

But as they swooped down with redoubled fury he saw almost subconsciously a great tangled litter of wreckage passing beneath him. He uttered a little cry, and with the girl still in his arm he dropped from the ledge. With a sigh of relief he felt the cooling, revivifying water, and the sharp, cold taste of brine in his mouth was like the touch of a new life.

Instinctively he had put his free arm around a section of cargo boom, with a grating caught in the twisted gear. Upon this he pushed and lifted the half-unconscious girl. Then he clambered astride the boom. Thus they drifted, while Dan, his mind slowly clearing, struggled pitifully for full possession of his faculties. He had a dull sense of pain, but the one dominant idea was the girl. Leaning slightly over, he twisted his hand in the folds of her dress lest she slip into the waters. The stars were paling; on the horizon were the first vague hints of dawn. He gazed at the faint gray curtain with interest. It was a dawn he had not expected to see, he told himself.

Then, as he looked, a shape arose before his eye out of the gloom. Dan watched it with dumb fascination. Suddenly a realizing sense of the nature of the apparition shot through his mind. A vessel—God! Dan's voice raised in a long, hoarse cry for assistance. But there was no answer. Yet the craft was bearing toward them, not a hundred yards away, silently as a ship of the dead. Dan cried again, rising on his rolling perch. But the hail died on his lips. He could see now. It was a ship of the dead. It was the derelict they had viewed from the fancied security of the *Tampico's* deck, a few short hours before. An imprecation trembled upon Dan's lips. For the last half-hour Virginia, who had crawled to a kneeling posture, had been watching Dan with unlighted eyes. Now as he turned to her and pointed at the slowly advancing vessel, she nodded slowly, as though comprehending his meaning, and stretched out her arms to him.

Softly, quietly the bow of the hulk slid up and nuzzled gently among the wreckage. Quickly Dan secured the litter to the bow by twisting a length of wire cable through the rusty green fore-chains of the derelict. Then gaining a footing in the mess of gear, he assisted the girl to her feet on the tottering grating, and placed her hand on the chains.

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"Hold here tight," he said. She nodded, and Dan looked about for the easiest way to the deck. It was not difficult to find. The end of the jib-boom had dropped into the water, making an easy incline, and the foremast had also fallen over the bow and was directly alongside. Both were covered with sections of canvas and a maze of gear and rigging.

Dan clambered up, and then, lying flat across the bowsprit and the mast, he put his arms under the girl's shoulders and literally pulled her to his side. Hand in hand they slowly worked their way up among the wreckage to the deck.

And there with the dawn beginning to glow rosily far on the eastern rim of the slaty waste the girl sighed and sank to her knees; and Dan, his head reeling with sleep and exhaustion, sank also. When the darkness had all gone and the sun had cleared the horizon, the first level rays flooded the sullen deck of a gray-green hulk, sodden, desolate, and fell upon the faces of a man and woman sleeping, her head resting on his shoulder, strands of her dark hair lying across his face.

CHAPTER XII

ALONE IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE

As the sun rose higher still they slept. The genial rays flowed over them, drying their wet, clinging garments, filling their stiffened frames with languorous warmth.

Finally the girl sighed and smiled. Half waking now, she thought she was at home in her own bed. The sunlight always awakened her there. She wondered if it was time for her maid to enter. She hoped not; it was so comfortable, and she was, oh, so sleepy! She turned on her side. Then suddenly she started. Certainly she was lying on nothing that would remotely suggest a bed. Sleepily she tried to open her eyes, but the long lashes were glued together by the heavy salt water.

Arousing still further, she rubbed them open. And then as a heaving, littered deck, with patches of blue sea showing through the shattered rail bore upon her vision, a realizing sense of the situation and the tragic events leading to it came to her.

For a moment she lay still, shuddering. Her head still rested upon Dan's arm. She knew it, but she was afraid to arise. Somehow that arm seemed the only thing which assured her she was in a living world. Even in the brilliant morning sunlight the vessel, souging, creaking, groaning, as it moved slouchily over the waters impressed her as the shape of terror. From the deck little mist spirals arose like spirits of the men who had deserted the ship. And hovering all about was the gray, sordid reek of desolation, eerie, awe-inspiring.

And yet the Captain must not find her thus. Slowly she withdrew her head. She hated to awaken him. Yet she felt she must hear his voice, for the all-pervading loneliness

was unbearable. She sat up and shook him gently by the shoulder. It was as though she had applied an electric shock. With a muffled exclamation he lifted himself by his elbow, and the next instant he was on his feet.

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"Miss Howland!" he exclaimed. The sound of his voice echoed hollow along the deck, but it was the most joyous sound Virginia had ever heard. Leaning down, he assisted her to her feet. Their eyes met, and they gazed at each other, wondering, uncertain. Alone of all the world, these two, in the midst of a vast, lonely domain where hidden terrors lurk, where elements unharness their might and work their harm unchecked, where wind and wave whisper of murderous deeds, where the rime of dead ages is still fresh. It was all too big for minds to encompass, for their senses to grasp.

A great sob shook the girl.

"Will—will you please go away—a moment? I think I am going to cry," she stammered. She turned from him hurriedly and walked toward the rail. She tottered as though about to fall. Dan sprang to her side and placed his hand lightly on her arm. The touch seemed to strengthen her. With a convulsive effort she gained control of herself, and as Dan's hand dropped to his side she looked at him with a quivering smile.

"I am going to be brave. I am not going to cry. Captain, tell me, is my father safe, and my aunt—and the rest?"

"There is not the slightest question about that," replied Dan. "They got overboard smartly. The lifeboats were steel, well manned and supplied with provisions for a week. If they weren't picked up last night by some steamship attracted by the fire, they will be within a short time." The girl regarded him closely, as though trying to determine whether he was speaking from conviction or merely to dissipate her fears. Interpreting her expression, Dan shook his head impatiently.

"I am sincere, Miss Howland. I have no more doubt of the safety of your father and the others than I have that I am alive. The sea has been comparatively smooth, the weather clear. Our situation is the one to bother about."

"But some steamship will surely see us."

"I hope so, but remember we are on a derelict. Where we are, or where we are going heaven only knows. Sometimes—there is no sense in trying to avoid the truth—derelicts go for weeks and even months without being sighted. Still, I don't think we shall. At night we'll have our distress lights. We shall come out all right. In the meantime we may not even have to be uncomfortable. Usually when men desert these schooners they go in a hurry, leaving almost everything behind. I am going to investigate affairs. Will you come? You may never have another opportunity of this sort."

Dan's voice, at first grave, had gradually assumed a lighter tone, and at the humorous allusion in the last sentence she smiled. Virginia was a sensible girl, but it must be confessed that her position alone with a man on a derelict in the middle of nowhere

would have dazed a woman who held even broader views of the ordinary conventions than she did.

