

The Blood Ship eBook

The Blood Ship

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THE BLOOD SHIP

CHAPTER I

It was the writing guy who drew this story out of Captain Shreve. He talked so much I think the Old Man spun the yarn just to shut him up. He had talked ever since his arrival on board, early that morning, with a letter from the owners' agent, and the announcement he intended making the voyage with us. He had weak lungs, he said, and was in search of mild, tropical breezes. Also, he was seeking local color, and whatever information he could pick up about "King" Waldon.

He had heard of the death of "King" Waldon, down in Samoa—Waldon, the trader, of the vanishing race of island adventurers—and he expected to travel about the south seas investigating the "king's" past, so he could write a book about the old viking. He had heard that Captain Shreve had known Waldon. Hence, he was honoring a cargo carrier with his presence instead of taking his ease upon a mail-boat.

Captain Shreve must tell him all he knew about the "king." He was intensely interested in the subject. Splendid material, you know. That romantic legend of Waldon's arrival in the islands—too good to be true, and certainly too good not to put into a book. Was Captain Shreve familiar with the tale? How this fellow, Waldon, sailed into a Samoan harbor in an open boat, his only companion his beautiful young wife? Imagine—this man and woman coming from nowhere, sailing in from the open sea in a small boat, never telling whence they came!

He said this was the stuff to go into his book. Romance, mystery! It was quite as important as the later and better known incidents in the "king's" life. That was why Captain Shreve must tell him all he knew about the fellow. If he could only get at the beginning of the "king's" career in the islands. Where did the fellow come from? Why should a man bring his bride into an uncivilized and lawless section of the world, and settle down for life? There must be a story in that. Ah, yes, and he was the man who could properly do it.

Well, that was the way that writer talked. He talked so steadily nobody could slide a word in edgeways. Yet he said he wanted information. We wondered. If the ability to deliver an unending monologue, consisting chiefly of the ninth letter in the alphabet, is any sign of lung power, that chap didn't need any cod-liver oil or sea air. He could have given up writing, and still have made a good living ashore as a blacksmith's bellows! And as for the local color and information—well, he blinked through his black rimmed glasses at our immaculate decks, and said it was a pity they built ships for use and not for looks nowadays, and went on talking about himself, and what he could do with "King" Waldon.

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Briggs, the mate, confided to me in a soft aside that the chap was making the voyage because he knew he had an audience which couldn't escape—unless it jumped over the side. Captain Shreve didn't confide; his face kept its accustomed expression of serenity, and he made no attempt to stem the author's flood of words. I was somewhat surprised by this meekness, for our Old Man is a great hand to puncture a windbag; but then, I reflected, the writing guy, being a passenger, was in the nature of a guest on board, and, according to Captain Shreve's code, a man to be humored.

We lay in the Stream, with a half dozen hours to pass ere we proceeded to sea. It was Sunday, so we were idle, the four of us lounging on the lower bridge deck—the Captain, Briggs, myself, and this human phonograph. It was a pleasant day, and we would have enjoyed the loaf in the warm afternoon sunshine, had it not been for the unending drivel of the passenger. I enjoyed it anyway, for even though the ears be filled with a buzzing, the eyes are free, and San Francisco Bay is an interesting place.

“. . . and the critics all agree,” the passenger rambled on, “that my genius is proved by my amazingly accurate portraits of character. I have the gift. That is why I shall do ‘King’ Waldon so well. I need but a mental image of the man to make him live again. You must tell me what he looked like, Captain. Is it true, as I have been told, he was such a giant of a man, and possessed of such enormous physical strength? And that his hair retained its yellow luster even in old age? And that he had a great scar on his face, or head, about which he never spoke? Ah, yes, you must tell me about him, Captain.”

Captain Shreve grunted at this—the first sound he had been able to squeeze into the talk for half an hour. But the author did not pause; in fact he hastened on, as though determined to forestall any interruption. Talk! I don't know when that fellow found any time to write. He was too eager to tell the world about his gift.

“You know,” says he, “I need but a few little intimate facts about ‘King’ Waldon's appearance and character, and I can make him stalk through my story as truly alive as when he was in the flesh. If he were alive I should not need your assistance, Captain; one look at the man and I could paint him in his true colors. I have that gift. Not men alone—I am able to invest even inanimate objects with personality. A house, a street, or a—yes, even a ship. Even this ship. Now, this old box——”

Captain Shreve sat up straight in his chair. I thought he was rasped by the fellow's slur, for he is very proud of his ship. But it was something else that rubbed the expression of patient resignation from his face; he was staring over the starboard rail with an expression of lively interest. I followed his gaze with mine, but saw only a ferryboat in the distance, and, close by, a big red-stack tug towing a dilapidated coal hulk.

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The Captain's eyes were upon this tow. He tugged excitedly at his beard. "Well, by George, what a coincidence!" he exclaimed. He turned to the mate, his bright eyes snapping. "Look, Briggs! Do you know her? By George, do you recognize her?"

The writing guy was disgusted by this interruption, just when he was going to prove his genius. Briggs shifted his quid, spat, and inspected the passing hulk with extreme deliberation. I looked at her too, wondering what there was about an old coal-carrier that could pierce Captain Shreve's accustomed phlegm.

The tow was passing abreast, but a couple of hundred yards distant. The tug was shortening the line, and on the hulk's forecastle-head a couple of hands were busy at a cathead, preparing to let go anchor. She was ill-favored enough to look at, that hulk—weather-beaten, begrimed, stripped of all that makes a ship sightly. Nothing but the worn-out old hull was left. An eyesore, truly. Yet, any seaman could see with half an eye she had once been a fine ship. The clipper lines were there.

Suddenly Briggs sat up in his chair, and exclaimed, "Well, blast my eyes, so it is!" He nodded to the Captain, and then returned his regard to the hulk, his nostrils working with interest. "So it is! So it is! Well, blast my——"

"Is what?" I demanded. "What do you two see in that old hull that is so extraordinary?"

Just then the writing guy decided we had monopolized the conversation long enough. So he seized the opportunity to exercise for our benefit the rare gift he was endowed with. He glanced patronizingly at the coal hulk, wrinkled his nose in disapprobation of her appearance, and delivered himself in an oracular voice.

"What a horrible looking old tub! Not a difficult task to invest her with her true personality. An old workhorse—eh? A broken down old plug, built for heavy labor, and now rounding out an uninspiring existence by performing the most menial of tasks. An apt description—what?"

I noticed a faint smile crack the straight line of Captain Shreve's mouth. But it was Briggs who was unable to contain himself. He turned full upon the poor scribe, and plainly voiced his withering scorn.

"Why, blast my eyes, young feller, if you weren't as blind as a bat you'd know you were talking rot! 'A workhorse!' you say. 'A broken down old plug!' Blast me, man, look at the lines of her!"

The passenger flushed, and stared uncomprehendingly at the poor old hulk. The tug had gone, and she was lying anchored, now, a few hundred yards off our starboard bow. A sorry sight. The author could see nothing but her ugliness.

"Why, she is just a dirty old scow—" he commenced.

“Blast me, can’t you even guess what she once was?” went on Briggs, relentlessly.
“Well, young feller, that dirty old scow—as you call her—is the *Golden Bough*!”

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The passenger only blinked. The name meant nothing to him. But it did to me.

“The *Golden Bough*!” I echoed. “Surely you don’t mean the *Golden Bough*?”

“But I do,” said Briggs. He waved his hand. “There she is—the *Golden Bough*. All that is left of the finest ship that ever smashed a record with the American flag at her gaff. She’s a coal hulk now, but once she was the finest vessel afloat. Eh, Captain?”

Captain Shreve nodded affirmation. Then he turned to the writing guy, and courteously salved the chap’s self-esteem.

“Small wonder you overlooked her build; it takes a sailor’s eye for such things. And really, your description strikes home to me. We are all workhorses, are we not, we of the sea? And time breaks down us all, man and ship.” The Old Man was staring at the hulk, and his voice was sorrowful. “Aye, but time has used her cruelly! What a pity—she was so bonny!”

The writing guy perked up at this. “Well, you know, I see her through a layman’s eyes,” he explained. “And she does look so old, and dirty, and commonplace——”

Briggs snorted, and the Captain hastened to continue, cutting off the mate’s hard words. “Oh, yes, she looks old and dirty—no mistake. But time was when no ship afloat could match her for either looks or speed. Aye, she was a beauty. Remember how she looked in the old days, Briggs?”

Briggs did. He emphatically blasted his eyes to the effect that he remembered very well the *Golden Bough* in the days of her glory, the days when she was no workhorse, but a double-planked racehorse of the seas, as anyone but a lubber could see she had once been, just by looking at her. Yes, blast his eyes, he remembered her. He remembered one time running the Easting down in the *Josiah T. Flynn*, a smart ship, with a reputation, and they were cracking on as they would never dare crack, on in these degenerate days, when, blast his eyes, the *Golden Bough* came up on them, and passed, and ran away from the poor old *Flynn*, and Yankee Swope had stood on his poopdeck at the passing, and waved a hawser-end at the Old Man of the *Flynn*, asking if he wanted a tow. “And then we caught hell,” commented Mr. Briggs. Aye, he should say he did remember the *Golden Bough*. But he had never sailed in her.

“And she looks commonplace enough,” continued Captain Shreve, “providing you know nothing of her history. But she does not look commonplace to Briggs or me. I suppose we regard her through the mist of memory—we see the tall, beautiful ship that was. We know the record of that ship. Aye, lad, and if those sorry-looking timbers yonder could talk, you would not have to make the voyage with us in order to get a taste of the salt. You’d get real local color there—you’d hear of many a wild ocean race, of smashed records, or shanghaied crews and mutinies. Yes, and you’d get, perhaps, some of that

particular information you say you are after. Those old, broken bulwarks yonder have looked upon life, I can tell you—and upon death.”

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"The dangerous life of the sailor, I presume," drawled the writing guy. "Falling from aloft, and being washed overboard, and all that sort of thing."

"Not always," retorted Captain Shreve. "There were other ways of going to Davy Jones in the old clipper days—and in these days, also, for that matter. Knives, for instance, or bullets, or a pair of furious hands—if you care for violent tragedy. But I did not mean the physical dangers of life, particularly; I meant, rather, that Fate tangles lives on board ship as queerly as in cities ashore. I meant that the *Golden Bough*, in her day, left her mark upon a good many lives. She broke men, and made them. And once, I know, she had to do with a woman's life, and a woman's love. There was a wedding performed upon that ship upon the high seas, and a dead man sprawled on the deck at the feet of the nuptial pair, and the bride was the dead man's widow!"

"Oh, come now—" said the writing guy. It was plain he thought the skipper was stringing him. But I knew how difficult it was to get our Old Man to spin a yarn, and I was determined he should not be shunted off on a new tack. I interrupted the author, hurriedly. "Did you ever make a voyage in the *Golden Bough*, Captain?" I asked.

"Yes," replied the Captain. "I was a witness to that wedding; and I played my small part in bringing it about. Yes, that old wreck yonder has had a good deal to do with my own life. I received my first boost upward in the *Golden Bough*. Shipped in the foc'sle, and ended the voyage in the cabin. Stepped into dead man's shoes. And more important than that—I won my manhood on those old decks."

"Ah, performed some valorous deed?" purred the writing guy.

"No; I abstained from performing an infamous deed," said Captain Shreve. "I think that is the way most men win to manhood."

"Oh!" said the writing guy. He seemed about to say a lot more, when I put my oar in again.

"Let us have the yarn, Captain," I begged.

Captain Shreve squinted at the sun, and then favored the passenger with one of his rare smiles. "Why, yes," he said. "We have an idle afternoon ahead of us, and I'll gladly spin the yarn. You say, sir, you are interested in ships, and sailors, and, particularly, in 'King' Waldon's history. Well, perhaps you may find some material of use in this tale of mine; though I fear my lack of skill in recounting it may offend your trained mind.

"Yet it is simply life and living—this yarn. Human beings set down upon those decks to work out their separate destinies as Fate and character directed. Aye, and their characters, and the motives that inspired their acts, were diverse enough, heaven knows.

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"There was Swope, Black Yankee Swope, who captained that hell-ship, a man with a twisted heart, a man who delighted in evil, and worked it for its own sake. There was Holy Joe, the shanghaied parson, whose weak flesh scorned the torture, because of the strong, pure faith in the man's soul. There were Blackie and Boston, their rat-hearts steeled to courage by lust of gold, their rascally, seductive tongues welding into a dangerous unit the mob of desperate, broken stiffes who inhabited the foc'sle. There were Lynch and Fitzgibbon, the buckos, living up to their grim code; and the Knitting Swede, that prince of crimps, who put most of us into the ship. There was myself, with my childish vanity, and petty ambitions. There was the lady, the beautiful, despairing lady aft, wife of the infamous brute who ruled us. There was Cockney, the gutless swab, whose lying words nearly had Newman's life. And last, and chiefly, there was the man with the scar, he who called himself 'Newman,' man of mystery, who came like the fabled knight, killed the beast who held the princess captive, and led her out of bondage. And I helped him; and saw the shanghaied parson marry them, there on the bloody deck.

"Stuff for a yarn—eh? But just life, and living. By George, it was mighty strenuous living, too! And yet, well as I know this tale I lived in, I am at a loss how to commence telling it. You know, sir, this is where you writing folk have at disadvantage the chaps who only live their stories—you see the yarn from the beginning to the end, we see but those chapters in which Fate makes us characters. The beginning, the end, the plot—all are beyond our ken. If indeed there is a beginning, or end, or plot to a story one lives."

"Every story must have a beginning, a middle, and an end," began the writing guy, sonorously. "Now I——"

Just then I leaned over and placed my number nine brogan firmly upon that writing guy's kid-clad foot, and held him in speechless agony for a moment, while Captain Shreve got his yarn fairly launched.

CHAPTER II

Then, if I must have a beginning for the yarn (said Captain Shreve), I'll begin with that morning, in this very port of San Francisco, when I walked out of the Shipping Commissioner's office with my first A.B.'s discharge in my hand, and a twelve months' pay-day jingling in my pocket. For I must explain something of my state of mind on that morning, so you will understand how I got Into Yankee Swope's blood-ship.

It was the heyday of the crimps, and I walked through the very heart of crimpdom, along the old East street. It is not a very prepossessing thoroughfare even to-day, when it masquerades as the Embarcadero, a sinner reformed. In those days, when it was just East street, it consisted of solid blocks of ramshackle frame buildings, that housed all



the varieties of sharks and harpies who live off Jack ashore; it was an ugly, dirty, fascinating way, a street with a garish, besotted face. But on this morning it seemed the most wonderful avenue in the world to me. I saw East street through the colorful eyes of youth—the eyes of Romance.

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I stepped along with my chest out and my chin up-tilted. A few paces behind me a beachcomber wobbled along with my sea-bag on his shoulder—for what A.B. would demean himself with such labor on pay-day, when moochers abounded at his heel! I was looking for a boarding-house.

But it was not the Sailors' Home. That respectable institution might do very well for boys, and callow ordinary seamen, but it certainly would not do for a newly made A.B. Nor was I looking for Mother Harrison's place, as I told Mother's runner, who stuck at my elbow for a time. Mother Harrison's was known as the quietest, most orderly house on the street; it might do for those quiet and orderly old shellbacks whose blood had been chilled by age; but it would never do for a young A.B., a real man, who was wishful for all the mad living the beach afforded. No; I was looking for the Knitting Swede's.

Knitting Swede Olson! Remember him, Briggs? A fine hole for a young fool to seek! But I was a man, remember—a MAN—and that precious discharge proved it. I was nineteen years old, and manhood bears a very serious aspect at nineteen. No wonder I was holding my head in the air. The fellows in my watch would listen to my opinions with respect, now I was an able seaman. No longer would I scrub the foc'sle floor while the lazy beggars slept. No longer would I peggy week in and week out. I was A.B. at last; a full-fledged man! Of course, I must straightway prove my manhood; so I was bound for the Knitting Swede's.

Everybody knew the Knitting Swede in those days; every man Jack who ever joined a ship. They told of him in New York, and London, and Callao, and Singapore, and in every foc'sle afloat. The king of crimps! He sat in his barroom, in East street, placidly knitting socks with four steel needles, and as placidly ignoring every law of God and man. He ruled the 'Frisco waterfront, did the Knitting Swede, and made his power felt to the very ends of the seas.

Stories about him were without number. It was the Knitting Swede who shanghaied the corpse on board the *Tam o' Shanter*. It was the Knitting Swede who drugged the skipper of the *Sequoia*, and shipped him in his own foc'sle. It was the Knitting Swede who sent the crowd of cowboys to sea in the *Enterprise*. It was the Knitting Swede who was the infamous hero of quite half the dog-watch yarns. It was the Knitting Swede who was—oh, the very devil!

And it was on this very account I was bound for the Swede's house. Very simple, and sailorlike, my motive. In my mind's eye I saw a scene which would be enacted on board my next ship. Some fellow would ask me—as some fellow always does—“And what house did you put up in, in 'Frisco, Jack?” And I would take the pipe out of my mouth, and answer in a carefully careless voice, “Oh, I stopped with the Knitting Swede.” And then the whole foc'sle would look at me as one man, and there would be respect in their eyes. For only very hard cases ever stopped at the Knitting Swede's.

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Well, I found the Swede's place easily enough. And he was there in person to welcome me. I discovered his appearance to be just what the stories described—a tall, great paunched man, who bulked gigantic as he perched on a high stool at the end of the bar, a half-knitted gray sock in his hands, and an air about him of cow-like contentment. He possessed a mop of straw-colored hair, and a pair of little, mild, blue eyes that regarded one with all the innocence of a babe's stare.

He suspended his knitting for a moment, gave me a fat, flabby hand, and a grin which disclosed a mouthful of yellow teeth.

"Ja, you koom for a good time, and, by and by, a good ship," says he. "Yoost trust the Swede—he treat you right."

So he sent my bag upstairs to a room, accepted my money for safekeeping, and I set up the drinks for the house.

What? Give him my money for safekeeping? Of course. There was a code of honor even in crimpdom, you know. I came to the Swede's house of my own choosing; no runner of his snared me out of a ship. Therefore I would be permitted to spend the last dollar of my pay-day, chiefly over his bar, of course, and when the money was gone, he would ship me in a ship of my own choosing. Unless, of course, men were exceptionally scarce, and blood money exceptionally high. Crimpdom honor wouldn't stand much temptation. But I was confident of my ability to look after myself. I was a man of nineteen, you know.

So, at the Knitting Swede's I was lodged. I spent most of my first day there in examining and getting acquainted with my fellow lodgers. Aye, they were a crowd, quite in keeping with the repute of the house; hard living, hard swearing, hard fighting A.B.'s, for the most part; the unruly toughs of the five oceans. I swaggered amongst them and thought myself a very devil of a fellow. I bought them drinks at the Swede's bar, and listened with immense satisfaction to their loud comments on my generosity. It was, "He's a fine lad, and no mistake!" and, "He's a real proper bloke, for certain!" And I ordered up the rounds, and swung my shoulders, and felt like a "real proper bloke" indeed.

Well, I saw one chap in the house who really attracted me. I should liked to have chummed with him, and I went out of my way to be friendly towards him. He was a regular giant of a man, with yellow hair and frosty eyes, and a very white face. In fact he looked as if he might have recently been sick, though his huge, muscular frame showed no effects of an illness. He had a jagged, bluish scar over one eye, which traveled up his forehead and disappeared beneath his hair, plainly the result of some terrible clout. But it was not these things, not his face or size which drew me to him; it was his bearing.

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All of the chaps in Swede Olson's house were hard cases. They boasted of their hardness. But their hardness was the typical tough's hardness, nine parts bravado, a savagery not difficult to subdue with an oak belaying pin in the fist of a bucko mate. But the hardness of this big, scar-faced man was of a different sort. You sensed, immediately you looked at him, that he possessed a steely armor of indifference that penetrated to his very heart. He was a real hard case, a proper nut, a fellow who simply did not care what happened. It was nothing he said or did, but his demeanor declared plainly he was utterly reckless of events or consequences. It was amusing to observe how circumspectly the bullies of the house walked while in his neighborhood.

But I found him to be a man of silent and lonesome habit, and temperate. He discouraged my friendly advance with a cold indifference, and my idea of chumming with him during my pay-day "bust" soon went glimmering. Yet I admired him mightily from the moment I first clapped eyes upon him, and endeavored to imitate his carriage of utter recklessness in my own strutting.

CHAPTER III

The talk in the Swede's house was all of drink and women and ships. I was too young and clean to find much enjoyment in too much of the first two; much liquor made me sick, and I did not find the painted Jezebels of sailor-town attractive. But ships were my life, and I lent a ready ear to the gossip about them. To tell the truth, I didn't enjoy the Knitting Swede's place very much. I did so want to be a hard case, and I guess I was a pretty hard case, but I didn't like the other hard cases. Youth likes companionship, but I didn't want to chum with that gang, willing though most of them were that I permit them to help me spend my money. I hadn't been ashore twenty-four hours before I found myself wishing for a clean breeze and blue water.

Shipping was brisk in the port, and I discovered I would have no trouble in picking my ship when my money was gone. The *Enterprise* was loading for Boston; the *Glory of the Seas* would sail within the fortnight for the United Kingdom; there were a half-dozen other smart ships wishing to be manned by smart lads. I had nothing to worry about. I could blow my pay-day as quickly as I liked; there was no danger of my being stranded "on the beach."

So I spent my money, as violently as possible. I made a noise in the Swede's house, and was proud of myself. My first A.B.'s spree!

On the third evening of my "bust," my mettle was tested. There was a woman in the Swede's house, a slim wisp of a little Jewess, with the sweet face of a Madonna and the eyes of a wanton. Well—she smiled on me. She had good reason to; was I not making my gold pieces dance a merry tune? Was I not fair game for any huntress?

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But she belonged to the Swede's chief runner, his number one bouncer, as ugly a brute as ever thumped a drunken sailor. The bully objected, with a deal of obscene threatening, to my fancied raiding of his property. We had it out with bare knuckles in the Swede's big back room, with all the little tables pushed against the wall to make fighting space, and the toughest crowd in San Francisco standing by to see fair play. I was the younger, and as hard as nails, he was soft and rotten with evil living, so I thrashed him soundly enough in five rounds.

After he had taken the count, I turned away and commenced to pull my shirt on over my head. I heard a sharp curse, a yell of pain, and the clatter of steel upon the floor. When my head emerged, I beheld my late antagonist slinking away before the threatening figure of the man with the scar. The bully's right arm dangled by his side, limp and broken, and a sheath-knife was lying on the floor, at the big man's feet. The sight gave me a rather sick feeling at the pit of the stomach, for I realized I had narrowly escaped being knifed.

The scar-faced man would not listen to my thanks. He bestowed upon me a cool, bracing glance, and remarked, "You must never take your eyes off one of that breed!" Then he resumed his seat at a table in the far corner of the room, and quite plainly dismissed the incident from his mind.

Indeed, the house as speedily dismissed the incident from its collective mind. A fist fight or a knifing was but a momentary diversion in the Swede's place. Five minutes after he left the room, the whipped bully left the establishment, his one good hand carrying his duffle. The Knitting Swede would have no whipped bouncer in his employ.

That was a purple night for me. I was the victor, and the fruits of the victory were very sweet. The Jewess murmured adoring flatteries in my ear. The others—that crowd of rough, tough men—clapped me respectfully upon the back, felt gingerly of my biceps, and swore loudly and luridly I was the best man in the port. I agreed with them—and set up the drinks, again and again. Oh, I was a great man that night! The house caroused at my expense till late.

Only my silent friend in the corner declined to take part in the merry-making. The man with the scar sat alone, drinking nothing, and regarding with cool and visible contempt the dizzy gyrations of the roughs who were swilling away the money I had worked for. But his open contempt of them was not resented, even at the height of the orgy. They were hard cases, rough, tough fighting men, but they gave the big fellow plenty of sea-room. No ruffling or swaggering in his direction. No gibes or practical jokes. The bludgeon-like wit of the house very carefully passed him by. For he was so plainly a desperate man.

“He’s a bad one,” whispered the Jewess to me, lifting an eye towards the lonely table.
“He has the house bluffed. Bet you the Swede doesn’t try any of his tricks with him.
He’s a real bad one. Wonder who he is?”

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I openly admired the man. I'd have given my soul almost to own his manner. The careless yet grand air of the man, the something about him that lifted him above the rest of us—aye, he was the real hero, he was the sort of hard case I wanted to be.

"I know he's a sailorman by the cut of his jib," I said. "But he is so pale—and that scar—I guess he is just out of the hospital. Been sick, or hurt, most likely."

The woman gave me a pitying look that set my teeth on edge. She was continually marveling over my innocence, and I didn't relish being innocent. "Just out of hospital!" she mocked. "You certainly haven't been around places like this very much or you would know."

"Know what?" I demanded.

She shook her head, and looked serious. "No, I'll not preach, not even to you. And I like him—because he saved you."

Next morning the Swede interrupted his knitting long enough to toss my last ten dollars across the bar. "Ay tank you ship now?" says he.

The huskies who were gathered about the room immediately chorused their disapproval. "Oh, give the poor beggar a chance!" they sang out. "Let him rest up a spell, Swede!" But the Swede had gauged me correctly. He knew I would not want to stay on the beach after my money was spent.

"I am ready to ship," I told him, "but, remember this, Swede, in a ship of my own choosing."

He grinned widely, and showed his whole mouthful of yellow teeth. His baby stare rested appreciatively upon me, as though I had just cracked an excellent joke. "Oh, *ja*, you pick him yourself," he chortled. "Mineself get you good ship, easy ship. No bucko, no hardtack, good pay, soft time, by Yimminy!"

His mirthful humor abruptly vanished. He leaned towards me, and the lids of his little round eyes slowly lifted. It was like the lifting of curtains. For an instant I looked into the unplumbed abyss of the man's soul, and I felt the full impact of his ruthless, powerful mind. It was an astonishing revelation of character, that glance. I think the Swede designed it so, for he was about to make me a momentous offer.

"Ay ship you by easy ship, shore-going ship. No vatch, no heavy veather, good times, *ja*. You thump mine roonar, you take his voomans, so—you take his yob. *Ja*? You ship by the Knitting Swede?"

The eyelids drooped, and his gaze was again one of infantile innocence. His fat smooth jowls quivered, as he waited with an expectant smile for my answer.



I'll admit I was completely bowled over for a moment. A hush had fallen upon the room. I heard a voice behind me exclaim softly and bitterly, "Gaw' blimme, 'e's got it!" I knew the voice belonged to a big Cockney who was, himself, an avowed candidate for the runner's job. My mind was filled with confused, tingling thoughts. Oh, I was a man, right enough, to be singled out by the Knitting Swede for his chief lieutenancy. I was a hard case, a proper nut, to have that honor offered me. For it was an honor in sailordom. I thought of the foc'sles to come, and my shipmates pointing me out most respectfully as the fighting bloke who had been offered a chief runner's berth by the Knitting Swede.

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For I did not doubt there would be other foc'sles, and soon. Life ashore at the Knitting Swede's was not for me. Young fool, I was, with all the conceit of my years and inches. Yet I realized clearly enough I would only be happy with the feel of a deck beneath my feet, and the breath of open water in my nostrils. I was of the sea, and for the sea. And if anything were needed to make my decision more certain, there was the little Jewess. She leaned close, and there was more than a hint of command in her voice. "Boy, say yes! I want you to, Boy!"

"Boy!" To me, a nineteen-year-old man, who had just been offered a fighting man's berth! "I want you to," she commanded. I saw more clearly just what the Swede's offer meant: to spend my days in evil living, my drugged will twisted about the slim, dishonest fingers of the wanton; to spend my nights carrying out whatever black rascality the Swede might command. An ignoble slavery. Not for me!

"I'll only ship in a proper ship, Swede," I said, decisively.

The Swede nodded. My refusal did not disconcert him; I think his insight had prepared him for it. But the tension in the room released with a loud gasp of astonishment. It was unbelievable to those bullies that such an offer could be turned down. A sailorman refusing unlimited opportunities for getting drunk! "Gaw' strike me blind, 'e arn't got the guts for hit!" a voice cried at my elbow, and I found the Cockney openly sneering into my face.

I saw through his motive immediately. Cockney wanted the job, and he wasn't going to allow the Swede to overlook his peculiar qualifications a second time. Therefore, he would risk battle with me.

I was nothing loath. I might turn down the job, but I would not turn down a challenge. I stepped back, and my coat was already on the floor by the time the Swede had a chance to form his words. And his words showed him also cognizant of the Cockney's ruse.

"'Vast there, Cocky! Ay give you the yob. No need to fight, and get smashed sick. To-night I got vork—to put the crew by the *Golden Bough*!"

The Cockney's hostility melted into a satisfied smirk. He called upon his Maker with many blasphemies while he assured the Swede he was the very "proper blushin' bloke" for the berth. The crowd straightway lost all interest in the runnership; they had another sensation to occupy them. At the Swede's words, a low growl ran around the room, a growl which swelled into a chorus of imprecations.

The Swede was going to ship the crew for the *Golden Bough* that night! That meant he needed sailors. And every man who was in debt to the Swede, or in any way under his thumb (and I suspect every man Jack of them was under his thumb in some fashion or

other), quaked in his boots, and thought, “Will the Swede choose me?” For they knew ships, those men, and they knew the *Golden Bough*. Some of them had sailed in her.

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The Swede grinned jocosely at me. “How you like to ship by the *Golden Bough*! There ban easy ship, *Ja*! Plenty grub, easy vork, good mates——”

“Yah-h-h!” One swelling, jeering shout from the whole crowd submerged the Swede’s joking reference.

“Plenty to eat!” yelled one. “Aye, plenty o’ belaying-pin soup, an’ knuckle-duster hash!”

“Easy work!” sang out another. “In your watch below, which never happens!”

“Proper gents, the mates are,” spoke up a third. “They eats a sailorman every mornin’ for breakfast!”

Oh, they knew the *Golden Bough*! Who did not?

“How many, Swede?” called out a man.

“Ay ban ship a crowd of stiffs—and some sailor-mans,” stated the Swede.

Cursing broke out afresh. Some of them must go! The bulk of the crew was to be crimped, of course, in the Swede knew what kennels of the town. But a few tried sailormen must go to leaven that sodden, sea-ignorant lump. It was like condemning men to penal servitude. No wonder they swore. And swear they did, with mouth-filling, curdling oaths, as though in vain hope their flaming words would quite consume that evilly known vessel.

In the midst of that bedlam I stood thinking strange thoughts. It is hardly credible, but I was considering if I should tell the Swede I would ship in the *Golden Bough*. And I had heard all about the ship, too, for if the Knitting Swede was the hero of half the dog-watch yarns, the *Golden Bough* was the heroine of the other half. I knew of the ship, the most notorious blood-ship afloat, and the queen of all the speedy clippers. I knew of her captain, the black-hearted, silky-voiced Yankee Swope, who boasted he never had to pay off a crew; I knew of her two mates, Fitzgibbon and Lynch, who each boasted he could polish off a watch single-handed, and lived up to his boast. I knew of the famous, blood-specked passages the ship had made; of the cruel, bruising life the foremast hands led in her. And I stood before the Swede’s bar and considered shipping. Oh, Youth!

For my thoughts were fathered by the vaulting conceit of my nineteen years. Consider . . . a few days before I had for the first time assumed a man’s estate in sailordom. Already I was a marked man. Had I not stopped at the Knitting Swede’s, and ruffled on equality with the hard cases? Had I not whipped the bully of the beach? Had I not been offered a fighting man’s billet by the Swede, himself? Was not that glory?