As for the Captain, he evidently intended to accept the inevitable in a matter-of-fact, common-sense way. There was nothing for her but to do likewise. That he would be tactful and considerate in every way she knew. And he would save her too, in the end. Something seemed to tell her that. She smiled at him bravely.

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"I think it will be fun, Captain! Lead on."

Their course aft was attended with difficulty. All along the deck was a thick mass of wreckage, broken casks, boxes, sections of spars, tattered canvas, and enough wire rope and other gear, it seemed, to encircle the world. Amidships the hull sagged so that the deck was not three feet above the water.

Ascending the slight incline, Dan led the way to the entrance to the after cabin, containing four rooms—two on either side of a corridor. The cabins were just below the level of the deck but were not flooded.

"Now," said Dan with his hand on the knob of the door at his right, "we will pay the Captain a visit."

The bunk was mussed as though the skipper had left it hastily, but otherwise the apartment was in good order. There was a little oaken desk containing a dictionary, several books on navigation, and writing appurtenances. In the middle, on a piece of blotting-paper, was an overturned inkstand with a pen still in it. Along the top were several photographs of home scenes, probably New England, and a picture of a rather comely young woman.

"And here's a woman's hat," cried Virginia, picking from a corner a rather garishly trimmed creation.

Dan paused and looked at it.

"That's good," he said. "His wife was evidently aboard." He opened a door leading into the next cabin. "This was her room undoubtedly," he said.

The girl peered in with a delighted expression.

"Why, of course." Her eyes took a quick inventory. An ornate if cheap dressing-table! Four waists on coat hangers! Four skirts, beautifully hung! And what a litter of brushes and things on the floor! She turned to Dan, who had not entered, but was standing in the doorway, smiling. "It must have been perfectly maddening for the good lady of the ship to leave all this behind." She walked to the dressing-table and peered into the mirror. It must be said she saw a girl whom under other circumstances she would hardly have recognized. Her heavy hair was dishevelled. Her long, blue broadcloth ulster was stained with salt water and altogether out of shape. A great black smudge ran along her cheek, and on her chin was a deep red scratch.

She looked at Dan from out the mirror, blushing.



"I am afraid I should compare rather unfavorably with the Captain's lady. I think, first of all, I shall sit right down and do my hair. But no—of course not now." She opened her eyes wide.

"Oh, yes, you can," laughed Dan. "I am going to leave you now and look about the ship."

"Oh, no, you're not," exclaimed the girl; "you're not to leave me alone on this horrid ship just yet. The hair can wait. I'll go with you. If everything is as nice as this cabin I shall feel quite at home."

The cabin opposite the Captain's had been the mate's, and behind it was the mess cabin. Here the greater part of crockery and glass was shattered on the floor. An overturned bird-cage with a dead canary in it lay under the table.

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"Well," said Dan, "we ought to be comfortable. Now, Miss Howland, I think you ought to go to your cabin and get off those damp skirts. I have got to take a look at the cargo, see what plans I can make to render us something else than a log on the sea, and nose about in the galley." He started. "By George! I had forgotten about food. That's rather important." He hastily left the cabin and started down the corridor, with the girl's warning not to be long following him.

First he stopped in the carpenter's room and secured the very thing he was looking for,—an axe. With this he broke down the door of the storeroom, which, as he had expected, was locked. There were a barrel of flour, tins of beef and of soups and vegetables, condensed milk, and a number of preserve jars filled with coffee.

Taking one of the jars in which he saw the coffee was ground he poured out a cupful and drew some water from a cask. Then going into the galley, he dug up a coffee-pot from the mass of cooking utensils which covered the floor, and proceeded to light a fire in the range. It was soon roaring, and Dan had just mixed the coffee and water when Virginia appeared at the door.

For an instant Dan hardly recognized the girl in her trim blue skirt, white sailor waist, open at the throat, and a red leather belt with a great brass buckle.

"You have done well," he said at length. "I had no idea you would be so fortunate."

"Yes, everything fits pretty well," laughed the girl, "except that the skirt is a trifle short, but of course that doesn't matter here. That's not the point, though." She gazed at him sternly. "Who gave you permission to come in here and cook?"

As Dan looked at her in amazement she continued:

"Now see here, Captain Merrithew, we might just as well face our situation. This is no time for observance of the minor conventions or gallantry. We are shipwrecked. We are nothing more nor less than two human beings cast away on a derelict. You are to regard me, not as Virginia Howland, helpless, dependent, to be waited upon and watched over, but as you would Ralph Oddington or any one else were he in my place—as an assistant in the common cause of safety. I am going to help you in every way I can, and I am going to begin by establishing myself as cook of this party from now on. Please don't imagine I can't cook. I attended a French culinary school for two seasons. And now—" she stepped into the galley and seized Dan by the sleeve, drawing him gently toward the door—"won't you please go so that I shall have elbow room—this is such a tiny box of a place. Please!"

Dan hesitated no longer. Seizing his axe he left the galley and went forward. The mainmast had snapped about six feet below the truck; of the other two masts nothing was left but the stumps. He chopped away the wreckage hanging over the bow,

including the bowsprit and foretopmast, and had made good progress in clearing away the forward deck when Virginia, standing in the doorway of the after cabin, called him.

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"Breakfast, Captain," she cried. "Breakfast is served."

The girl was laughing excitedly as she led the way to the dining-cabin and seated herself in front of a great, steaming nickel coffee-pot. Blushing radiantly she pointed to the other chair.

"Sit down, Captain Merrithew." But Dan protested.

"Now, really, Miss Howland," he laughed, "I can just as—"

"Captain," interrupted Virginia, sharply, "don't be a goose. There—" She began to pour the coffee. "It isn't really much of a breakfast," she added; "I shall do much better for luncheon. But, as it is—" she inclined her head with mock unction as she handed him his cup.

Dan never forgot that breakfast. It was one of those events which linger in memory, every detail indelibly stamped, long after more important pictures of the past have lost even a semblance of outline.

Sunlight flowed in through the portholes and rested on the red tablecloth and the glittering steel cutlery. For a centrepiece she had a half shattered clay flower-pot containing a geranium plant which she had picked up from the deck outside the woman's cabin. It was droopy and generally woebegone, but it served its purpose. In front of Dan was a heaping dish of toast artistically browned, and a generous glass jar of marmalade.

And opposite, smiling at him, talking to him as though they had breakfasted together for a number of years, was the most radiant girl he had ever looked upon. The simple costume was wonderfully effective. The white, full throat and the curves of the neck running to the shoulders were revealed by the low rolling collar, and the hair coiled low shone with lustrous sheen.

[Illustration: Opposite, smiling at him, as though they had breakfasted together for years, was the radiant girl.]

Despite Dan's fears as to the manner in which their tenancy of the derelict might terminate, he abandoned himself to the sheer charm of it all. When he finally arose, ending a light, laughing conversation, the girl regarded him seriously.

"Now, Captain," she said, "I want to ask you something, and you must tell me truthfully. You have examined this vessel, and you have doubtless some idea as to what we are to do. Tell me the exact situation."