Then how much greater the glory if I spoke up with a devil-may-care lilt in my voice, and shipped in the hottest packet afloat! Glory!—why, I would be the unquestioned cock of any foc'sle I afterward happened into. You know, in those days the ambitious young lads regularly shipped in the hot clippers; it was a postgraduate course in seamanship, and accomplishment of such a voyage gave one a standing with his fellows. I had intended going in one—in the *Enterprise*, or the *Glory of the Seas*, both loading in port. But the *Golden Bough*! No man shipped in her, sober, and unafraid. If I shipped, I should be famous the world around as the fellow who feared neither God, nor Devil, nor Yankee Swope and his bucko mates!

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So I stood there, half wishful, half afraid, deaf to all save my own swirling thoughts. And there happened that which gave me my decision.

It was the man with the scar. He had been lounging against the bar, an uninterested spectator of the bestowing of the runnership. Now, my eyes fell upon him, and I saw to my surprise that he was shaken out of his careless humor. He was standing tensely on the balls of his feet, and his hands were gripping the bar rail so fiercely his fingers seemed white and bloodless. It was apparent some stern emotion wrestled him; the profile I saw was set like chiseled marble. There was something indescribably menacing in his poise. The sight of him jolted my ears open to the noises of the room.

The crowd was still talking about the *Golden Bough*. And the talk had progressed, as talk of the *Golden Bough* always progressed, from skipper and mates, to the lady. They spoke of the ship's mystery, of the Captain's lady. She was a character to pique a sailorman's interest, the Lady of the *Golden Bough*. Her fame was as wide, and much sweeter, than the vessel's. With all their toughs' frankness, the crowd were discussing the lady's puzzling relations with Swope.

"Uncommon queer, I calls it," said one chap, who had sailed in the ship. "They call 'em man an' wife, but she lives to port, an' he to starboard. Separate cabins, dash me! I had it from the cabin boy. They even eats separate. . . . He's nasty to her—I've heard the devil snarl at her more than once, when I've had a wheel. . . . Blank me, she's a blessed angel. There was I with a sprained wrist big as my blanked head, an' Lynch a-hazin' me to work—and every morning she trips into the foc'sle with her bright cheer an' her linaments. A blanked, blessed angel, she is!"

"He beats her," supplemented another man. "I got it from a mate what chummed with the bloke as was a Sails on her one voyage. He said, that sailmaker did, as how Swope got drunk, and beat her."

The big Cockney, who had been visibly possessed by a pompous self-importance since his elevation to the dignity of runner, saw fit to interpose his contrary opinion of the Lady of the *Golden Bough*. Because the man was vile, his words were vile.

"Blimme, yer needn't worrit abaht Yankee Swope's lydy, as yer call 'er. She arn't nah bleedin' lydy—she's just a blarsted Judy. Yer got to knock a Judy abaht, arn't yer? Hi 'arve hit straight—'e picked 'er hoff the streets——"

The man with the scar wheeled on his heel, reached out, and grasped the Cockney by his two wrists. I exclaimed aloud when I saw the man's full face. There was death in it. He spoke to Cockney in a voice of cold fury. "You lie!" he cried. "Say you lie!"

Cockney was a big man, and husky. He cursed, and struggled. But he was a child in the grasp of that white-faced giant towering over him. The hands I had seen gripping

the rail a moment before, now gripped Cockney's wrists in the same terrible clutch. They squeezed, as though to crush the very bones. Cockney squirmed, and whimpered, then he broke down, and screamed in agony.

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“Ow, Gaw’ blimme, let hup! Hi never meant northin’! A lie— Ow, yuss—a lie! She’s a proper lydy— Hi never ‘eard the hother— Gaw’ strike me blind!”

The man with the scar cast the fellow contemptuously away; and Cockney lost no time in putting the distance of the room between them. The big man turned on the Swede, and his voice was sharp and commanding.

“Swede, does the *Golden Bough* sail to-morrow?”

“Ja, with da flood,” the Swede answered.

“Then I ship in her,” declared the man. “I ship in the *Golden Bough*, Swede!”

It was the spark needed to fire my own resolution. What another dared, I would dare. I thumped the bar with my fist and sang out valorously, “I ship in her too, Swede!”

The Swede’s needles stopped flashing in and out of the gray yarn. He regarded us, one after the other, with his baby stare. Then he said to the big man, “Vat if your frients ship by her?”

“I have no friends,” was the curt answer.

The Swede leaned back on his stool, and his big belly quivered with his wheezy laughter. “By Yimminy, Ay tank da *Golden Bough* haf vun lively voyage!” he exclaimed.

CHAPTER IV

We signed articles in the Swede’s house, almost within the hour. A little man with a pimply, bulbous nose appeared in the house; he carried in his person the authority of Shipping Commissioner and in his hand the articles of the *Golden Bough*. After the careless fashion of the day and port we signed on without further ado for a voyage to Hong Kong and beyond—sitting at a table in the back room, and cementing the contract with a drink around.

The Shipping Commissioner made the usual pretense of reading the articles. Then he squinted up at us.

“What’s yer John Henry’s?” says he.

My big shipmate mused a moment. He stroked the scar on his forehead—a habit he had when thinking. He smiled.

“My name is Newman,” he made answer. “It is a good name.”

He took the pen from the Shipping Commissioner's hand and wrote the name in the proper place upon the articles. "A. Newman," that is how he wrote it. Not the first time he had clapped eyes upon ship's articles, one could see with half an eye. I wrote my own "John Shreve" below his name, with an outward flourish, but with a sinking sensation inwardly.

As soon as the ceremony was completed, A. Newman got to his feet, refused my pressing invitation to visit the bar, and went upstairs to his room. Now, this seemed very peculiar to my sailor's way of thinking; it seemed more peculiar than his choice of a name. Here we were, shipmates, together committed to a high adventure, yet the man would not tarry by my side long enough to up-end a schooner to a fair passage. I was to have other surprises before the day was out—the mean-faced beggar,

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and the way in which the Knitting Swede put us on board the *Golden Bough*. Surprising incidents. But this refusal of my new shipmate to drink with me was most surprising. Think of a sailor, a hard case, too, moping alone in his room on the day he shipped, when downstairs he could wassail away the day. I was surprised and resentful. It is hard for a nineteen-year-old man to stand alone, and I felt that Newman, my shipmate, should give me the moral support of his companionship.

I strutted away the day in lonely glory. I had not the courage to violate the hoary traditions of the foc'sle and join my ship sober, so I imbibed as steadily as my youthful stomach permitted. Towards evening I was, as sailors say, "half seas over."

I was mellow, but not befuddled. I saw things clearly, too clearly. Of a sudden I felt an urgent necessity to get away from the Swede's barroom. I wanted to breathe a bit of fresh air, I wanted to shut out from my mind the sights and sounds and smells of the groggery, the reek and the smut and the evil faces. Above all, I wished to escape the importunities of the little Jewess. She had gotten upon my nerves. Oh, I was her fancy boy to-day, you bet! I was spending my advance money, you see, and this was her last chance at my pocketbook.

So, when opportunity offered, I slipped away from the crowd unobserved, and went rolling along East street as though that thoroughfare belonged to me. And in truth it did. Aye, I was the chesty lad, and my step was high and proud, during that stroll. For men hailed me, and pointed me out. I was the rough, tough king of the beach that hour; I was the lad who had whipped the Knitting Swede's bully, and shipped in the *Golden Bough*.

Upon a corner, some blocks from the Knitting Swede's house, I came upon a fellow who was spitting blood into the gutter. He was the sorriest-looking wretch I had ever seen, the gaunt ruin of a man. He drew his filthy rags about him, and shivered, and prefaced his whine for alms with a fit of coughing that seemed to make his bones rattle.

I can't say that my heart went out to the man. It didn't. He was too unwholesome looking, and his face was mean and sly. His voice was as remarkable as anything about him; instead of speaking words, he whined them, through his nose it sounded like, and though his tone seemed pitched low, his whine cut through the East street uproar like a sharp knife through butter.

Well, he was a pitiful wreck. On the rocks for good, already breaking up and going to pieces. Without thinking much about it, I emptied my pockets of their change. He pounced upon that handful of silver with the avidity of a miser, and slobbered nasal thanks at me. I was the kindest-hearted lad he had met in many a day, he said.



We would have gone our different ways promptly but for a flurry of wind. I suspect that, with the money in his hand, he was as eager to see the last of me as I was to see the last of him. But I felt ashamed of my distaste of him; it seemed heartless. And when the cold wind came swooping across from the docks, setting him shivering and coughing, I thought of the spare pea-coat I had in my bag. It was serviceable and warm, and I had a new one to wear.

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So I carried him back to the Swede's house with me. I did not take him into the barroom, though he brazenly hinted he would like to stop in there; but I feared the gibes of the boisterous gang. This bum of mine was such grotesque horror that the drunken wits of the house would not, I knew, fail to seize the chance to ridicule me upon my choice of a chum. Besides it was clothes not whisky I intended giving him.

I took him upstairs by the side entrance, the entrance to the lodging-house section of the Knitting Swede's establishment. The house was a veritable rookery above the first floor. I lodged on the third floor, in a room overlooking the street, a shabby, dirty little cubicle, but one of the choice rooms at the Swede's disposal—for was I not spending money in his house?

My companion's complaining whine filled the halls as we ascended the stairs. He was damning the times and the hard hearts of men. As we walked along the hall towards my room, the door of the room next to mine opened and the big man, who signed himself Newman, looked out at us. I had not known before that he occupied this room, he was so silent and secretive in his comings and goings.

I hailed Newman heartily, but he gave me no response, not even a direct glance. He was regarding the derelict; aye, and there was something in his face as he looked at the man that sent a thrill through me. There was recognition in his look, and something else. It made me shiver. As for this fellow with me—he stopped short at first sight of Newman. He said, "Oh, my God!" and then he seemed to choke. He stumbled against the banisters, and clung to them for support while his knees sagged under him. He'd have run, undoubtedly, if he had had the strength.

"Hello, Beasley," said Newman, in a very quiet voice. He came out of his room, and approached us. Then this man of mine threw a fit indeed. I never saw such fright in a man's face. He opened his mouth as if to scream, but nothing came out except a gurgle; and he lifted his arm as if to ward off an expected blow.

But Newman made no move to strike him. He looked down at him, studying him, with his stern mouth cracked into a little smile (but, God's truth, there was no mirth in it) and after a moment he said, "Surprised? Eh? But no more surprised than I."

The poor wreck got some sound out of his mouth that sounded like "How—how—" several times repeated.

"And I wanted to meet you more than I can tell," went on Newman. "I want to talk to you—about——"

The other got his tongue to working in a half-coherent fashion, though the disjointed words he forced out of his mouth were just husky whispers. "Oh, my God—you! Not me—oh, my God, not me!—him—he made me—it was——"

No more sense than that to his agonized mumbling. And he got no more than that out of him when he choked, and an ugly splotch of crimson appeared upon his pale lips. His knees gave way altogether, and he crouched there on the floor, gibbering silently at the big man, and plainly terrified clean out of his wits.

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Well, I felt out of it, so to speak. The feeling made me a little resentful. After all, this bum was my bum.

“Look here, the man’s sick,” I said to Newman. “Don’t look at him like that—he’ll die. You’ve half scared him to death already.”

“Oh, no; he’ll not die—yet,” said Newman. “He’s just a little bit surprised at the encounter. But he’s glad to see me—aren’t you, Beasley? Stop that nonsense, and get up!” This last was barked at the fellow; it was a soft-voiced but imperative command.

The command was instantly obeyed. That was Newman for you—people didn’t argue with him, they did what he said. I’d have obeyed too, just as quickly, if he had spoken to me in that tone. There was something in that man, something compelling, and, besides, he had the habit of command in his manner.

So Beasley tottered to his feet, and stood there swaying. He found his tongue, too, in sensible speech. “For God’s sake, get me a drink!” he said.

I was glad to seize the cue. It gave me an excuse to do something.

“I’ll get some whisky downstairs,” I sang out to Newman, as I moved for the stairs. “Take him into my room; I’ll be right back.”

But when I returned with the liquor a few moments later, I discovered that Newman had taken his prize into his own room. I heard the murmur of voices through the closed door. But I had rather expected this. Half seas over I might be, but I was still clear-witted enough to realize that I had accidentally brought two old acquaintances together, and that one was pleased at the meeting and the other terrified, and that whatever was or had been between the two was none of my business. I had no intention of intruding upon them. But the fellow, Beasley, had looked so much in need of the stimulant that I ventured a knock upon the door.

Newman opened, and I handed him the bottle without comment. I could see my erstwhile tow sitting upon the bed, slumped in an attitude of collapse. He looked so abject; his condition might have touched a harder heart than mine. But there was no softening of Newman’s heart, to judge from his face; the little mirthless smile had vanished and his features were hard and set. Aye, and his manner towards me was curt enough.

“Thank you; he needs a pick-me-up,” he said, as he took the bottle. “And now—you’ll excuse us, lad.”

It wasn’t a question, that last; it was a statement. Little he cared if I excused him or not. He shut the door in my face, and I heard the key turn in the lock.



Well, I suppose I should have been incensed by this off-hand dismissal. Oh, I was no meek and humble specimen; my temper was only too touchy, and besides there was my reputation as a hard case to look to. But strangely enough I did not become incensed; I never thought of kicking down the door, I never thought of harboring a grudge. It wasn't fear of the big man, either. It was—well, that was Newman. He could do a thing like that, and get away with it.

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The carousing gang downstairs was more than ever distasteful to me. I went into my own room and lay down upon the bed. The liquor that was in me made me a bit drowsy, and I rather relished the thought of a nap.

But I discovered I was likely to be cheated of even the nap by my next door neighbors. The walls in the Swede's house were poor barriers to sounds, and lying there on the bed I suddenly found myself overhearing a considerable part of the conversation in the next room. Newman's deep voice was a mere rumble, a menacing rumble, with the words undistinguishable, but the beggar's disagreeable whine carried through the partition so distinctly I could not help overhearing nearly every word he said. I didn't try to eavesdrop; at the time Beasley's words had little interest or meaning for me. But afterwards, on the ship, I had reason to ponder over what he said.

The burden of his speech was to the effect that somebody referred to as "he" was to blame. Aye, trust a rat of that caliber to set up that wail. For some time that was all I got from the words that came through the wall. I wasn't trying to listen; I was drowsing, and paying very little attention.

But gradually Beasley's whine grew louder and more distinct. I suppose the whisky was oiling his tongue. Once he cried out sharply, "For God's sake, don't look at me like that! I'm telling the truth, I swear I am!" The scrape of a chair followed this outburst, and when the whine began again it was closer to the wall, and more distinct than ever.

"I didn't want to, but he made me. I had to look out for myself, hadn't I? I had to do what he said. He had this paper of mine—he knew they were forgeries—I had to do what he said. But, my God, I didn't know what he was planning—I swear I didn't!"

Newman's rumble broke in, and then the voluble, reedy voice continued, "But he was wild when he came home and found you and Mary so thick, and everybody just waiting for the announcement that it was a match. Why, he had the whole thing planned, the very day he arrived. I know he had, because he came to me, in the tavern, and told me I was to drop hints here and there through the village that you and Beulah Twigg had been seen together in Boston. I didn't want to, but I had to obey him. Why, those checks—he could have put me in prison. My father would not have helped me. You remember my father—he was ready to throw me out anyway. He never could make allowances for a young fellow's fun.

"He had others dropping hints around. Trust him to handle a job like that. He was your friend, and Mary's friend—your very best friend, and all the time the tongues were wagging behind your back. Why, it was the talk of the town. You and Beulah Twigg, together in Boston; you and Beulah together at sea; you and Beulah—well, you know what a story they would make of it in a little town like Freeport. Mary must have heard the gossip about you; the women would tell her.

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“But it didn’t seem to have any effect. The two of you were as thick as ever. We were laying bets in the tavern that you would be married before you went to sea again. He didn’t like that—the talk about your wedding. But he wasn’t beaten yet; he was just preparing his ground. Oh, he was a slick devil!

“He came to me one day and said, ‘Beasley, give me the key to the Old Place—and keep your mouth shut and stay away from there.’