Dan looked her straight in the eye a moment, and the girl returned his gaze unflinchingly.

"I am perfectly honest," she said; "I want you to be."

"Well," said Dan, "first of all I'll tell you what I am going to try to do: I am going to try to sail this derelict into some port. There is enough of the mainmast standing to allow some sort of a sail, and we can't be so terribly far from land. Besides, this hold is filled with logwood and mahogany. Now this is a valuable cargo, worth at least fifty thousand dollars. The vessel herself isn't worth a great deal, but still something. Here is the point: if we take this vessel into port alone we can claim fifty per cent salvage, and we'll get it, too. That means that we shall net, through our little experience, some twenty-five thousand dollars between us."

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Virginia stepped toward him with a delighted exclamation. Dan raised his hand admonishingly.

"But," he continued, "we must first get the vessel into port. Several things may prevent this. The chief preventive will be a storm. If God gives us good weather for three or four days that is all I ask. If He doesn't, then we—"

"Go on," said the girl.

"Then we must simply pray for small favors."

Virginia nodded gravely.

"I understand," she said. "I trust you, Captain." She looked at him fixedly. "Can you imagine how much I trust you? I shall be strong and brave and do exactly as you tell me." She started forward suddenly. "What have you under your coat sleeves? Are your arms bandaged?" she cried. "And your neck, too?"

Dan laughed.

"It's nothing," he said. "My hands and arms and the back of my neck were pretty well scorched. I dug some picric acid out of the Captain's medicine chest and tied myself up a bit. I am all right now. The pain has all disappeared."

The girl flushed.

"And you didn't ask me to help you?"

"There was absolutely no need. Honestly, if I had needed to bother you I should not have hesitated. The flames did not touch me, you know, just their hot breath; the bandages do not amount to anything."

"Well," replied Virginia, shaking her head, "I don't like it one bit. If I can do anything to repay you, however slightly, for all you have done for me, please give me the opportunity."

"I shall remember that," said Dan.

CHAPTER XIII

NIGHT ON THE DERELICT

When the sun that evening sank like a red ball behind the purple horizon, Dan laid aside various implements and went aft with the realization of a day well spent. He had

cleared the deck. Using the mainboom and a goodly section of the tattered canvas he had improvised a capacious leg-of-mutton sail which flapped idly in the almost motionless air.

He found Virginia seated in a camp lounging-chair, with a paper-covered novel lying open face downward in her lap, gazing thoughtfully at the dusk which seemed rolling toward them over the sea like a fog.

"It was a beautiful sunset," she said; "but now it has gone, the ocean seems to have such a cruel, cold look. And there are whispering voices on the water."

She shivered slightly and looked at him half humorously.

"I know," said Dan. "But the stars will be out to-night, and, later, the moon."

"It will be dreary at best," replied Virginia. "I think it would be nice if there weren't going to be any night until we—until we—" she paused. "Oh, Captain, you think we—" She stopped short and frowned. "There," she said reproachfully, "I told you I was going to be brave. I'm succeeding admirably!"

"You *are* succeeding admirably," said Dan. "Yes, I think we are going to get out of this. Of course we are. In the meantime, pending dinner, or supper, rather, I am going into my cabin to see if I can't confiscate some of the Captain's clothes. I feel as if I had been in these for years. And—" he hesitated.

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"And what?" she asked.

"And if the Captain has left a razor, I am going to shave."

"Are you really?" laughed the girl. "And while you are about it, won't you please telephone for my hairdresser?"

With the dark came a light breeze—and the stars, which Dan hailed with delight as giving him something to go by. The breeze came over the starboard beam, the sail filling nicely, and Dan, taking a stand by the wheel, directed the derelict toward land. He had lighted the red starboard lamp—the port lamp was missing—and hung a lantern at the head of the foremast. Virginia sat beside him.

For an hour Dan had been absorbed in the business of manoeuvring his sodden charge. Waterlogged as she was it was no easy matter to swing her out of the current and head her upon a course. But at last he had succeeded. Having but one sail it could not have been better placed than amidships. Placed in the mainmast it was easier to maintain steerage way and at the same time it served to push the derelict forward. Turning to the girl, he laughed triumphantly; and she, who had begun to be almost jealous of the derelict, inasmuch as it had taken so much of his attention, smiled politely, if faintly.

"And now," said Dan, sitting beside her, with his hands on the lower spokes of the battered wheel, "we are homeward bound. The stars have told me a great deal. See them all. Over there are Regulus and his sickle, and in the northwest you see Queen Vega. There is Ursa Major up there, nearly overhead. There's the Little Bear north of it; and still north is the good old North Star. We are going straight for land, Miss Howland."

"You are awfully clever, Captain Merrithew."

Dan looked at her quickly. She was smiling mockingly.

"Yes," she continued, as though communing with herself, "I really believe he would rather talk about his old stars than bother coming down to the level of a girl who is dying to bring him to earth. I cannot imagine a more disagreeable man to be shipwrecked with."

"Nor I a more agreeable—" He checked himself. "I am entirely at your service, Miss Howland," he added; "which is to say, I have alighted."

She did not answer at once. Instead she leaned forward with her hands supporting her chin, her elbows in her lap, gazing solemnly at the western stars.

"It is nearly eight o'clock, isn't it?" she asked, without moving her head.

“Yes,” replied Dan, “about that. Why?”

“Just now in New York,” said Virginia in her low, full tones, “they have finished dining on Broadway. All the lights are, oh, so bright! and women in the most gorgeous spring gowns and men in evening dress are pouring out of the Astor, the Waldorf, the Knickerbocker,—every place,—and stepping into red and green taxi-cabs, or strolling leisurely to see the latest play. And on Fifth Avenue, in the club opposite our house, the same five

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stout men are just about to occupy the same five stout chairs in the big windows. I have watched them for years, and—" The girl paused. "Our house! Do you suppose my father is there now?" She closed her eyes. "I can almost see him. Of course he is mourning me for lost; and Aunt Helen is trying to comfort him and other persons. But there, I must not think of that, must I?" She turned to Dan and smiled bravely.

"No, you must not," he said gravely. "He is a man; he will bear his grief like a man. And when you return—"

"When I return?" interpolated the girl, quickly. "Have you thought about that, Daniel Merrithew?"

"Not a great deal, except to resolve that if I ever get ashore I shall never again go to sea as a sailor."

"Oh, I don't mean that," said Virginia. "Ever since the night when you were shielding me from the fire—"

Dan raised his hand.

"Anything you said that night, Miss Howland, need cause you no regret, no misgiving. As well judge the words, the actions, of a man who knows he has but an hour to live."

Virginia looked at him puzzled. She started to speak, but closed her lips tight upon the words. She was vividly flushed.

"Did I say anything so terrible then?" she asked at length. "I am sure I can remember nothing I regret. Of course I don't remember much; I suppose I was awfully flighty, then. But you were fine and brave and noble; and, whatever I said, I stand pat, as father says," the girl laughed. "This is such a conventional age that when a knight of modern times revives the daring and chivalry of older ages, we women have no adequate way in which to requite it, you know."