“Now you begin to understand? The Old Place—that tumble-down old ruin of a house all alone out there on the cliffs. It belonged to my father, you remember, but it hadn’t been lived in for years. I had a key because we young bloods used the place for card-playing, and high jinks.

“I gave him the key. Why not? It was a small matter. He went off to Boston—business trip, he said. I could make a good guess at the nature of the business. Didn’t I know his ways? But I wouldn’t blab; he owned me body and soul. I was afraid of him. His soft voice, his slick ways, and what he could do to me if I didn’t obey!

“He brought Beulah Twigg back with him from Boston. Now you understand? Little Beulah—pretty face, empty head, too much heart. He owned her body and soul, too. When folks wondered where she had run off to, I could have told them. I knew how he’d played with her, on the quiet, while he sparked Mary in the open—last time he was home. You were home then, also. Remember, you left a day ahead of him, to join your ship in New York? A China voyage, wasn’t it? Well—Beulah left the same day. Just disappeared. And poor old Twigg couldn’t understand it. You remember the old fool? Beulah was all the family he had, and after she skipped out he got to drinking. They found him one morning at the bottom of the cliffs, not a hundred yards from the spot where they afterwards found her.

“But I knew what had become of Beulah. I guessed right. Didn’t I know his ways with the girls? You know there weren’t many women who could stand out against him. Mary could, and did—that’s why he was so wild against you. But little Beulah—she threw herself at him. And when she ran away, it was to join him in Philadelphia, and go sailing with him to South America.

“Now you know how he turned the trick on you, don’t you? But—don’t look at me like that! I didn’t know what he was doing, I swear I didn’t! I thought he just wanted his sweetheart near him, or that she insisted on coming, or something like that. I thought it was devilish bold of him, bringing the girl where everybody knew her. But then, he really wasn’t taking such a chance, because nobody ever went near the Old Place, except upon my invitation, and he drove her over from the next township in the night, and she didn’t come near the village. I knew, but he knew I wouldn’t blab. My God, no!

“Well, he came to me the next day after he got back from Boston. ‘I ask a favor of you,’ he said to me. Yes—asking favors, when he knew I must do what he said. Smiling and purring—you remember the pleasant manner he had. ‘Just a short note. I know you are handy with the pen,’ he said.

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"What could I do? I had to look out for myself. He gave me a page from an old letter as a sample of the handwriting. It was Mary Barntree's writing; oh, I knew it well. I had it perfect in a few minutes. You know—I had a rare trick with the pen in those days—before this cough got me, and my hand got shaky. The note I wrote for him was a mere line. 'Meet me at Beasley's Old Place at three,' with her initial signed. That was all. But he had a sheet of her own special note paper for me to write on (no, I don't know where he got it!) and of course he knew—like we all knew—how fond the two of you were of lovers' walks out on the cliffs.

"Do you remember how you got that note? Oh, he was a slick devil. He thought of everything. Abel Horn brought it to you—remember? He told you, with a wink and a grin, that it was from a lady—but he didn't say what lady. Remember? Well, Beulah had given him the note, and told him to say that—not to mention names. Abel was a good fellow; he wouldn't gossip. *He* knew that.

"That wasn't the only note he had written. He made Beulah write one, too, addressed to Mary, and asking her to come to the Old Place, and be secret about it. Ah, now you understand? But—I swear I didn't know what he was leading up to. No, I didn't. I thought it was—well, all's fair in love, you know. And I had to do what he said, I had to!

"Poor little Beulah had to do what he said, too. I only feared him, but she loved and feared him both. He owned her completely. He had made her into a regular echo of himself. She didn't want to, she cried about it, but she had to do what he said.

"Mary came, as he knew she would. Didn't she have the kindest heart in the country? And there he was, with Beulah, with his eyes on her, and his soft, sly words making her lie seem more true. I heard it all. I was upstairs. He placed me there, in case Mary didn't believe; then I was to come in and tell about seeing you and Beulah together in Boston, and how she begged me to bring her home. But—for God's sake!—I didn't do it. I didn't have to. Mary believed. How could she help believing—the gossip, and poor little Beulah sobbing out her story. Beulah said it was you who got the best of her. She didn't want to say it, she faltered and choked on the lie, but *his* eyes were on her, and his voice urged her, and so she had to say it. The very way she carried on made the lie seem true.

"Well, Mary did just what he expected her to do. She promised to help Beulah; she told Beulah she would make you make amends. Then she rushed out of the house and met you coming along the cliff road—coming along all spruced up, and with the look about you of one going to meet a lady. Just as *he* planned.

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“What more could Mary ask in the way of evidence than the sight of you in that place at that time? Of course she was convinced, completely convinced. And she behaved just as he knew she would behave—she denounced you, and threw your ring in your face, and raced off home. And you behaved just as he knew you would behave. He was a slick devil! He knew your pride and temper; he counted on them. He knew you would be too proud to chase Mary down and demand a full explanation; that you would be too angry to sift the thing to the bottom. You packed up and went off to New York that night to join your ship—and that was just what he wanted you to do.

“Next morning you were gone, and—they picked up little Beulah at the bottom of the cliffs. And you gone in haste, without a word. They said she jumped—desertion, despair, you know what they would make of it. The gossip—and Abel Horn’s tale—and you running away to sea.

“And I—my flesh would creep when I looked at him. I was certain she—didn’t jump. I tell you he was a devil. There wasn’t anything he wouldn’t do. He didn’t have such a feeling as mercy. Didn’t I find it out? He wanted to get rid of me—and he did. Before the week was out; before Beulah was fairly buried, before Mary was outdoors again. He showed those checks I had signed—and I had to go, I had to go far and in a hurry. After all I had done for him, that’s the way he treated me.”

There was a movement of chairs in the next room, and a scraping of feet. There was more talk, Newman’s heavy murmur, and responding whines. But I do not remember what else was said. In fact, although I have given you Beasley’s tale in straight-forward fashion, I did not overhear it as I tell it. I caught it in snatches, so to speak, rather disconnected snatches which I pieced together afterwards. I heard this fellow, Beasley, talk while lying drowsing on the bed, and not trying particularly to understand his words. In fact, I did drop off to sleep. First thing I knew, the Knitting Swede was shaking me awake. “Yump out of it, Yackie,” says he. “We go aboard.”

I turned out, shouldered my sea-bag, and went downstairs. There was Newman, with his dunnage, waiting. He was alone. There was no sign of my beggar about. In fact, I never saw him again. Newman’s face didn’t invite questions.

As a matter of fact, I didn’t even think of asking him questions. I had forgotten Beasley; I was worrying about myself. Now that the hour had come to join the ship, I wasn’t feeling quite so carefree and chesty. I went into the bar, and poured Dutch courage into myself, until the Knitting Swede was ready to leave.

We rode down to the dock in a hack. I was considerably elated when the vehicle drew up before the door; It is not every sailorman who rides down to the dock in a hack, you bet! The Swede was spreading himself to give us a grand send-off, I thought! But I changed my mind when we started. The hack was on Newman’s account, solely; and he made a quick dash from the door to its shelter, with his face concealed by cap and

pea-coat collar. He didn't want to be seen in the streets—that is why we rode in the hack!

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The ride was made amidst a silence that proved to be a wet blanket to all my attempts to be jovial, and light-hearted and devil-may-care. The Swede slumped in one seat, with our dunnage piled by his side, wheezing profanely as the lurching of the hack over the cobblestones jolted the sea-bags against him, and grunting at my efforts to make conversation. Newman sat by my side. Once he spoke.

"You are sure the lady sails, Swede?" was what he said.

"Ja, I have it vrom Swope, himself," the crimp replied.

Now, of course, I had already reasoned it out that Newman was sailing in the *Golden Bough* because of the lady aft, and that he had once owned some other name than "Newman." That was as plain as the nose on my face. I didn't bother my head about it; the man's reasons were his own, and foc'sle custom said that a shipmate should be judged by his acts, not by his past, or his motives. But I did bother my head about his question in the hack—or rather about the Swede's manner of replying to it. It was a little thing, but very noticeable to a sailor.

The Swede's manner towards me was one of genial condescension, like a father towards an indulged child. This was a proper bearing for a powerful crimp to adopt towards a foremost hand. But the Swede's manner towards Newman was different. There was respect in it, as though he were talking to some skipper. It considerably increased the feeling of awe I was beginning to have for my stern shipmate.

I supposed we would join the rest of the crew at the dock, and go on board in orthodox fashion, on a tug, with drugged and drunken men lying around, to be met at the rail by the mates, and dressed down into the foc'sle. Such was the custom of the port. But when we alighted at Meigg's Wharf not a sailor or runner was in sight. A regiment of roosting gulls was in lonely possession of the planking. The hack rattled away; the Swede, bidding us gather up our dunnage and follow him, waddled to the wharf edge, and disappeared over the string-piece.

"Why, where is the crew?" I asked of Newman. "You and I, alone, aren't going to sail the ruddy packet?"

"They'll follow later," replied Newman. "The Swede is going to put us two aboard. He's getting the boat free now."

I stopped stock still. The constant surprises were rapidly shocking me sober, and this last one fairly took my breath for a moment. The Swede was putting us on board!

Now, the King of Crimps didn't put sailormen on board. He hired runners to oversee the disposal of the slaves. The most he did was lounge in the sternsheets of his Whitehall while his retainers rowed him out to a ship to interview the captain, and collect his blood

money. It was unusual for the Swede to go down to the dock with a couple of men; and now, he was going to fasten his lordly hands upon a pair of oars and row us out to our vessel!

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"Say, what is the idea?" I demanded of Newman. "We are no flaming dukes to be coddled this way!"

Newman placed his hand upon my shoulders. "What say you call it off, lad?" he said. "That hell-ship yonder is no proper berth for you. Take my advice, and dodge around the corner with your bag. I can fix it with the Swede, all right."

I should have liked to have taken the advice, I admit. I was not in nearly such a vainglorious mood as I had been back in the Swede's barroom, with the waterfront applauding me. If Newman had offered to dodge around the corner with me, I'd have gone. The aspect of that empty wharf was depressing, and there was something sinister about all these unusual circumstances surrounding our joining the ship. I began to feel that there was something wrong about the *Golden Bough* besides her bucko mates, and I possessed the superstitions of my kind. But Newman did not offer to dodge around the corner with me. He was merely advising me, in a fatherly, pitying fashion that my nineteen-year-old manhood could not stomach.

"I shipped in her, and I'll sail in her," I told him, shortly. "I can stand as much hell as any man, and I'd join her if I had to swim for it. That flaming packet can't scare me away; I'll take a pay-day from her, yet!" I was bound I'd live up to my reputation as a hard case! I was letting Newman know I was just as proper a nut as himself.

The Swede hailed us from the darkness beyond. We reached the wharf edge, and dimly made out the Swede's huge bulk squatting in a Whitehall boat below. "Yump in!" he bade us. We tossed our bags down, followed ourselves, and a moment later I was bidding farewell to the beach.

The Swede lay back manfully on the oars, grunting with every stroke. He was expert; he seemed to make nothing of the intruding tide, and quickly ferried us out into the fairway. Newman and I sat together in the sternsheets, each wrapped in his mantle of dignified silence. I kept my eyes on the black bulk of the vessel we were rapidly nearing, and I confess my thoughts were not very cheerful. One needed jolly companions, and more drink inside than I had, to have cheerful thoughts when joining the *Golden Bough*.

The Swede lay on his oars when we were a few hundred yards from the ship, allowing us to drift down with the tide. He fumbled about his clothes for a moment, and produced a bottle. "Here, yoongstar, you take a yolt!" he commanded, passing me the bottle.

I thought he was just bolstering up my courage, and I was grateful. I swallowed a great gulp of the fiery stuff. It was good liquor, and possessed an added flavor to which I was stranger.

I passed the bottle to Newman; he accepted it, but I noticed he did not drink.

The Swede lifted up his voice and hailed the ship. Immediately, the most magnificent fore-topsail-yard-ahoy voice I had ever heard bellowed a reply, “Ahoy, the boat! What d’ye want?”

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"That ban Lynch," remarked the Swede to us. Then he called in reply. "Ay ban Swede Olson with two hands for you! Heave over da Yacob's ladder, Mistar Lynch!" He lay back on his oars, and shot us under the quarter.

A moment later the three of us were standing on the clipper maindeck, confronting a large man who inspected us with the aid of a lantern. Afterwards, I discovered Mister Second Mate Lynch to be a handsome, muscular chap, with not so much of the "bucko" in his bearing as his reputation led one to expect. But at the moment I was impressed only by his big body and stern face. In truth, even that impression was hazy, for the drink I had taken from the Swede's bottle a moment before proved to be surprisingly potent. No sooner did I set foot upon the deck than I commenced to feel a heavy languor overcoming my body and mind.

Lynch turned, and his voice rumbled into the lighted cabin alleyway. "Oh, Fitz, come here. Those two jaspers we heard of have come aboard."

A moment later a man came from the cabin and stood by Lynch's side. Here was a true bucko, even my addled wits sensed that. A human gorilla, with a battered face and brutal, pitiless mouth—the dreaded Fitzgibbon, "chief kicker" of the *Golden Bough*.

Mister "Fitz" regarded us with a sneering smile. "*Huh*, stewed to the gills! What did you dope 'em with, Swede?" he said. Then he added to Lynch, "Good beef, though. They'll pull their weight. Hope there are more like them." He gave his regard to me, looked me up and down slowly, and then turned his eyes on Newman. "Shipped themselves, did they? Two jumps ahead o' the police, I bet! Lord, what a cargo he's got aboard!"

This last referred to Newman. I was staring at him, myself, with stupid surprise, his peculiar antics aiding me to retain a slender clutch on my senses.

For Newman was drunk, rip-roaring drunk. Now mind, he had been cold sober a few moments before when I handed him the Swede's bottle, and I was quite certain he had not touched that bottle to his lips. He came over the rail with the bottle clutched in his hand, and as soon as he touched the deck he was as pickled as any sailor who ever joined a ship. He hung his head, and lurched unsteadily from foot to foot, mumbling to himself. Suddenly he brandished the bottle, and commenced to howl, "Blow the Man Down," in a raucous voice.

"Stow that!" commanded Lynch, shortly. "You'll wake up the lady!"

Newman shut up. "Vas da lady on board?" asked the Swede, respectfully.

"Yes, and if that jasper rouses her, I'll shove a pin down his gullet!" answered Lynch. "Here you two," he commanded us, "gather up your dunnage and get for'rd!"



Newman and I grappled laboriously with our bags. Fitzgibbon spoke to the Swede.
“When does the crew come off?”

“Flood tide,” answered the Swede. “Captain Swope comes with them. And I send a port gang to get you oondar way.”

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"Hope there are some more huskies like these two," said Lynch.

"Ja, day ban all able seamans," declared the Swede.

"You're a filthy liar!" I heard Lynch comment. But further words I lost, for Newman and I went stumbling forward to the forecastle.

We dumped our bags upon the floor, and Newman lighted the lamp. My knees gave way, and I sat down upon the bench that ran around beside the tiers of empty bunks. Then, when the flickering light revealed my companion's face, I felt another shock of surprise.

For Newman was sober again. As soon as he was out of sight of the group on the after deck, he dropped his inebriety like a mantle. The face I looked into was alert and hard set, and the eyes gleamed strangely as though the man were laboring under a strong, repressed excitement. Newman wore an air of triumph, as though he had just accomplished a difficult victory. My tongue had suddenly become very thick, but I managed to mumble a query. "Say, matey, what's the game?"

He regarded me sharply. "What's the matter with you, lad?" he exclaimed. He leaned over, pressed up one of my eyelids, and looked into my eye. Then he tilted the bottle he still carried, and wetted his lips with the liquor. "That . . . Swede! He drugged this bottle! Bound to get the blood money for you!"

I didn't answer. I couldn't, for while Newman was speaking, a wonderful thing happened. He suddenly dwindled in size until he was no larger than a manikin, going through the motion of drinking from a tiny bottle; while in contrast, his voice increased so tremendously in volume it broke upon my ears like a surf upon a beach. I couldn't grasp the miracle.

". . . well, not enough to hurt . . . all right tomorrow . . ." Newman boomed. Then he picked me up in his arms and deposited me in a bunk. He got a blanket out of my bag and spread it over me. I found something very comical about this, though I couldn't laugh as I wished. One hard case tucking in another hard case, like a mother tucks in her child!

The last thing I saw, or thought I saw, ere oblivion overcrept me, was Newman's manikin-sized figure stretching out in a manikin-sized bunk opposite.

CHAPTER V

My head ached, my tongue was thick and wood-tastey, but I awoke in full possession of my faculties. Even in the brief instant between the awakening and the eye-opening, I sensed what was about.

The motion told me the ship was under way. The noises that had probably aroused me, boomed commands, stormed curses, groans, sounds of blows, feet stamping—all told me that the mates were turning to the crew. I sat up and looked around.

It had been dark night, and the foc'sle empty, when Newman had tucked me in for my drugged siesta. Now it was broad day, and a bright streak of sunlight streaming into the dirty hole through the open door showed men's forms sprawled in the bunks about me.

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The *Golden Bough* had a topgallant foc'sle, the port and starboard sides divided by a partition that reached not quite to the deck above, and which contained a connecting door. Newman and I had stumbled into the port foc'sle the previous night, and as I sat up, I discovered that the babel of sound came from the starboard side of the partition. I swung up into the bunk above my head, raised my eyes above the partition, and looked down.

I saw Mister Lynch, the second mate, standing in the middle of the starboard foc'sle's floor. He was turning to the crew with a vengeance. His method was simple, effective, but rather ungentle. His long arm would dart into a bunk where lay huddled a formless heap of rags. This heap of rags, yanked bodily out of bed, would resolve itself into a limp and drunken man. Then Mister Lynch would commence to eject life into the sodden lump, working scientifically and dispassionately, and bellowing the while ferocious oaths in the victim's ear.

"Out on deck with you!" he would cry, shaking the limp bundle much as a dog would shake a rat. A sharp clout on either jaw would elicit a profane protest from the patient. The toe of his heavy boot, sharply applied where it would do the most good, would produce further evidences of life. Then Lynch would take firm grasp of the scruff of the neck and seat of the breeches, and hurl the resurrected one through the door onto the deck, and out of range of my vision. A waspish voice streaming blistering oaths proved that Mister Fitzgibbon was welcoming each as he emerged into daylight. Another voice, melodiously penetrating the uproar, proved another man was watching the crew turn to. I recognized the silky, musical voice of Yankee Swope. "Stir them up, Mister! Make them jump! My ship is no hotel!" is what it said.

The second mate boosted the starboard foc'sle's last occupant deckwards; then he paused a moment for a breathing spell. Next, his roving eye rested upon my face blinking down at him from the top of the wall.

"Oh, ho—so you have come to life, have you!" he addressed me. "The Swede said you would be dead until afternoon!"

He stepped through the connecting door, into my side of the foc'sle, and looked about. I leaped down from the upper bunk and stood before him, feeling rather sheepish at having been discovered spying.

"Where is that big jasper who came aboard with you?" he suddenly demanded of me.

"Why;—there!" I replied promptly, indicating the bunk opposite the one in which I had slept.

Then, I became aware that Newman was not in that bunk; and a rapid survey of the foc'sle showed he was not in any bunk. He was gone, though his sea-bag was still lying

on the floor. The bunk I thought he was in contained an occupant of very different aspect from my grim companion of the night before.

A short, spare man of some thirty years, wearing an old red flannel shirt, was stretched out upon the bare bunk-boards. Lynch and I contemplated him in silence for a moment.

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He was no beachcomber or sailor, one could tell that at a glance. His skin had no tan upon it. It was white and soft. Obviously, he was no inhabitant of the underworld of forecastles and waterside grogeries. His white face looked intelligent and forceful even in unconsciousness.

In some way, the man had come by a wicked blow upon the head. It was the cause, I suspected, of his swoon, and stertorous breathing. Dried blood was plastered on the boards about his head, and his thick, dark hair was clotted and matted with the flow from his wound.

Lynch leaned over, and opened one of the fellow's loosely clenched hands. It was as white and soft as a lady's hand.

"This jasper is no bum—or sailor!" declared Lynch. "That damn Swede's been up to some o' his tricks. Well—we'll make a sailor of him before we fetch China Sea, I reckon!" He straightened, and turned on me with another demand for Newman. "Where did you say that big jasper was?"

I shrugged my shoulders helplessly. I could have sworn Newman had turned into that bunk; and I told him so.

Lynch snorted. "Didn't have the guts to face the music, I reckon, and cleared out! Well, if he tried to swim for it, I'll bet he's feeding fishes now!" His eyes roved around the room. Several of the bunks were occupied by nondescript figures, but Newman's huge bulk did not appear. "Damned seedy bunch," commented Lynch. "Couldn't afford to lose good beef. Hello—who's this?"

His eyes rested upon the bunk farthest forward, athwartship bunk in the eyes. The body of a big man lying therein loomed indistinctly in the gloom of the corner. Lynch reached the bunk with a bound, and I was close behind.

But it was not Newman. It was—the Cockney! The very man to whom the Swede had tendered the runner's job, the man Newman had manhandled! He lay on his back, snoring loudly, his bloated, unlovely face upturned to us.

I laughed. "It's the runner," I said. "The Swede's first runner. Swede gave him the job yesterday."

"And gave him a swig out of the black bottle last night!" commented Lynch. Then he grasped the significance of the Swede's double cross, and his laughter joined mine. "*Ho, ho*—shanghaied his own runner! *Ho, ho* . . . that damned Swede!"

Then it evidently struck Mister Lynch that he was conducting himself with unseemly levity in company with a foremast hand. His face became stern, his voice hard, and my moment of grace was ended.

“Turn to!” he commanded me. “What are you standing about for? Get out on deck, before I boot you out!”

I knew my place, and I obeyed with alacrity. As I reached the door, his voice held me again for a moment.

“I guess you are a smart lad,” says he. “I’ll pick you for my watch, if Fitz doesn’t get ahead of me. Got your nerve—shipping in this packet! If you know your work, and fly about it, you’ll be all right. Otherwise, God help you!”

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CHAPTER VI

During my brief communion with Lynch in the foc'sle, I had, of course, been conscious of ship work proceeding on deck. I had been deaf otherwise, what with the mate's obscene, shrill voice ringing through the ship, and the rattle of blocks, the cries of men, and the tramp of their feet as they pulled together. Now, as I stepped from the foc'sle into the bright daylight, I saw just what work was doing.

The vessel was aback on the main, her way lost for the moment. Abeam, a tug was puffing away from us, carrying the port crew—who had lifted anchor and taken the *Golden Bough* to sea—back to San Francisco. And we were fairly to sea; the rugged coast of Marin was miles astern, and the Golden Gate was lost in a distant haze. The voyage was begun.

I saw this at a glance, out of the corners of my eyes, as I ran aft to join the crowd. For I was minded to take the second mate's advice, and fly about my work in the *Golden Bough*. To wait for an order, was, I knew well enough, to wait for a blow. The crowd were already at the lee braces, commencing to trim up the yards, and I tailed onto the line and threw in my weight, thanking my lucky star that Mister Fitzgibbon was too busied with the weather braces to accord my advent on deck any other reception than a sizzling oath.

We got the ship under wary, and then jumped to other work. Mister Lynch had flung several more sick, frightened wretches out of the foc'sle, and now he joined with the mate in forcible encouragement of our efforts. The port gang had hoisted the yards, and loosed the sails, but the upper canvas was ill sheeted, and soon we were pully-hauling for dear life.

The best of ships is a madhouse the first day at sea, but the *Golden Bough*—God! she was madhouse and purgatory rolled into one! My own agility and knowledge saved me from ill usage for the moment, since the mates had plenty of ignorant, clumsy material to work upon. Such material! I never before or after saw such a welter of human misery as on that bright morning, such a crowd of sick, suffering, terrified men. Most of them knew not one rope from another, some of them knew not a word of English, half of them were still drunk, and stumbled and fell as they were driven about, the other half were seasick and all but helpless. Oh, they caught it, I tell you! The mates were merciless, as their reputations declared them to be. It was sing out an order, then knock a man down, jerk him to his feet, thrust a line into his hands, and kick him until he bent his weight upon it. It was bitter driving. But I'll admit it brought order out of chaos. We cleared the decks of the first-day-out hurrah's nest in jig time. Mercifully, it was fair weather, with a light, steady, fair breeze.



I found myself working shoulder to shoulder with a big, trim-bodied mulatto. He was a sailorman, I saw at a glance, and we stuck together as much as possible during the morning. He already bore Fitzgibbon's mark in the shape of a raw gash on his forehead, and his blood-specked eyes were hot with mingled rage and terror. He murmured over and over again to me, as though obsessed by the words, "Does yoh know where yoh am, mate? Lawd—de *Golden Bough*! de *Golden Bough*!"

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There came an ominous flapping of canvas aloft. “He done gib her too much wheel!” said the mulatto to me. “Lawd help him!”

The black-bearded man who had been lounging over the poop rail watching us work, and at whom I had been casting curious and fearful glances as I rushed about beneath his arctic glare, now swung about and damned the helmsman’s eye with soft voiced, deadly words. The mates’ voices dropped low, and we listened to Yankee Swope’s storm of venomous curses with bated breath.

As a man curses so he is. I learned that truth that morning, a truth amply tested by the days that came after. It was like a book page before my eyes, revealing the different characters of the three men who ruled our world, by comparison of their oaths.

Now Lynch swore robustious oaths in a hearty voice. They enlivened your legs and arms, for you sensed there was a blow behind the words if you lagged. But they did not rasp your soul. You knew there was no personal application to them. They were the oaths of a bluff, hard man who would drive you mercilessly, but who would none the less respect your manhood. They were the oaths of the boss to the man, and they bespoke force.

Fitzgibbon’s swearing always sounded dirty. His curses fell about you like a vile shower, and aroused your hot resentment; the same words that came clean from Lynch’s lips, sounded vile from Fitzgibbon, because the man, himself, was bad through and through. His oaths were the oaths of a slave-driver to the slave, and they bespoke cruelty.

But the curses of Captain Swope! God keep me from ever hearing their like again. They sounded worse than harsh, or vile, they sounded inhuman. The words came soft and melodious from his lips, but they were forked with poison and viciousness. As we of the foc’sle listened to him curse the helmsman, that first morning out, each man felt fear’s icy finger touch the pit of his stomach. The captain’s words horrified us, they sounded so utterly evil, and foretold so plainly the suffering that was to come to us.

He suddenly cut short his cursing, and turning, caught sight of us, men and mates, standing idle by the main fife rail. “What’s this, Misters?” he sang out. “Going asleep on the job? Rush those dogs—rush them! And send a man aft to the wheel—a sailorman! This damned Dutchman does not know how to steer!”

Those evenly spoken words aroused us to a very frenzy of effort. Fitzgibbon struck out blindly at the man nearest him, and commenced to curse us in a steady stream. Lynch reached out and dragged me away from the line on which I was heaving. “Aft with you!” he ordered me. “Take the wheel—lively, now!”

Lively it was. I ran along the lee deck towards the poop, my belly griped by the knowledge that the black-bearded man was watching my progress. Nineteen-year-old

man I might be, able seaman and hard case, but I'll admit I was afraid. I was afraid of that sinister figure on the poop, afraid of the soft voice that cursed so horribly.

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It was a little squarehead who had the wheel. A young Scandinavian, an undersized, scrawny boy. He was pallid, and glazy-eyed with terror, as well he might be after facing the Old Man's tirade, and when I took the spokes from his nerveless grasp he had not sufficient wit left to give me the course. Indeed, he had not much chance to speak, for Captain Swope had followed me aft, and as soon as I had the wheel he commenced on the luckless youth.

"You didn't watch her, did you? Now I'll show you what happens in my ship when a man goes to sleep on his job!" he purred. *Purred*—aye, that is the word. Through his beard I could see the tip of his tongue rimming his lips, as he contemplated the frightened boy, much like a cat contemplating a choice morsel about to be devoured; and there was a beam of satisfaction in his eye. Oh, it was very evident that Yankee Swope was about to enjoy himself.

The poor squarehead cowered backward, and Swope stepped forward and drove his clenched fist into the boy's face, smashing him against the cabin skylights. The boy cried out with pain and fear, the blood gushing from his nose, and, placing his hands over his face, he tried to escape by running forward. Swope, the devil, ran beside him, showering blows upon his unprotected head, and as they reached the break of the poop he knocked the boy down. Then he gave him the boots, commenced to kick him heavily about the body, while the boy squirmed, and pleaded in agonized, broken English for mercy. It was a brutal, revolting exhibition. I was an untamed fore-castle savage, myself, used to cruelty, and regarding it as natural and inevitable, but as I stood there at the wheel and, watched Yankee Swope manhandle that boy I became sick with disgust and rage. Aye, and with fear, for what was happening to the squarehead might well happen to me!

The boy ceased to squirm under the impact of the boots, and his pained cries were silenced. Then the captain ceased his kicking, though he did not cease the silky-toned evil curses that slid from his lips. He leaned over the bruised, insensible form, grasped the clothes, and heaved the boy clear off the poop, much as one might heave aside a sack of rubbish. So the little squarehead vanished from my ken for the time being, though I heard the thud of his body striking the deck below.

Swope stood looking down at his handiwork for a moment; then he swung about and came aft, brushing invisible dirt from his clothes as he walked. When he drew near, I saw his eyes were bright with joyous excitement; yes, by heaven, Captain Swope was happy because of the work he had just done; he was a man who found pleasure in inflicting pain upon others! He paused at my side, glanced sharply at me, then aloft at the highest weather leech, for I was steering full and by. But he found no cause for offense, and after damning my eye to be careful, he turned away and commenced pacing up and down. I was in a furious rage against the man. But when he looked at me my knees felt weak, and I answered his words respectfully and meekly indeed. God's truth, I was afraid of him!

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Oh, it was not his size. Yankee Swope was only of medium build; I was much the better man physically, and could have wiped the deck with him in short order—though, of course, a quick death would have rewarded any such attempt upon the master of the *Golden Bough*. Nor was his face ill to look at. Indeed, he had a handsome face, though beard and mustache covered half of it, and there was a peculiar and disturbing glitter in his black eyes. Some of my fear was caused, I think, by the sinister softness of his voice. But most of it was caused by the impression the man, himself, gave—call it personality, if you like. It was much like the impression of utter recklessness that Newman gave, only in Yankee Swope's case it was not recklessness, but utter wickedness. An aura of evil seemed to cling about him, he walked about in an atmosphere of black iniquity that was horrifying. Any foremast hand would look after Yankee Swope and say, "There—he's sold his soul to the Devil! He's a bad one, a real bad one, and no mistake!"

So I looked after him, and thought, while he paced the poop, and I held the wheel. "You're in for it, Shreve!" I thought. "This packet is so hot she sizzles, and this Old Man is a bad egg, and no fatal error! There will be bloody, sudden death before this passage is ended, or I'm a ruddy soldier!"

Standing there at the wheel, with one eye upon Captain Swope and the other upon my work, I found I owned a full measure of rueful thoughts. The *Golden Bough* was an eye-opener to me, used though I was to hard ships and hard men. I wished I had not shown myself such a hard case back there in the Swede's. I cursed myself for the vainglorious fool I was for having put myself in such a hole. The only rift in my cloud of gloom was Lynch; the second mate seemed favorably disposed towards me, I reflected, and had promised to choose me for his watch. He said I would be safe if I jumped lively to my work. I promised myself to do that same, for I foresaw a cruel fate for the malingering man aboard that vessel.

From Lynch, my thoughts naturally jumped to Newman. What had become of him? Deserted, as Lynch had declared? Developed a craven streak, and cleared out? No. My grim, reserved companion of the night before had had some strong, secret purpose in joining the *Golden Bough*; if he had deserted, I knew it was in obedience to that same hidden purpose, and not from fear of ship or officers.