"You must not think about it at all," replied Dan.

"And why not? That night I hung at the mercy of your strength and endurance to pain, when you could easily have saved yourself by letting me go. Ah, don't deny it," as Dan made a gesture. "I know! My life was in your keeping, to save it or let it go, as you willed. Daniel Merrithew, do you ever feel that now you have the right to be interested in that life that you alone saved?"

"What do you mean?" Dan was looking at her curiously.

The girl laughed excitedly.

“Oh, I don’t know exactly what I do mean—except, except that I have simply felt, well, as though I have no right to be altogether my own selfish self—in the way I used to be, I mean; that I have no longer an absolute right—— Oh, how can I explain it clearly? Let us say that I have a conviction that any serious change I might wish to make in my life should not be done without—well, not consent, exactly, but good wishes—no, I mean consent. There, that may be putting it clumsily, but don’t you understand?”

Dan flushed. “I have saved lives before,” he said; “and twice men have saved my life, and I never felt,—felt the way you say toward my rescuers.”

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"But that is different; it is impossible to compare man's attitude toward man as you would a woman's."

"Yes, that's so."

"Then you, too, have felt as I feel?"

"No, I never thought of it in that way."

She was silent a moment, but she regarded him searchingly. His face was upturned, gazing at the flapping sail on the mainmast. She caught the strong, classic profile in the starlight, and over her flooded the deep sense of her utter dependence upon him, upon his skill, his strength, his resource, and the deeper sense of her implicit trust in him as the embodiment of all these qualities.

She yearned now to express to him her emotions; she almost felt she must. And yet she hardly knew how. She had tried to do so, but how inadequate her words had seemed! Bearing in upon her mood, Dan's cool, even voice sounded miles away.

"Miss Howland, had you thought—"

She interrupted him.

"See here, Daniel Merrithew, I said before that ceremony had no part on this boat. Hereafter, if you won't call me by my first name you must address me by my last. It must be either one or the other."

Dan made no comment. He hesitated just a moment, then he said:

"I was going to ask you, Virginia, if you had thought of going to your cabin yet."

She smiled and blushed.

"I—I wanted to speak to you about that," she said, speaking rapidly. "I saw you this evening taking things from the Captain's room into the mate's cabin. Now, if you have any idea that I am going to sleep on this horrid, grisly boat, so far away from you, you are mistaken. You must sleep in the Captain's room—and the door leading into mine must be ajar, too. Oh, I am terribly unmaidenly! I cannot help it; I shall be horribly forlorn and frightened, and shall hear all sorts of sounds; I can hear them now, and so can you—"

"But," interrupted Dan, "I cannot go to sleep, Miss—Virginia. This boat must be sailed to land. There is a breeze. She cannot be left alone; she would go a hundred miles out of her course; and, besides, we might meet a vessel."

For a moment the girl gazed at him uncomprehendingly.

“Do you mean to say you are going to stay up all night and sail? But you have not had a wink of sleep and I shall certainly not go into that—” she suddenly arose. “How stupid of me! Of course both of us must stand watch in turn. While you are steering I shall sleep at the wheel. While I am steering you shall sleep there. How simple! Then we need not be alone at all. Here, I’ll hold the wheel first and you go to sleep. I shall wake you at midnight, perhaps before if I get frightened. Then I shall be asleep through those creepy morning hours.”

Dan demurred vigorously, but she was steadfast. So he went to the after cabin and brought out several blankets and a pillow, which she arranged deftly.

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As he prepared to lie down, he looked at the girl.

“See that star up there?” he said. “Well, just keep the vessel going the way she is, with that star over your shoulder. Don’t let it get anywhere else. If it does, wake me quickly. If you become afraid, or see anything, let me know at once.”

“Yes,” said the girl, “I understand. Good-night, Daniel.”

“Good-night, Virginia.”

In a few minutes Dan was fast asleep. Through the night sailed the girl, alone, sore afraid, but comforted with the assurance that a touch of her hand would bring to her the powerful man who slept at her feet.

Straight she stood at the wheel, and tall, like some figure of a goddess of antiquity. The moon rose, and its light glorified her. It fell upon the shattered deck, defining every dreary detail. The waves rose and fell with the lilt of music. The tinkling breeze was cool and fresh and invigorating. Fear vanished from her. She felt herself a part of the elements, a part of the night, the lone representative of life and consciousness, and God amid the waste of primeval desolation.

So she sailed, exalted, ennobled, until long after midnight. When her thoughts turned to the man sleeping at her feet, she leaned down, gazing long and earnestly upon his face. Then, as he stirred, she let her hand rest on his forehead a moment.

“It is time to awaken, Daniel,” she said.

He was upon his feet in an instant. There was a strange expression upon his face.

“I was far away from here,” he said. “I was dreaming, the bulliest sort of a dream.”

“Dreaming? And what about, pray?”

“You.”

“You were! Tell me the dream.”

“They say dreams that are told never come true,” replied Dan, slowly.

Their eyes met. Both were smiling. Then her eyes fell; but she still smiled.

“Then,” she said, “I guess you had better not tell me—unless—”

“Unless?” asked Dan, as she paused.

Slowly she arranged the blankets, while Dan waited for the completion of the sentence. Then she lay down.

“Good-night,” she said.

When she awoke, the sun was rising high. The breeze had died away. The wheel was deserted. She looked down the stretch of deck, but Dan was nowhere to be seen. With a fluttering heart she arose and shook out her skirts, hardly daring to peer into the cabin for fear her dreadful intimations might prove true.

He was not in the cabin. She called his name in a low voice, but only the hollow echo resounded from the corridor. In agonized suspense now she ran out on the deck.

“Dan!” she called with all the power of her lungs, not expecting that he would hear her now. “Dan Merrithew, have you left me?”

There came an answering hail, and looking toward the bow she saw Dan clambering out of the forward hatch. His shoes and trousers were dripping wet. As he ran to her she waited, weeping. He caught her hands and held them.

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"Oh, Dan, Dan!" she cried, "you frightened me so! I thought you had gone. I thought you were dead. You are not going to leave me again, are you?"

"Never," said Dan.

Then both started as though the underlying significance of the question and answer had suddenly dawned upon them. Gently she withdrew her hands, which Dan did not seek to retain. In conversational tone, he said:

"I am awfully sorry, Virginia. While you were sleeping, the wind fell, an hour or two after dawn, and the blue of the water struck me. I found the Captain's thermometer and lowered it overboard. My best hopes were realized. We are in the Gulf Stream, Virginia, and moving northward at about four miles an hour. We are all right now if all goes well."

"But why were you hiding?" asked the girl.

"I wasn't. I wanted to see if the water had hurt the logwood, so as to impair its value, and to learn the condition of the hull. You know the cargo is all that is keeping us afloat. Everything is pretty soggy down there, but we'll hold together, I guess; and I don't believe the logwood will suffer a bit. Of course the mahogany is all right. We're lucky. One schooner in a million has mahogany these days."

She had been gazing at him almost vacantly while he was talking. Now she smiled beautifully.

"Oh, I am so glad to see you again," she said. "It seems almost as if you had been away a thousand years."

"That," said Dan, "almost pays me for frightening you. Are you ready for breakfast? I knocked it together a while ago."

"For which you shall be punished—when we get ashore."

CHAPTER XIV

DAN AND VIRGINIA

After breakfast they drew chairs to the wheel and sat out on deck. It was a wonderful May morning. Thin clouds hung in the blue, like little yachts; and the cool, balmy air and the sparkling sunlight brought the clear, steady call of work to be done, of life to be lived beautifully and nobly, and strong things to overcome, or to accomplish—the call of youth.

And they heard the call, these two, and responded to it with the joyousness of youth, wherein a phrase is a lifetime, and a word, volumes. They talked of themselves, regarding each other wonderingly as hidden depths of character were revealed, or a word, or a sentence, or a sympathetic silence threw light upon a new element of personality.

He spoke of the *Fledgling*. He used to see her through a golden haze. She was his first command. Yet each day came the old question, What next? And the answer. Why, everything. A future—bigger things and better, broader work, not on the sea at the last. No; landward, somewhere, anywhere. But onward, onward!

“Something is linked with every one’s destiny, Virginia. Fate fires no salutes; every shot is solid and aimed at something. And the thing that is hit you have to step over and go on; if you stop to look at it and think over it and try to look for something else for Fate to knock down for you, something easier to step over and get away from, you find, perhaps, years later, that just there you missed your chance.”

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She regarded him with kindling eyes.

“And so that has been your philosophy.”

“For want of a better, yes.”

“I think it is a splendid one, and it has stood its highest test—it has served you well. Do you know, the first time I had any idea you were interested in the higher things was that day we were in your cabin on the *Tampico*. Do you remember my looking at your books and exclaiming over the selection? I don’t know, but somehow the Bible impressed me most.”

“I had a pretty good English foundation at Exeter,” replied Dan, “and I kept it up after I left there. That Bible—I think I did grow and broaden after leaving school, but I never grew beyond Psalms and St. Paul; which proves that a little knowledge is not dangerous.”

The girl smiled.

“Most men would be ashamed to say that,” she said. “Most of the men I have known,” she added.

“I never would have said it to any one but you.” He said this with quiet conviction, and the girl inclined her head slightly.

“I thank you. . . . Do you remember that night at the dinner when I told you that if our friendship was to continue it was to be one of limitations? How long ago that seems now—and how absurd!”

“Does it seem absurd?”

“Doesn’t it?” She laughed. “It seems to me you were inclined to regard it so that night.”

“Much to your indignation.”

“Is it so? If you had asked me, I might have admitted that the fact I ever could be indignant with you was the principal reason why that night of the dinner seemed so long ago.” She hastened to qualify. “For, you see, I count you now among my very closest friends.”

“That is saying a great deal,” smiled Dan. “When we get ashore and you are comfortably installed as queen of your father’s drawing-room and Dan Merrithew is—”

An exclamation from the girl interrupted him.



“Dan Merrithew, don’t you dare!”

“And Dan Merrithew is just a—” She had risen, and before he could complete the sentence her hands were pressed tightly over his mouth.

“Will you be good?” she cried. She released her hands and regarded him with mock severity.

“But—” laughed Dan.

Again the hands flew to his face.

“Will you?”

“I will,” said Dan.

“And you’ll promise not to say or think such nonsense again?”

“I promise,” said Dan.

And then for a while both fell silent, thinking of the future which lay before them. The girl smiled as her day-dreams opened and expanded. Dan frowned, and the fingers of his well-shaped hands locked and unlocked across his knees.

Suddenly Virginia sprang to her feet with an exclamation.

“Oh, I forgot,” she said, and ran, laughing, to the galley, whence she returned with a large plate of fudge. At Dan’s look of surprise she tossed her head in mock disdain of what he might say or think.

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"I unearthed two great cakes of chocolate last night," she said, "and as I was simply dying for some candy I made fudge while preparing breakfast. I had to use condensed milk, watered; and as there was no marble slab I had to stir it in the pan. I don't know how good it is; it's awfully grainy"; and thus, rattling on, she took a square of the confection and placed it gingerly between her lips.

"Why, it's not so bad," she said. "Here! Open your mouth and shut your eyes!" Which Dan did, declaring that he had never eaten anything half so delicious.

"Really!" she exclaimed, with falling inflection. "Then I must say I feel sorry for you. . . . Now, why have you that little amused twinkle in your eyes? I used to see it sometimes at the table on the *Tampico* when Reggie was boasting, and—and sometimes when I was trying to be very brilliant. Do you know, sometimes I felt like boxing your ears, you seemed so superior."

"It was not superiority in your case," laughed Dan, "it was appreciation."

"Thank you," said Virginia; "and now?"

"Oh," smiled Dan, "the thought of fudge on a derelict was and is responsible for this twinkle."

"I don't care," she frowned. "It is the person that rises superior to conditions who triumphs in this world. Anyway, you seem to be disposing of your share, despite your notions of incongruity."

"Have you thought," said Dan, "that it might pay to be very economical with your chocolate? If we stay here two or three months and all our food runs out we can live on ever so little chocolate each day."

"Two or three months!" echoed Virginia. "Now, you are tactful, aren't you? And just as I was sitting here chattering away, with no thought that we were not on a yacht ready to turn home the minute I wished to!"

Dan smiled.

"If we were on a yacht, how soon would you—wish to?" he said.

The girl met his eyes undauntedly.

"If I answered you in one way I should not be at all polite," she said; "and if in another, I should not be—be—"

"Honest?" suggested Dan.

“That would depend upon what I said,” she answered with a non-committal shrug. “Now I am going. I’ve a lot to do in my cabin, and a luncheon menu to make out. *Au revoir!*” She paused at the entrance to the cabins, smiled brightly at Dan, and then disappeared.

Long he sat, gazing out over the serene waters, filled with a great inward thrill. The wonder of all the fast-crowding events of the past fortnight was asserting itself potently in his mind, and it was difficult to realize he was not now living some wild, improbable dream. But, after all, he found the sense of responsibility dominant. To his care was committed a beautiful life,—a life that must be saved, cherished, and ultimately restored to its proper environment. Of late, it seemed, an evil star had pursued him; everything he had commanded or had anything to do with had either sunk or burned—an extraordinary train of misfortune not lacking in the lives of many able masters of craft. What next? He passed over that thought with a frown. He was living in a beautiful present; the future would be met as the past had been, bravely and with no cry for quarter.