It was while I was speculating about Newman's disappearance that Mister Lynch came aft and reported that fact to the Old Man, in my hearing. "We have them all hustling except two," he told Swope. "One jasper the Swede dosed with his black bottle, and another one who has been sandbagged. I'll have them on deck by muster. A damned seedy bunch, taken by and large, Captain. We're one hand shy!"

"What's that? One hand shy?" exclaimed Swope, sharply.

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"Yes, sir; cleared out, I expect. Came on board last night—one of the two the Swede told us about, who picked the ship themselves. There's one of them at the wheel. But the other one, the big one, was gone this morning. Best looking beef of the entire lot, too. Good sailorman, or I'm a farmer; looked like an officer down on his luck."

Swope turned to me. "Where is the fellow who came on board with you?" he demanded.

"I don't know, sir," I replied. "He had disappeared when I woke up this morning."

"*Huh!* Sounds fishy!" was his response. "Don't lie to me, my lad, or I'll wring your neck for you!" He stood silent a moment, opening and shutting his fingers, just as though he were turning the matter over in the palms of his hands. Then he cursed.

"You searched about for'ard for him?" he asked Lynch.

"Yes, sir; he isn't on board," the second mate answered.

"Then why are you bothering me?" the Old Man wanted to know. "If the swab is gone, he's gone. Drive the rest of them the harder to make up for his loss!"

He resumed his pacing of the poop, while Lynch went forward.

I was well enough pleased by the ending of the incident. For a moment I had feared the captain would blame me for Newman's absence. With the little squarehead's fate fresh in my mind I had no desire to foul Yankee Swope's temper.

But I could not help thinking about Newman. His going was a mystery, and, moreover, I was sorry to see the last of him. I wondered why he had not stayed. It was not fear that made him clear out; of that I was certain. What then? The lady?

I began to think about the *Golden Bough's* lady. To think of Newman was to think of her. I was sure she had drawn him on board the ship. Had she, then, sent him packing ashore, while I slept? What was he—a discarded lover? Was she the lass in the beggarman's yarn? Had he shipped so he might worship his beloved from the lowly foc'sle? Or was he seeking vengeance? Oh, I read my Southworth and Bulwer in those days, and had some fine ideas regarding the tender passion. I felt sure there was some romantic heart-bond between Newman and the lady.

I wondered if the lady were really so lovely, possessed of such goodness of heart, as glowing foc'sle report declared. Was she really an incarnate Mercy in this floating hell? Did she really go forward and bind up the men's hurts? Why did she not show herself on deck this fine morning? I wanted to see this angel who was wedded to a devil.

I heard her voice first, ascending through the skylight. It thrilled me. Not the words—she was but giving a direction to the Chinese steward—but the rich, sweet quality of the voice. I, the foc'sle Jack, whose ears' portion was harsh, bruising oaths, felt the feminine accents as a healing salve. They stirred forgotten memories; they sent my mind leaping backwards over the hard years to my childhood, and the sound of my mother's voice. No wonder; I had scarce once heard the mellow sound of a good woman's voice since I ran away to sea five years before, only the hard voices of hard men, and, now and then, the shrill voice of some shrew of the waterside.

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She ascended from the cabin, and stepped out upon deck, and, as if moving as far as possible from the harsh voices forward, came aft and stood near the wheel. And at the first glance, I knew that foc'sle report of the lady was not overdrawn, that the most glowing description did ill justice to her loveliness.

Her age? Oh, twenty-four, perhaps. Beautiful? Aye, judged by any standard. But it was not her youth, or the trimness of her figure, or the mere physical beauty of her features that touched the hearts, and made reverent the voices of rude sailormen. No; it was something beyond, something greater, than the flesh that commanded our homage.

Once since have I seen a face that was like the face of Captain Swope's wife—in a great church in a Latin country. It was a painting of the Madonna, and the master who had painted it had given the Mother's face an expression of brooding tenderness as deep as the sea, an expression of pity and sympathy as wide as the world. You felt, as you looked at the picture, that the artist must have known life, its sufferings and sins.

It was a like expression in the face of the Captain's lady. She was no pretty lass whose sweet innocence is merely ignorance. She was a woman who had looked upon life; you felt that she had faced the black evil and hideous cruelty in a man's world, and that she understood, and forgave. You felt her soul had passed through a fierce, white heat of pain, and had emerged burned clean of dross, free of all petty rancor or hatred. It glowed in her face, this wide understanding and sympathy, looked from her eyes, and sounded in her voice, and it was this that won the worship of the desperate men and broken derelicts who peopled the *Golden Bough's* forecastle.

Hair? Oh, yes, she had hair, a great mass of it piled on her head, black hair. Eyes? Her eyes were blue, not the washed out blue of a morning sky, but the changing, mysterious purple-blue of deep water. She turned those wonderful eyes upon me, as I stood there at the wheel, and the red blood flushed my cheeks, while the mask of cynical hardness I had striven so hard to cultivate fled from my face. She saw through my pretence, did the lady, she saw me as I really was, a boy playing desperately at being such a man as my experience had taught me to admire. I was abashed. I was no longer a hard case with those pitying, understanding eyes upon me. I was like a lad detected in a mischief, facing my mother.

She had heard some talk in the cabin, or perhaps she had overheard Lynch's report to the Old Man, for her words showed she knew me as one of the men who had shipped in the vessel of my own will. "Why—you are only a boy!" she said, in a surprised voice. Then her face seemed to diffuse a sweet sympathy and understanding. I can't explain it, but I knew that the lady knew just why I had shipped. She looked inside of me, and read my heart—and *understood!* "Oh, Boy, why did you do it?" she exclaimed softly. "It is not worth it—why did you come! Listen!—do not give offense; whatever they do, show no resentment. Oh, they are hard—forget your pride, and be willing!"

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She seemed about to say more, but Captain Swope interrupted. When she appeared on deck, he affected not to see her; he had paced past her twice, but not by the quiver of an eyelash had he shown himself aware of her presence. Now he suddenly paused nearby. Perhaps his sailor's sense of fitness was ruffled by the sight of her in conversation with the man at the wheel; or, more likely, his eye had noted the scene occurring forward, and he wished to force it upon her attention, because it would cause her pain.

"Ah, madam, commencing your good works so soon?" he remarked, in a soft, sneering voice. "Well, from all signs for'ard, you had better overhaul your medicine chest. You will have a patient or two to sniffle over to-morrow morning."

The lady shuddered ever so slightly at Swope's words, and her features contracted, as though with pain. Just for an instant—then she was serenity again, and she gazed forward, as Swope bade, and silently watched the mates at their work.

They were manhandling, of course. I might have found humor in the scene had not the lady just stirred the softer chords of my being. Away forward, by the foc'sle door, Mister Lynch was engaged in dressing down the Cockney. This was not a particularly interesting exhibition, though, for although the Cockney showed fight, he was clearly outmatched, and arose from the deck only to be knocked down again.

But, by the main hatch was a more interesting spectacle. There, Mister Fitzgibbon was busied with the spare, red-shirted man, he of the intelligent face and gashed skull, the man I had found so mysteriously occupying the bunk Newman had gone to bed in, and who, Lynch declared, was neither sailor, nor bum. There on the poop, we could not overhear the small man's words for Mister Fitz's shrill cursing, but he seemed to be expostulating with the mate. And he seemed intent on forcing past the mate and coming aft. He would try to run past the hatch, and Fitzgibbon would punch him and send him reeling backwards. Even as we watched, the mate seized him by the collar of his red shirt, slammed him up against the rail, and then, with a belaying pin, hazed him forward at a run.

I heard the lady sigh—and Swope chuckled. Then I noticed she was staring fixedly at the side of the cabin skylight. A few drops of the blood the Old Man had drawn from the little squarehead were splattered upon the woodwork and the deck. Silently, she regarded them, and her slight figure seemed to droop a bit. Then, with a queer little shrug, she squared her shoulders, and faced the Captain with up-tilted chin. . . . Aye, and I sensed the meaning of that little shrug, and the squared shoulders. It meant that she had picked up her Cross, and that she would courageously bear it in pain and sorrow through the dark days of the coming voyage. For I truly believe the lady suffered vicariously for every blow that bruised a sailor's flesh on board the *Golden Bough*!

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"Yes, I must look to my medicines," she replied to Swope. "I see they will be required." There was no active hate in her voice, or in her eyes, but she looked at the man much as one looks at some loathsome yet inevitable object—a snake, or a toad. And she turned away without further words, and descended to the cabin. Swope watched her departure with a half smile parting his beard and mustache. Oh, how I longed to be able to wipe that sneer from his mouth with my clenched fist!

CHAPTER VII

The Cockney relieved me at the wheel, at one bell, when the mates turned the crowd to after a short half hour for dinner. Oh, what a changed Cockney from yestereve! He came slinking meekly along the lee side of the poop. When he took over the wheel he had hardly spirit enough in him to mumble over the directions I gave him. His eyes were puffed half closed, and his lips were cut and swollen. Gone was the swanking, swaggering Cockney who had paraded before the Swede's bar. Instead there was only this cowed, miserable sailorman taking over the wheel. That Cockney had suffered a cruel double cross when he drank of the black bottle, and was hoisted over the *Golden Bough's* rail. Yesterday he was a great man, the "Knitting Swede's" chief bully, with the hard seafare behind him, and with unlimited rum, and an easy, if rascally, shore life ahead of him. To-day he was just a shell-back outward bound, with a sore head and a bruised body; a fellow sufferer in the foc'sle of a dreaded ship, mere dirt beneath the officers' feet. Such a fall! Keenly as I had disliked the man yesterday, to-day I was sorry for him. The more sorry because I felt that the Jocese Swede had come near having me as the butt of his little joke, instead of Cockney.

I scurried forward, intent upon dinner. I drew my whack from the Chinaman in the gallery, and bolted it down in the empty foc'sle. It was a miserable repast, a dish of ill-cooked lobscouse, and a pannikin of muddy coffee, and I reflected glumly that I had joined a hungry ship as well as a hot one.

I finished the last of that mysterious stew, and then filled and lighted my pipe. I felt sure I would be allowed the half hour dinner spell the rest of the crowd had enjoyed, and I relaxed and puffed contentedly, determined to enjoy my respite to the last minute. For the sounds from the deck indicated a lively afternoon for all hands. But something occurred to interrupt my cherished "Smoke O," something that caused me to sit up suddenly and stiffly on the bench, while my pipe fell unheeded from my slackened mouth, and an unpleasant prickle ran over my scalp and down my spine.

I have already mentioned that the *Golden Bough* had a topgallant forecastle; that is, the crew's quarters were away forward, in the bows of the ship, beneath the forecastle head. It was a gloomy cavern; the bright day of outdoors was a muddy light within.

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Well, in the floor of the port foc'sle, wherein I was sitting, was the hatch to the forepeak, below. It was this yard square trap-door which caused my agitation. My glance fell casually upon it, and I saw it move! It lifted a hair's breadth, and I heard a slight scraping sound below.

Aye, I was startled! A rat? But I knew that even a ship rat did not grow large enough to move a trap-door. The ghost of some dead sailor-man, haunting the scene of his earthly misery? Well, I had the superstitions of a foc'sle Jack, but I knew well enough that a proper ghost would not walk abroad in the noon o' day. I stared fascinated at that moving piece of wood. It slowly lifted about an inch, and then, through the narrow slit; I saw an eye regarding me with a fixed glare. I glared back, my amazement struggling with the conviction that was oversweeping me; and then, just as I was about to speak, Bucko Lynch's voice came booming into my retreat.

"Hey, you! D'you reckon to spell-o the whole afternoon? If you've finished your scouse, out on deck with you—and lively about it!"

There was no denying that request, eye or no eye. And at the second mate's first word, the trap door dropped shut, I clattered out of the foc'sle, and to work; but I was turning that little matter of the forepeak hatch over in my mind, you bet!

It was near dusk, well on in the first dog-watch, when the mates let up with their driving, and herded all hands aft to the main deck. The forepeak hatch had rested heavily upon my mind all afternoon, and I was tingling with excitement when I went aft with the rest to face the ceremony which always concludes the first day out, the choosing and setting of the watches, and the calling of the muster roll. Something unexpected was about to happen, I felt sure.

We were a sorry looking crowd gathered there on the main deck, before the cabin, a tatterdemalion mob, with bruised bodies and sullen faces, and with hate and fright in our glowering eyes. Those few of us who were seamen possessed a bitter knowledge of the cruel months ahead, the rest, the majority, faced a fate all the more dreadful for being dimly perceived, and of which they had received a fierce foretaste that merciless day.

Captain Swope came to the break of the poop, lounged over the rail, and looked us over. In his hand he held the ship's articles. He regarded us with a sort of wicked satisfaction, seeming to draw delight from the sight of our huddled, miserable forms. Without saying a word, he gloated over us, over the puffed face of the Cockney, over the expression of desperate horror in the face of the red-shirted man, over the abject figure of the little squarehead, who had been going about all afternoon sobbing, with his hand pressed to his side, and whose face was even now twisted with a pain to which he feared to give voice. Aye, Swope stared down at us, licking his chops, so to speak, at the sight of our suffering; and we glared back at him, hating and afraid.

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Then the lady appeared at the poop rail, some paces distant from the Old Man. It was heartening to turn one's eyes from the Old Man's wicked, sneering face to the face of the lady. There was sorrow in that brooding look she gave us, and pity, and understanding. She was used to looking upon the man-made misery of men, you felt, and skilled in softening it. There was a stir in our ranks as we met her gaze, a half audible murmur ran down the line, and the slackest of us straightened our shoulders a trifle. The Old Man sensed the sudden cheer amongst us, and, I think, sensed its cause, for without glancing at the lady, he drawled an order to the mate, standing just below him.

"Well, Mister Fitz, start the ball rolling—your first say."

The mate allowed his fierce, pig eyes to rove over us, and to my secret delight he passed me by. "Where's the nigger?" he said, referring to the mulatto, who was at the wheel. "The wheel? Well, he's my meat."

So the watch choosing began. Lynch promptly chose me, as he had promised he would, and I stepped over to the starboard deck. Fitzgibbon chose the Cockney, Lynch picked a squarehead—so the alternate choosing went, the mates' skilled eyes first selecting all those who showed in their appearance some evidence of sailorly experience.

"You!" said Fitzgibbon, indicating the red-shirted man, and motioning him over to the port side of the deck.

The red-shirted man, whose agitated face I had been covertly watching, instead of obeying the mate, stepped out of line and appealed to Swope. "Captain, may I speak to you now?" he asked, in a shrill, excited voice.

"Eh, what's this?" exclaimed Swope, gazing down at the fellow. He lifted his hand and checked the mate, who was already about to collar his prey. I think Swope knew just what was coming, and he found sport in the situation. "What do you want, my man?" his soft voice inquired.

A flood of agitated words poured out of the red-shirted man's mouth. "Captain—a terrible mistake—fouly mistreated, all of these men fouly mistreated by your officers—tried to see you and was beaten. . . ." With an effort he made his speech more coherent. "A terrible mistake, sir! I have been kidnapped on board this vessel! I am not a sailor, I do not know how I come to be here—I have been kidnapped, sir!"

"How terrible!" said Swope. "I do not doubt your word at all, my man. Anyone can see you are no sailor, but a guttersnipe. And possibly you were—er—'kidnapped,' as you call it, in company with the wharf-rats behind you."

“But, Captain—good heavens, you do not understand!” cried the man. “I am a clergyman—a minister of the Gospel! I am the Reverend Richard Deaken of the Bethel Mission in San Francisco!”

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The Reverend Richard Deaken! I saw a light. I had heard of the Reverend Deaken while I was in the Swede's house. The labors of this particular sky-pilot were, it appeared, particularly offensive to crimpdom. He threatened to throw a brickbat of exposure into the camp. He was appealing to the good people of the city to put a stop to the simple and effective methods the boarding masters used to separate Jack from his money, and then barter his carcass to the highest bidder. I had heard the Swede, himself, say, "Ay ban got him before election!" And this is how the reverend gentleman had been "got"—crimped into an outward bound windjammer, with naught but a ragged red shirt and a pair of dungaree pants to cover his nakedness; and he found, when he made his disclosure of identity, that the high place of authority was occupied by a man who enjoyed and jeered at his evil plight.