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The present! He was immediately to learn how dearly he prized it; for as he gazed seaward, the smoke of a steamship, below the horizon, appeared. He sprang to his feet and watched it eagerly; and yet when that faint column grew more dim and finally faded, he sat back constrained to confess that he was almost glad the course of the steamship was as it was. He fought against it, thinking of the girl in the cabin and her interests. And yet—and yet? He shrugged his shoulders and walked toward the door, lured by the song which he remembered so clearly.

“If I had you! If I had you! You!”

“Will I do?” he laughed, peering in at her open door.

“For the present, yes,” she bowed, “because I want you to admire. See, I have been decorating my room with unbleached muslin. Aren’t those curtains dear? And those silesia bunk tapestries, aren’t they fascinating?”

“They are, indeed. How much would you charge to beautify my cabin?”

Virginia blushed.

“You had better ask how much you owe me,” she said. Then, “You haven’t looked in your cabin! And after all my labor, too!”

With an exclamation Dan darted across the corridor and beheld, with kindling eyes, many evidences of that feminine touch without which hardened bachelors may fancy their quarters complete. She had followed him to the door and was gazing over his shoulder. Something caught in Dan’s throat. Always a man’s man, as the saying is, the full force of the realization of his strange situation seemed rushing from the interior of that cabin to overpower him. A girl, a beautiful girl, one whom he had looked upon as he had looked upon the beautiful unattainable things of this life, planning and executing for his pleasure, and blushing joyously to find that which she had done for him pleasing in his sight, left him bereft of words.

He turned to her and strove to speak, and then suddenly he faced about and walked hurriedly to the deck. She came up behind him and placed her hand upon his shoulder and smiled, understanding. His eyes met hers, and then, with an involuntary movement, his arm was about her waist. For a full minute they stood thus, neither moving, she regarding him with wondering eyes, but still smiling slightly.

Suddenly he started; his arm swiftly dropped, and he glanced with a jerk of his head towards the sail.

“Are we getting out of our course?” she asked.

“I was,” he said, scowling, “but I won’t again. Can you forgive one who is no better than a—than a blamed pirate?”

“I can forgive you everything but calling yourself names,” she said gently.

Before another hour had passed, clouds began to rise from out the sea. There came a fitful breeze, with a little hum to it. To the southeast-ward the horizon assumed a grayish-white tinge.

Dan watched it anxiously, and the girl followed his gaze and then glanced at him inquiringly.

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"It's going to cloud over," he said. "There may be some deviltry before we make shore."

He moistened his fingers, moving them to and fro in the air.

"It isn't a storm," he said; "it is fog."

"Fog!" The girl was trembling. "What does that mean?"

"It means that for a while old ocean is going to destroy all our pretty scenery, and that it is going to be cold and nasty and disagreeable."

Already, in fact, the ocean had lost its color. Heavy blue-white clouds with shredded, filmy foundations, which seemed almost to sweep the waters, moved swiftly to the westward, while in the background the wall of mist advanced silently to encompass them. They could feel its breath, heavy, clammy, chilling.

Presently a mass of vapor, like a detached squadron of cavalry, swept about the derelict and then moved on, leaving little shredded patches hanging about the foremast.

Quite unknown to the girl, Dan, the preceding day, had constructed a raft, which he regarded as being quite as safe for ocean travelling, if not quite so comfortable, as the derelict. He had lashed supplies, a small cask of water, and the like thereon, and now, with the fog-pall gathering about, he went amidships, examined it carefully, and made sure that nothing would prevent a hasty launching in event of disaster.

When he returned the murk had closed in thickly. It was as though the vessel were immured from the world. Virginia was standing at the wheel, and with the pall throwing the derelict into more sombre relief, Dan caught more strongly than ever the utter contrast which her presence brought to this abandoned hulk. Whenever she had walked along the deck it had seemed a profanation to him that the uneven planking should know her tread; that she should be on the derelict at all was, he felt, a working of Fate against everything that was beautiful and graceful.

Now, as she stood there in the pallid gloom, she suggested some tall, beautiful genius, presiding over the wrack of elemental things, facing a more glorious future.

"How shut in everything seems!" she said, as Dan took the wheel from her hands. He had a long fog-horn which he blew at intervals.

"We haven't seen a speck of a ship," he explained, "but now the fog is about us there's liable to be a fleet of them in our vicinity at any time. At least that has been my experience with fogs. It would not be much fun to be rammed, although in our present condition I fancy it would hurt the other vessel more than it would this."

Hour after hour they went on blindly, silently, save at such times as Dan's raucous horn blasts went tearing through the fog. The wind had died away. Sometimes the forward part of the vessel was hidden from their view. Frequently it seemed distorted; strange phantom shapes filled the deck, and the souging of the yielding hull brought strange, uncanny sounds to their ears.

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Dan was seated on the deck, his eyes peering about on all sides, trying to pierce the veil, every nerve taut, every sense alert. The girl crept close beside him, so that she touched him, and there she remained, while all the terrors of the ghostly ship arose to confront her. The weed-hung, slimy rails and wave-bitten deck stretched away in ever-fading perspective to the foremast where everything ended in an amorphous blur.

There came a time when the two felt almost a part of the deep—two mortals admitted into all the hidden evils that lurk thereon. Their lot to witness the inception of mighty tempests; to hear great gray waves boast of the harm they had done and the winds to plan their rending deeds. Perhaps they themselves would be called to the work, to deal to some proud vessel the death blow as so many derelicts have done.

Once far off there sounded a series of whistle blasts, hoarse, tremulous notes of warning and inquiry. But as the two listened with straining ears the sounds became more dim. Finally they ceased altogether.

The girl eventually lost all sense of acute feeling. She sat dumb, her undeviating eyes fastened upon Dan's face, as though in him she found all that was tangible or normal or real. Her hand was resting on his shoulder now, clutching it tight; but if he knew it was there, he made no sign.

At length, toward evening, as though in a dream, Dan's voice bore upon her ears. For a moment she gazed at him dully, and then she comprehended his words.

"It is beginning to rain, Virginia. The fog will go away now."

"Oh, good!" she exclaimed.

"The wind is freshening, too," he added, "and it doesn't feel very good. I think we're going to have a blow for a change."

It seemed so. Already the mists were beginning to scuttle away before the increasing wind-rush which moaned with evil breath.

"Will you hold the wheel for a moment, please," said Dan.

As she placed her hands on the spokes he went forward and lowered the sail. There were two lines of reef points in the section of canvas and Dan took in both. When he hoisted it again there was just a patch of three-cornered sail.

Within half an hour it was raining hard. The wind was increasing slowly but surely, and the sea was rising. Dan asked the girl to go into the cabin and to remain there either until the storm was over, or he summoned her. She obeyed him partially. She went into the cabin, but returned quickly with two slickers.

“Do you suppose,” she cried, “I am going to let you be alone now? I am going to help you, and, if it must be, to die with you. I am not a bit afraid any more.”

Dan placed his hand on her arm.