For, at the man's words, the Old Man threw back his head and laughed loudly. "*Ho, ho, ho!* D'ye hear that, Mist'ers? The Swede has given us a sky-pilot—a damned Holy Joe! By God, a Holy Joe on the *Golden Bough!* *Ho, ho, ho!*" Then he addressed the unfortunate man again. "So you are a Holy Joe, are you? You don't look it! You look like an ordinary stiff to me! Let me see—what did you call yourself? Deaken?" He lifted the articles, and scanned the names that represented the crew. "Deaken—*hey!* Well, I see no such name written here." I did not doubt that. Save my name, and Newman's, I doubted if any name on the articles could be recognized by any man present. "I see one name here, written in just such a flourishing hand as a man of your parts might possess—'Montgomery Mulvaney.' That is undoubtedly you; you are Montgomery Mulvaney!"

"But, Captain—" commenced the parson, desperately.

"Shut up!" snapped Swope. "Now, listen here, my man! You may be a Holy Joe ashore, or you may not be, that does not concern me. But I find you on board my vessel, signed on my articles as 'Montgomery Mulvaney, A.B.' Yet you tell me yourself you are no sailor. Well, my fancy man, Holy Joe you may be, stiff you are, but you'll be a sailor before this passage ends, or I'm not Angus Swope! Now then, step over there to port, and join your watch!"

"But, Captain—" commenced the desperate man again. Then he evidently saw the futility of appealing to Captain Swope. Abruptly, he turned and addressed the lady.

"Madam—my God, madam, can you not make him understand——"

The lady shook her head, frowned warningly, and spoke a soft, quick, sentence. "No, no—do not protest, do as they say!" Well she knew the futility of argument, and the danger to the one who argued. Indeed, even while she spoke, the mate took the parson by his shirt collar, and jerked him roughly into his place. And there he stood, by the Cockney's side, wearing an air of bewildered dismay both comic and tragic.

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The mates renewed their choosing, and in a few more moments we were all gathered in two groups, regarding each other across the empty deck. There were fifteen men in the mate's watch, but, because of Newman's absence, only fourteen had fallen to Lynch.

The Old Man handed down the articles to Mister Lynch. "All right, Mister, muster them," he said. "And (addressing us generally) if you don't recognize your names, answer anyway—or we'll baptize you anew!"

Lynch held the papers before his face. I thrilled with a sudden expectancy. Something startling was going to happen, I felt it in my bones. Some clairvoyant gleam told me the forepeak hatch was wide open now.

"Answer to your names!" boomed Lynch's great voice. "A. Newman!"

"Here!" was the loud and instant response.

As one man, we swung our heads, and looked forward. Sauntering aft, and just passing the main hatch, was the man with the scar. He came abreast of us, and paused there in the empty center of the deck.

It was the lady, on the poop above, who broke the spell of silence the man's dramatic arrival had placed upon all hands. She broke it with a kind of strangled gasp. "Roy—it is Roy—oh, God!" she said, and she swayed, and clutched the rail before her as though to keep from falling. She stared down at Newman as if he were a ghost from the grave.

But it was the manner of Captain Swope which commanded the attention of all hands. He was seeing a ghost, too, an evil ghost. It was like foc'sle belief come true—this man had sold his soul to the Devil, and the Devil was suddenly come to claim his own. He, too, stared down at Newman, and clutched the rail for support, while the flesh of his face became a livid hue, and his expression one of incredulous horror.

"Where have you come from?" he said in a shrill, strained voice.

Newman's clothes and face were smutted with the grime from the peak, but his air was debonair. He answered Captain Swope airily. "Why—I come just now from your forepeak—a most unpleasant, filthy hole, Angus! And less recently, I come from my grave, from that shameful grave of stripes and bars to which your lying words sent me, Angus! I've come to pay you a visit, to sail with you. Why, I'm on your articles—I am 'A. Newman.' An apt name, a true name—*eh*, Angus? Come now, are you not glad to see me?"

It was unprecedented, that occurrence. A foremast hand badgering the captain on his own poop deck; badgering Yankee Swope of the *Golden Bough*, whilst his two trusty buckos stood by inactive and gaping. But, as I explained, there was an air about Newman that said "Hands off!" It was not so much his huge, muscular body; there was

something in the spirit of the man that was respect-compelling; something lethal, a half-hidden, over-powering menace; something that overawed. He was no foc'sle Jack, no commonplace hard case; as he stood there alone, he had the bearing of a man who commanded large ships, who directed great affairs. And his bearing held inactive and over-awed those two fighting mates, while he mocked their god, Swope.

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And Swope! The man became craven before Newman's upturned gaze. He was palsied with fear, stark fear. I saw the sweat beads glistening on his brow. He lifted a shaking hand and wiped them off. Then he suddenly turned and strode aft, out of our view, without a parting word to the mates, without even the time honored, "Below, the watch." In the quiet that was over us, we heard his footsteps as he walked aft. They were uncertain, like the footsteps of a drunken man. We heard them descend to the cabin.

Newman turned his gaze upon the lady. She stood there, clutching the rail. Her body seemed frozen into the attitude. But her face was alive.

Yes, alive—and not with fear or horror. There was a delight beyond the powers of description shining in her face. There was incredulity, with glad conviction overcoming it. Her eyes glowed. Her heart was in her eyes as she looked at Newman.

Newman spoke, and his voice was rich and sweet, all its harsh menace gone.

"I have come, Mary," says he.

She did not reply with words. But they looked at each other, those two, and although there were no more words, yet we gained the impression they were communing. Men and mates, we gaped, curious and tongue-tied. This was something quite beyond us, outside our experience. Bully Fitzgibbon, across the deck from me, pulled wildly at his mustache, and every movement of his fingers betrayed his bewilderment.

For what seemed a long time the man and the woman stood silent, regarding each other. The dusk, which had been gathering, crept upon us. The lady's face lost its clear outline, and became shadowy. Suddenly she turned and flitted aft. We listened to her light footsteps descending to the cabin, as, a short while before, we had listened to the Old Man's.

When sound of her had ceased, Newman, without being bidden, stepped to the starboard side and fell into line beside me.

The mate finally broke the awkward silence. Lack of the usual sting from his voice showed how the scene had shaken him.

"Well—carry on, Mister!" he said to Lynch. "Finish the mustering."

The second mate read off the list of names. With the single exception of myself, not a man responded with the usual "Here, sir." Not a man recognized his name among those called; a circumstance not to be wondered at, for the list was doubtless made up of whatever names happened to pop into the Knitting Swede's mind. But the mates did not care about responses. As soon as Lynch was finished, Fitzgibbon commanded shortly, "Relieve wheel and lookout. Go below, the watch."

We of the starboard watch went below. Newman came with us, and he walked as he afterwards walked and worked with us, a man apart.

CHAPTER VIII

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A man apart Newman was. We instinctively recognized that fact from the beginning. When we had gained the foc'sle, the rage in our hearts found expression in bitter cursing of our luck, the Swede, the ship and the officers. But Newman did not curse, nor did we expect him to. We sensed that he was glad he was at sea in the *Golden Bough*, that he was there for some peculiar purpose of his own. He was, of course, the dominant personality in the foc'sle, indeed, in the ship. But, strangely enough, we did not look to him for leadership. We regarded him curiously, and with awe and some fear, but we did not look to him to lead the watch. We felt he was not one of us. His business on the ship was not our business, his aim not our aim.

Because of this aloofness of Newman, I suddenly found myself occupying the proud position of cock of the starboard watch. A foc'sle must have its leading spirit, and the cockship is a position much coveted and eagerly striven for in most ships, decided only after combat between the fighting men of the crew. But the *Golden Bough* had an extraordinary crew. The majority of the men in my watch were just stiff, who possessed neither the experience nor desire to contest for leadership. The few seamen, besides myself and Newman, were squareheads, quiet peasants of Scandinavia and Germany, who felt lost and unhappy without somebody always at hand to order them about.

So, within half an hour after going below for that first time, I found myself giving orders to men and being obeyed. They were the first orders I had ever given, and, oh, they were sweet in my mouth! Think of it, my last ship I had been ordered about by the foc'sle cock. I had gone to the galley at command and fetched the watch's food. Now, scant days after, I, a fledgling able seaman, was lording it over the foc'sle of the hottest ship on the high seas, and ordering another man to go after the supper. And he went. I think I grew an inch during that dog-watch; I know my voice gained a mature note it lacked before.

I was a true son of the foc'sle, you must understand, with the habits and outlook of a barbarian. This leadership I so casually assumed may appear a petty thing, but it was actually the greatest thing that happened to me since birth. This little savage authority I commenced to exercise over my companions by virtue of the threat of my fists, was my first taste of power. It awakened in me the driving instinct, the desire to lead, and eventually placed me in command of ships; it also gave me my first sense of responsibility, without which there can be no leadership.

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During the supper, and after, I found myself watching and studying my companions. For I feared that my youth might later cause someone to question my cockship, and I meant to fight for it in that event. But my scrutiny satisfied my natural confidence. There was no man in my watch I could not handle in either a rough-and-tumble or stand-up go, I thought, with the exception of Newman. He would not interfere with me—his interest lay aft, in the cabin, not in the foc'sle. In the port watch were two fighting men, my eyes had told me, the Cockney and the Nigger. If they disputed my will in foc'sle affairs, I was still confident I should prove the best man. I felt my tenure of office was secure, and that new, delicious feeling of power quite effaced, for the moment, the memory of the day, and reconciled me to the ship.

This scrutiny I gave my companions was the first chance I had to fairly size them up, and I afterwards discovered that my first impressions of them, individually and collectively, were quite correct.

We were, as you know, thirty men before the mast, fifteen to a watch. More than half of the thirty were of that class known to sailors as “stiffs.” This is, they were greenhorns masquerading on the articles as able seamen. And such stiffs! The Knitting Swede must have combed the jails, and stews, and boozing dens of all San Francisco to assemble that unsavory mob.

In my watch, Newman, myself, and four square-heads could be called seamen. But the squareheads knew not a dozen words of English between them. The other nine were stiffs, various kinds of stiffs, broken men all, with the weaknesses of dissolute living stamped upon their inefficient faces.

Except two men. These two were stiffs right enough, and their faces were evil, God knows, but they plainly were not to be classed as weaklings. I noticed them particularly that first watch below because they sat apart from the wrangling, cursing gang, and whispered to each other, and stared at Newman, who was lying in his bunk.

They were medium sized men, as pallid of face as Newman, himself, and their faces gave one the impression of both slyness and force. A grim looking pair; I should not have cared to run afoul of them on the Barbary Coast after midnight. I already knew the names they called each other—the only names I ever knew them by—“Boston,” for the blond fellow with the bridge of his nose flattened, and “Blackie” for the other, a chap as swarthy as a dago, with long, oily black hair, and eyes too close together.

Even as I watched, they seemed to arrive at some decision in their whispered conversation. Blackie got up from the bench and crossed over to Newman's bunk. The latter was lying with his face to the wall. Blackie placed his hand upon Newman's shoulder, leaned over, and whispered into his ear.

I saw Newman straighten out his long body. For an instant he lay tense, then he slowly turned his head and faced the man who leaned over him. On his face was the same expression of deadly menace he had shown the Cockney, back in the Swede's barroom.

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Blackie could not withstand that deadly gaze. He backed hurriedly away, and sat down beside his mate. Then Newman spoke in low, measured tones, and at the first word the babel of noise stopped in the foc'sle, and all hands watched his lips with bated breath.

"I play a lone hand," he addressed the pair. "You will keep your mouths shut, and work, and play none of your deviltries in this ship unless I give the word. Otherwise—" The great scar on his forehead was blue and twitching, and his voice was deadly earnest. He did a thing so expressive it made me shudder. He lifted his hand, and carelessly placed his forefinger on the outer side of his bunk, and when he lifted it, two of the myriad cockroaches that infested the foc'sle were mashed fiat on the board.

Blackie's face set sullenly, and the angry blood darkened his cheeks. Boston wriggled uneasily on his seat, and cleared his throat as though about to speak. But, at the instant, Lynch's booming voice came into the foc'sle, calling the watch on deck, and putting an abrupt end to the scene.

There was an immediate scramble for the exit to the deck. Aye, the mates had put the fear of the Lord—and themselves—into us, and we were all eager to show how willing we were! But I heard Fitzgibbon without, as well as Lynch, and, from the gossip I had heard at the Swede's, I suspected the foc'sle was about to be introduced to the orthodox hell-ship manner of turning to the watch. Both mates would meet us coming up, and the first man on deck would get a clout for not being sooner, and the last man a boot for being a laggard.

So I held back, and allowed another the honor of being first through the door.

This honor was seized by none other than Blackie. I suppose he was anxious to escape from Newman's disturbing gaze; anyhow, at the second mate's first summons, he bounded from the bench, and tumbled through the door. I followed immediately after, and saw my suspicions confirmed.

Mister Fitz was holding a lantern, and Mister Lynch had his hands free for business. He met Blackie's egress with a careless jab of his fist that up-ended the unfortunate stiff, and the injunction, "Hearty, now, you swabs! Lay aft!"

I quickly sidestepped out of the second mate's range, in case he should aim a blow at me, and started to obey the command to lay aft. But I had taken but a step when I was arrested by Blackie's action.

Instead of adopting the sensible course of meekness under insult, Blackie rebounded from the deck and flew at Lynch. In the light cast by Mister Fitz's lantern, I saw the gleam of a knife blade in Blackie's hand. I suppose the anger that Newman's words had raised exploded beneath Lynch's blow, and caused his mad rashness.

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But Bully Lynch made nothing of the assault. “Ah, would you!” I heard him say as Blackie closed with him, and then the knife-hand went up in the air, and the weapon fell upon the deck. “I’ll teach you!” said Lynch, and he commenced to shower blows upon the man. Blackie screamed curses, and fought back futilely. Lynch commented in a monotone with each of his thudding blows, “Take that—that—that.” Soon he knocked Blackie cold, across the forehatch. Then he turned to us who were clustered outside the foc’sle door, watching. “Aft, with you! Jumping, it is, now!”

Aft, we went, and jumping, too, with the mate’s laugh in our ears.

CHAPTER IX

I had the second trick at the wheel that watch, from ten o’clock till midnight. I came panting and sweating to the task, keenly relishing the chance of resting. For there was to be no “farming” away the night watches in the *Golden Bough*; the second mate had kept us upon the dead run from one job to another, and I sensed this was the routine of the ship.

It was a fine, clean smelling night of moon and stars, and brisk breeze. The wind had freshened since day, and the vessel was stepping out and showing the paces that made her famous. She had an easy helm; one of those rare craft that may be said to steer herself. I had time to think, and receive impressions, as I half lounged at the wheel. The round moon brightened the world, the west pyramids of canvas above me bellied taut, the cordage wrung a stirring whistle from the wind, the silver spray cascaded on the weather deck. I watched the scene with delight, drank in the living beauty of that ship, and felt the witchery the *Golden Bough* practiced upon sailors’ minds steal over and possess me. Aye, she was a ship! I was soon to curse my masters, and the very day I was born, but never, after that night, did I curse the ship. I loved her. I felt the full force that night of a hoary sea axiom, “Ships are all right. ’Tis the men in them.”

I was surprised not to see Captain Swope upon the poop. According to the gossip I had heard at the Knitting Swede’s, this eight to twelve watch was Yankee Swope’s favorite prowling time. But he did not appear; indeed, he had not shown himself since he had so ignominiously surrendered the deck to Newman. I was not disappointed. I shouldn’t have cared if he remained below the entire voyage.