“Get down here, then, under the lee of this cabin. We are not going to die. At least not yet a while.”

So the storm came. With his patch of sail Dan had headed the craft up into the wind; and thus, with the boat already beginning to rise and fall, with the broad bow groaning, and oozing ends of planking, and dirty water, and the deck, contracting and expanding like the belly of a stricken whale, he settled down to the long fight.

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The fog had all departed now. North, east, south, and west, nothing but the gray of onrushing waves and a shrouded sky as implacable as the morning of doom. Darkness was falling swiftly. Soon the terrible night began.

Not that it was the worst storm in which Dan had ever been, but certainly he had never faced North Atlantic tumult under such a disadvantage, under conditions so desperately precarious. The bow rose but heavily to the seas, and never topped them. The water rushing over, poured down the deck in mill-races, filling it to the rails, occasionally springing up over the poop and the top of the after cabin, lashing the faces of the two crouching at the wheel behind it.

"It's a sou'easter, I'm almost certain," roared Dan in the girl's ear. "It will work up to a climax gradually, and then gradually go down, at this season of the year. Don't be afraid of the water. We can't sink, I believe; the only danger is that we might break up—and we won't do that."

But despite the optimism of his words, Dan was not altogether certain that the wallowing wreck would hold together. There was nothing to do but wait and see. The situation he grasped in all its grievous details. He had never been so happy, so utterly at peace as aboard this derelict. No gilded barge of antiquity had ever been so glorious, so golden as this mangled wraith of the seas in the sunlit hours of the immediate past. Her voice, her laughter, had filled them with music, her presence with all the poetry and romance of the world, and the light in her eyes shining for him alone had filled him with a great tenderness.

Now, the night, the storm, danger—death, perhaps. He shut his jaws and drove the flooding thoughts from his mind. Anger,—the anger of bereavement,—filled him, and he glared into the tempest and twisted the wheel as though combating a sentient adversary.

An hour passed, Cimmerian blackness had fallen. The waves came savagely, ill-defined masses let loose from a viewless limbo to work their harm. Sometimes they caught the dull gray flash of breaking waters, but more often everything was hidden. The roar of the wind and wave was incessant.

Dan's efforts to keep the derelict's head to the seas had failed. The hulk had slued around and was driving before the tempest, whither he did not know. Groaning, crashing, crackling, the hulk lumbered on. Once a wave leaped over the stern, stunning them with its thunderous impact, dragging at them powerfully, as though to draw them back into the sea whence it came.

Plunging thus, helpless, unseeing, they seemed to be flying as swiftly as the wind. A wild ride—to where? Were they driving out into the lonely heart of the deep, there to

perish in a last long dive? Or was it shoreward, with oblivion coming in the dreadful grinding and crashing and shattering of timbers?

Neither had the heart for even a faint hope for safety; and yet Dan, with his hands stiffened on the wheel spokes, fought on. The girl, with her head bowed, sat still, her hands clinging to his shoulders. They did not speak. Twice Dan had attempted to utter a cheering word, but the wind had swept the sounds from his lips.

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Both knew that at any moment the derelict might succumb to the forces striving to destroy her. And, as they sat waiting, the realization came to both what a small part of the incidents of this heaving night the dismemberment of their washing vessel would be. In the vortex of the riot, when the heavens and the ocean seemed united in the creation of chaos, they sensed the littleness of their own lives and the vanity of their affairs.

As a thunderous roar of wind smote the vessel Dan felt the pressure of Virginia's hand on his shoulder suddenly tighten. He turned to her, and through the darkness caught the vague outlines of her face, which was fixed on the faint blur which marked the forward part of the hulk.

His eyes followed just as her fingers loosened their grasp. He saw nothing save the dull flash of swirling waters and the amorphous blotch of hull. Slowly her hand tightened again; and then, as he looked he caught above the deck an impression of something moving. It seemed to be something that was revealing itself to the instinct rather than to their visual senses.

As the wind passed on, leaving that confused murmur, broken only by the dogged rush of waters, Virginia spoke to Dan with trembling voice.

"What is it?"

Dan's eyes were still staring forward. He spoke through his clenched teeth.

"Wait a moment." More accustomed to the gloom ahead he was able to determine that the sail had torn from the boom and was waving out from the shattered mast-top like a flag. The mast itself seemed to be reeling. Was the hull opening and disintegrating?

Almost without volition he half arose to his feet. The girl followed his action, still clinging to his shoulder. Dan inclined his head to speak to her, when with a shriek the wind came again. There was a dull crash forward, a splintering and rearing of wood, a quivering of the entire hull; and then, as though hurled by a giant hand, a huge section of wood, whether a part of cargo or hull Dan could not tell, shot out of the night, crashing a hole in the roof of the cabin behind which they were crouching, and then bounded over their heads into the sea.

Both remained still, as though carved in stone. Forward there was a crashing sound, a series of blows, as though some great hammer were engaged in disintegrating the hull. There was a grinding of wood against wood which caused the deck under their feet to tremble. Still neither moved. The terrible thought that the derelict was going to pieces was in both their minds. They had no doubt of this now. They simply waited.

Virginia had no great fear. Her dominant thought was the dread of the first immersion in the cold, cruel, black waters. But it would not last long. Not long, not long—these two words kept ringing in her mind. Her shoulders were drawn up, as though preparing for the shock.

Dan had not moved. Half crouching, half kneeling, his eyes were fastened upon the vague deck ahead. Now, as though the elements had worked to give him sight, the black sky was suddenly seared by a long, lurid line of lightning. It was but the fraction of a second; it was long enough. In that blue glow the derelict took form, grim, ghostly, heaving, as a spirit picture might be thrown upon a black cloth, every detail limned in filmy perfection.

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With a cry Dan leaped to his feet and seized an axe lying by his side.

"We are not breaking," he shouted. "The mast has torn out of its step and is pounding us. I am going to cut it away. We shall be all right."

The girl heard his voice, caught the enthusiasm of it, but distinguished not a single word. As he crawled slowly by the side of the cabin to the steps leading to the deck she half arose as though to follow him.

"Dan, Dan," she cried, "don't leave me!"

He waved her back, and a second later had gained the deck. For a few minutes she sat there, wondering, fearing, and then in a lull in the storm she heard the blows of the axe. A great wave rose over the quarter and ran forward with a roar. There came a shout. She listened. The sounds of the axe were heard no more.

"Dan!" she called. "Dan!" Her words were whistled away on the wind.

In desperation she worked her way to the steps and peered down upon the deck. She heard nothing but the wind and the waves. And then with her hair streaming wild, with lips bloodless, she stood upright and rushed to the deck. The wind tore at her, flying water buffeted her, and the hulk swayed under her feet; but, as though endowed with superhuman power, as though scorning the elements to which she had bowed through the night she ran forward, heedless of everything but that her companion was in danger.

Where she was going she knew not, nor cared. A hand grasped the end of her slicker and brought her to a halt. She looked down and saw Dan stretched upon the deck, the mast lying across his legs. She knelt at his side.

"Dan!"

He drew her head down so that her ear was near his mouth.

"Not hurt," he said coolly. "The wave knocked the mast across me just as I had almost cut it through. Find the axe. Two strokes will free me. Hurry. Another wave may drown me."

The girl swept her hands hastily over the deck. She found the axe a few feet from Dan, and with that frenzied, nervous strength which comes to women in times of stress, she hacked at the mast, which Dan had almost cut through when the wave struck him. Three times the edge of the implement glanced. She ground her teeth, raised it a fourth time taking careful aim. Then she let fly with all her strength, and the axe bit deep. She raised it again, smiling now. Two strokes, three strokes, four strokes. The keen blade severed the last inch of wood, the hulk pitched forward, and the mast with its boom and its tangle of rigging and canvas rolled from Dan and plunged into the sea.



He was on his feet in a second, and with his arm about her waist they ran astern and reached their posts at the wheel in safety. But there was no need to bother with the wheel now. There was nothing to do, in fact, but sit inactive and accept what came to them.

And yet, had they but known it, Fate, which it may be said takes the lives of the young grudgingly, had worked for their ultimate good. The Gulf Stream had carried them to a point off Hatteras, and there the storm had enveloped them. As Dan had surmised, it was from the south-east, and laboring and flailing as sorely as she might, the winds and the waves had steadily lashed the vessel toward safety.

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They could not know that. It was only after an unusual interval in the powerful wind-blast that Dan looked upward and suddenly held up his hand. He looked at the vague form of the girl and bared his teeth in a quick, mirthless smile.

"The wind is changing," he muttered. "What now?"

There came another rush of wind. But it was not so strong as its predecessors had been; and looking into the sky he could see the cloud movement. He shook Virginia by the shoulder, and there was a triumphant ring in his voice as he shouted into her ear,

"The gale is passing!"

Gradually but surely the shrieking of the elements diminished; the seas were palpably falling. Great, dark shapes could now be seen rushing across the lightening firmament, and once the girl, stretching her arm upward, exclaimed, as through a rift overhead she caught a glimpse of a little star.

Half an hour—there came a great peace.

Now, a man and a woman out of the chaos—with the world and all its civilization and its manners and its men and its affairs as though they had never been, as though the two had lived for a flashing minute in some old dream—the strain of years that makes for ceremony and diffidence and convention and custom suddenly stopped, turned backward.

They were the first man and the first woman on the verge of upheaval, having felt fear, not as we feel it, but in a dull, instinctive way—wondering horribly. Just two, just a man and a woman, emerging from all the destructive might of the world.

She—not Virginia Howland now—just She—turned toward the man who crouched with one hand still clutching the wheel, the other lying loosely, palm downward upon the deck. Her face was filled with the glow of returning blood, her hair streamed, her eyes shone.

Gone, the tempest. The waves were lashing, surly, hissing a monotone as old as Time is old. The darkness was the gloom of an age before the sun was born. The air was filled with low sounds that had been dead for aeons. And she turned to him, and he turned to her.

Her bosom was rising and falling; he could hear her quick, hard breathing. As though without volition, she moved a step forward, and with a low cry held out her arms to him, trembling no more, her heart filled with a wild, joyous song. Suddenly she felt his breath upon her face, felt herself crushed in his arms, as she would be crushed. Gently he kissed her upon the lips, and then again and again and again. For a moment she lay

dumb in his arms, and then as he drew back his head she put her arms around his neck and held his lips to hers. So they stood.

A force far greater than the unharnessed might of the ocean now thrilled and filled and exalted them. Slowly she raised her hands and passed them over his face, lingeringly; once more she felt herself drawn to him, and laughed joyously.

As Dan turned, out of the darkness ahead he saw a light. He looked again. He saw it plainly now, that steady white disc with its red sector.

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"Cape Henry!" he cried. "Good God!"

The girl started.

"What?" she said, wonderingly.

"Cape Henry to port, Virginia. We'll have a tug in an hour. The dawn is coming now. The sun will see us in Newport News."

Virginia regarded him dreamily, and tightened her clasp about his neck.

"Newport News," she said; "and what do I care! You have not kissed me in an age."

CHAPTER XV

CONCLUSION

The next afternoon Horace Howland sat in his office at No. 11 Broadway, staring moodily at his desk with its accumulation of papers. For long, it seemed, he had lived in an agony of suspense. Friends had come and gone and said their words, and passed on unrecognized and unheeded.

How many times had he wished that the Ward liner which had crossed the path of the boats and picked them up the morning after the fire had left him at least to perish. A full half-dozen tugs and steamships had been sent to the scene of the conflagration there to cruise about until some trace of the missing should be found. A Clyde vessel had sighted the burned steamship, a mere mass of charred and twisted frames and plates, sinking low in the sea. A Government cruiser and a revenue cutter had joined in the search.

But no word had come. An hour before, a messenger boy had arrived with a telegram. It was one of many received by Mr. Howland every day, and he tossed it, unopened, upon a pile of similar envelopes upon his desk.

Now, as he turned his eyes yearningly out of a window which gave upon the harbor, the name of a reporter was announced. Mr. Howland had talked and talked and talked to reporters until he was sick of them as of every one and everything else. He turned to his secretary.

"See that fellow, will you?" he said.

In less than a minute the secretary hurried into the office with an excited manner, the reporter at his heels, bearing a long sheet of tissue paper filled with typewriting.

"I have come to see you about the rescue of your daughter, Mr. Howland."

The merchant wheeled quickly in his chair.

"What!" he cried. Then he sprang to his feet and seized the manuscript which the reporter held out to him. Quickly he read it. Then he read it again, more slowly. He read it a third time. His hand flew to his forehead, and he staggered back to his chair. The secretary stepped to his side, but Mr. Howland waved him away.

"When did this come?" he asked.

"A few moments ago," replied the reporter.

"Well," and Mr. Howland gazed at his informant with suffused eyes, "I thank you for your kindness. You must know how grateful I am. Of course there is nothing I can tell you—nothing you want to know."

The reporter hesitated a moment.

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"No," he said, "I don't suppose you can tell me much. Except—"

"Eh?" said Mr. Howland.

"Except—you read the despatch. It speaks of Captain Merrithew as Miss Howland's *fiance*."

"Yes." Mr. Howland's years of business resource and acumen were beginning to assert themselves. "Oh, *fiance*! I see. Romance will help your article. Well, there isn't any. Captain Merrithew and my daughter were engaged before we started on this *Tampico* jaunt." He looked at the reporter steadily. "Merrithew, you know, is really the Assistant Marine Superintendent of the Coastwise Company; also a stock-holder. He was sailing the *Tampico* merely for experience."

The reporter smiled at Mr. Howland.

"Merrithew is to be congratulated," he said.

"I fancy so," replied Mr. Howland. "In fact," he added, "do you know, I have reason to be quite sure of it."

THE END