But I did see the lady that watch. When Mister Lynch, and his familiars (of whom more anon), had gone forward to a job, she suddenly stepped out of the companion hatch and flitted aft towards me. Then, when she was close enough to discern my features by the reflection from the binnacle lights, she stopped. I heard a sort of gasping sigh that meant, I knew, disappointment, and she moved over to the rail, and stood staring at the sea.

I knew what was wrong. She had, in the darkness, mistaken my very respectable bulk for Newman's gigantic body. She had expected to find Newman at the wheel; she was eager for a private word with him.

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I watched her, with my head half turned on my shoulder. Aye, but it thrilled me, the sight of her! You will call me a romantic young fool, but it was not that. It was no thrill of desire, no throb of passion for her beauty, though she was fair enough, in all faith, as she stood there in the moonlight. It was something bigger, something deeper, a wave of sympathy and pity that surged through my being, a feeling I had never before felt during my savage young life. A pretty pass, you say, when the ignorant foc'sle Jack pities the captain's wife? Aye, but the very beasts of the field might have pitied the wife of Yankee Swope.

Her body seemed so slender and childlike. Too fine and dainty to hold the woe of a hell-ship, and, Heaven knew, what private sorrow besides. She did not know I was observing her, or else her great trouble caused her to forget my presence, for she suddenly buried her face in her hands, and her shoulders commenced to heave. It stabbed me to the quick, the sight of that noiseless grief. My eyelids smarted, and my throat bulged uncomfortably. What was her trouble? Swope? Had he hurt her? Was the talk I had heard at the Swede's correct, did that black devil beat the lady? My hands grasped the wheel spokes fiercely, as though I had Swope's sleek throat between my fingers.

I heard Mister Lynch coming aft. I thought the lady would not wish him to see her weeping, and since she did not seem to hear the approach, I called softly to her, "Lady! They come!"

She straightened, and, after a second, came swiftly to me. She bent her face within the narrow radius of the binnacle lights, and her eyes looked straight into mine. Aye, and the misery and suffering I saw in those great eyes!

"God bless you, boy," she whispered. "You are his friend? Tell him I come forward in the morning. Tell him—for my sake—as he loves his life—to look behind him when he walks in the dark!"

With that she turned and sped to the hatch, and was gone below. And up the poop ladder tramped Lynch, with the two tradesmen following him.

I have mentioned these two familiars of the second mate before, and I had better explain them.

The *Golden Bough* carried neither junior officers, nor bo'suns, an unusual circumstance, considering the size and character of her crews. Instead, she carried two sailmakers and two carpenters, and these tradesmen lived by themselves in the round-house, ate aft at a special table, and, save when emergency work prevented, stood watch and watch. They stood their night watches aft, with the officer on deck. This arrangement—unique in all my sea experience—provided three men, awake, armed and handy,

throughout the night. It worried us a good deal, this arrangement, when, in due time, we began to talk of mutiny.

But I was not talking, or even thinking, of mutiny this night, or for many nights. Nothing was further from my thoughts. Mutiny is a serious business, a hanging business, the business of scoundrels, or the last resort of desperate men. I knew the consequences of mutiny, so did the others, squareheads and stiffs, and we had not been sufficiently maltreated to make us ripe for such an undertaking.

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But there was mutiny in the air on the *Golden Bough* from that very first day or the voyage. I was soon to learn that there was plenty of rebellious spirit forward, and shrewd, daring fellows eager to lead, because of piratical greed. Also, she was a hell-ship. It was part of a hell-ship's routine to thump the crew to the raw edge of mutiny, and keep them there.

You must understand the *Golden Bough*, and to understand her you must understand the knock-down-and-drag-out system in vogue on board a good many American ships of that day, and later. A hell-ship was not just the result of senseless brutality on the part of the officers. She was the product of a system. The captain rode high in his owner's esteem when he could point to the golden results of his stern rule at sea; the bucko mates were specifically hired to haze the crew, and drew extra large pay for the job.

It was, of course, a matter of dollars. If the owners did not have to pay wages to the crew, they would save money, wouldn't they? I suppose some sleek-jowled, comfortable pillar of church and society first thought of it, and whispered it into his skipper's ear. And the skipper whispered it to his mates, and they made that ship so hot the crew cleared out at the first port or call, leaving their wages behind. So was the hell-ship born.

For instance: We were thirty men before the mast in the *Golden Bough*, signed on for the voyage at \$25 a month. Of course, we didn't get any of this wage until the voyage was completed, until the vessel returned to an American port. Think of the saving to the owners if we deserted in Hong Kong. They would have no labor bill, practically, for working the ship from America to China, no labor bill during the months ere she was ready for sea again. Then when ready to leave Hong Kong, Swope would ship a new crew, haze them as we were being hazed, and they would clear out at the next port.

That system worked. It was a money saver, and lasted till the ascendancy of steam, and the passage of tardy laws, ended it. Why, some skippers—like Yankee Swope—boasted they never paid off a crew. Talk about efficiency, and reducing overhead costs! Some of those old windjammer skippers could swap yarns with these factory experts of to-day, I tell you!

Of course, not all American ships, or even a majority of them, adopted this system. But enough did to give American ships an evil name among sailors that has endured to the present day.

And this evil name helped sustain the system. It completed a kind of vicious circle. The crew ran away from the hell-ship, and spread the evil fame of the vessel over the five oceans. Sailors then would not willing ship in her—save, of course, a few adventuresome young fools, like myself, who sought glory—and the skipper found himself putting to sea with a mob of stiffs in his foc'sle.

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Often he had trouble getting stiffes. In some ports, where the crimping system was not developed, the hell ship waited for months for a crew. In other ports, like San Francisco, where the boarding master's will was the law of sailortown, the captain paid over his blood money, and the boarding master delivered him his crew, drunk, drugged and sandbagged. When he got to sea he would find his crew composed chiefly of the very scum of the waterside, a mode of unlicked, lawless ruffians, and his bucko mates would need all their prowess to keep them subordinate. Hazing such a mob was the only way to manage them. Also, it made them run away and leave their wages behind.

But there were degrees of "heat" in the hell-ships. The bucko mates usually contented themselves with working the men at top speed, depriving them of their afternoon watches below, and thumping the stiffes, because they were lubberly at their work. This treatment was sufficiently severe to produce the desired results. This was normal hell-ship style. The few sailors, in the crew, providing they were willing, rarely received more than verbal abuse.

Now, brutality feeds upon itself. Some officers, after living under the system for a time, became perfect fiends. They came to enjoy beating up men. In some ships, the dressing down of the crew was a continuous performance, and sailors, as well as stiffes, caught it.

As in the *Golden Bough*. God's truth, there was blood spilt every watch! Always, after the first day out, did the foc'sle bunks contain a miserable wretch or two laid up because of a manhandling.

Yet we of the starboard watch were comparatively lucky. Mister Lynch, our officer, was what I may call a normal bucko. He hazed for the results rather than for the pleasure of hazing, though I think he did get some satisfaction out of thumping the men. You feel a fine thrill when you see a half dozen huskies cringe away before you with fear in their eyes. I imagine it is the same thrill a wild animal tamer feels as he faces his beasts. I felt this fascinating sensation many times after I had become a mate of ships. Lynch had no mercy on the stiffes of our watch; he hammered the rudiments of seamanship into them with astonishing speed. He cuffed a knowledge of English into the squareheads. But he kept his hands off Newman and me, not because he was afraid of us—I don't think Lynch feared anything—but because we knew our work and did it. Oh, I got mine, and with interest, in the *Golden Bough*, but not from Lynch.

The mate was a different type. He was all brute, was Fitzgibbon, and sailors and stiffes alike caught it from him. A natural bully, and, like most such, at heart craven.

Lynch used his bare fists upon the men, Fitz used brass knuckles. I don't think Lynch ever bothered to carry a gun in the daytime. Fitzgibbon never stirred on deck without a deadly bulge in his coat pocket. Lynch stalked among us by night or day, alone, and

unafraid. After dark, the mate never stirred from the poop unless Sails and Chips were at his heels. Lynch was a bluff, hard man; Fitzgibbon was a cruel, sly beast.

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And Swope! Well, I cannot explain or judge his character. It would take a medical man to do that, I think. He was his two mates rolled into one, plus brains. He had fed a certain strong Sadistic element in his nature until inflicting pain upon others had become his chief passion. I can imagine his perverted soul living in former lives—as a Familiar of the Inquisition, or the red-clad torturer of some medieval prince. But explain him, no. I will tell his ending, you may judge.

But, of course, I was not musing upon the economy of hell-ships, or the characters of bucko mates, during the balance of that trick at the wheel. The lady's message to Newman possessed my mind.

When I went forward at eight bells, I immediately called Newman aside, and delivered her words. He listened in silence, and his face grew soft. He squeezed my hand, and whispered somewhat brokenly, "Thank you, Jack"—an exhibition of emotion that startled as much as it pleased me, he being such a stern man.

Then, when I repeated the latter part of the lady's message, "Tell him . . . to look behind him when he walks in the dark," his features hardened again, and I heard him mutter, "So, that is his game!"

"What is?" I asked.

He did not answer for a moment, and I turned away towards my bunk. But at that he reached out a detaining hand.

"You are a big man, Shreve," he said. "Not such a difference in our sizes but that a man might mistake us after dark. Keep your weather eye lifted, lad; you, too, must look behind when you walk in the dark."

"And what shall I look for?" asked I.

"Death," he said.

CHAPTER X

Came morning, but not the lady.

And the foc'sle was in sad need of her ministrations. Quite half the crew needed salves and bandages for their bruises and cuts, and there was, besides, a more serious case demanding attention.

When the starboard watch was called at four o'clock, we heard a low, insistent moaning in the port foc'sle. The man who called us said that the little squarehead—the lad Swope had manhandled—had again fallen afoul the masters. The hurts Swope had

inflicted prevented the boy moving about as quickly as Mister Fitzgibbon desired, so the bucko had laid him out and walked upon him during the mid-watch. When he was through, the lad had crawled on his hands and knees into the foc'sle, and collapsed.

By eight o'clock in the morning, when the starboard watch went below again, we found the poor chap daft, and babbling, and on fire with fever. The mate gave up his efforts to arouse him, and admitted to Lynch that "the damn little stock fish is a bit off color. Needs a dose o' black draught."

After breakfast, Newman and I stepped into the port foc'sle. The squareheads of our watch were already there, sitting gloomily about, or clumsily attempting to make the injured youth more comfortable.

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He looked bad, no mistake. Newman shook his head, gravely, as we turned away.

"It is a task for her," he said to me. "She has the healing gift. The boy is badly hurt."

A growled curse took my answer from me. It came from one of the squareheads, from Lindquist, a sober, bearded, middle-aged man, the one man among them who could manage a few words of English conversation.

"Koom vrom mine town," he said, indicating the tossing form in the bunk.

His blue eyes had a worried, puzzled expression, and his voice bespoke puzzled wrath. It was evident his slow moving peasant's mind was grappling with the bloody fact of a hell-ship. It was something new in his experience. He was trying to fathom it. Why were he and his mates thumped, when they willingly did their work? What for? "Nils iss goot boy," he said to us. "So hard he vork, *ja*." Then he bent over the bunk and resumed the application of his old folk remedy, the placing of wetted woolen socks upon Nils' forehead.

Before the foc'sle door, we found our mob of stiff, nursing their hurts, and watching the cabin. For, as all the world of ships knew, this was the time of day the lady came forward on her errand of mercy. They were a sorry-looking mob, as sore of heart as of body.

It was not so much medical attention the stiff wanted, I think, as sympathy. Bruises and lacerations, so long as they didn't keep a man off his feet, were lightly regarded in that tough crowd. But the lady's sweet, sane being was a light in the pall of brutality that hung over the ship. She was something more than woman, or doctor, to those men; in her they saw the upper world they had lost, the fineness of life they had never attained. They had all felt the heartening influence of her presence at the muster; they craved for it now as thirsty men crave for water. They were men in hell, and through the lady they had a vision of heaven.

Two bells went, and then three, and the lady did not come. At last Wong, the Chinese steward, came forward.

"All slick man go aft," says he. "Lady flix um."

"Is she not coming forward?" asked Newman.

"No can do. Slick man lay aft."

"What have you there?" I demanded, for he bore a glass filled with liquid.

"Dosey. Mlissa Mate, him say give slick man inside," and he pointed into the foc'sle.

Newman ripped out an oath. "Give it here. A bonesetter, not a dose of physic is needed in there."

He reached out his hand, and Wong obediently surrendered the glass. He surrendered something else. I was standing by Newman's side, and, saw the piece of paper that passed into his hand with the tumbler.

Newman's face remained as impassive as the Chinaman's own. He sniffed of the draught, made a wry face and tossed it, glass and all, over the side into the sea. Then he turned on his heel and went into the foc'sle. Wong went aft, followed by most of the watch.

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I went after Newman. He was sitting on the edge of his bunk, musing, and the note was open upon his knee. He handed it to me to read.

It was just a strip of wrapping paper, hastily scribbled over in pencil. But the handwriting was dainty and feminine. It was from the lady, plainly enough, even though no name was signed.

"We have quarreled, and he has forbidden me to leave the cabin, or go forward this voyage. He is drinking, he is desperate—oh, Roy, be careful, he is capable of anything. I know him now. Do not come aft with the sick."

I looked at Newman inquiringly. But he said nothing to supplement the note. He took it from me, lighted a match, and burned it up. I guessed he was disappointed, that he had counted upon the lady coming forward.

"And did the little dear write? And what did she say," drawled an unpleasant voice behind us.

I swung about with a start, and saw Boston and Blackie lying in their bunks, one above the other. Boston had spoken, but they were both eyeing Newman.

The dangerous light came into Newman's face. "Mind your own business!" he said, shortly.

There was a moment of uncomfortable silence, broken by Boston, with a wheedling note in his voice.

"Aw, say, Big 'Un, don't get hostile. We didn't mean to horn in. We just want to be friends; we feel hurt, Blackie an' me, at the way you're giving us the go by. We're all on the dodge together, ain't we? And we got a rich lay, I tell you! Blackie and me has it all figured out, but we need you to lead, Big 'Un. What d'ye want to pal with that cub for, when two old friends like Blackie an' me are ready and willing to work for you? We got a rich lay, I tell you!"

"Damn your thieving schemes," said Newman.

"Aw, now, bring the cub in, if you like," persisted Boston. "He's a game 'un."

Blackie, the hot-headed, spoke up, resentfully. He lifted his battered face on his elbow, and lisped through the gap Lynch's fist had made in his teeth. "Number seven hundred and three wasn't so finicky about his pals the time he jumped the dead line, and ditched the Big House!"

Newman crossed the foc'sle with one catlike bound. He got Blackie by the throat and yanked him from the bunk. Then he shook him, and threw him into the farther corner.

“There will be no scheme set on foot from this foc’sle, save the one I father,” he told the pair in his cool, level voice. “I gave you your answer last night. Now, if you two come between me and my goal, in this ship, as God lives, I’ll kill you!”

With that, he swung about and stepped into the port foc’sle.

“Come on, Shreve,” he said to me, over his shoulder. “Lend a hand. You and I must attend to this boy.”

Presently I was standing by Nils’ bunk, together with the squareheads, marveling at the gentleness with which Newman’s huge hands handled the sufferer. It was an exhibition of practiced skill. The feeling was strong on me that moment that Newman had gained this skill in no foc’sle, but in a cabin, where as master he had doctored his own sick.

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But, after all, he was no surgeon, and there was little he could do for the lad. Newman undressed him—the squareheads had not been able to accomplish this feat, because of the pain their rough handling caused—and bared the poor broken body to view. The squareheads cursed deeply and bitterly at the sight of the shocking bruises on the white flesh. Nils was delirious, staring up at us with brilliant, unseeing eyes, and babbling in his own lingo.

“He say, mudder, mudder,” commented Lindquist in a choked voice. “I know his mudder.”

Newman explored the hurts with his finger, and his gentle touch brought gasps of agony. His face grew very grave. Then he ripped up a blanket, and with my assistance, skillfully bandaged Nils about the body.

When he was through, he looked Lindquist in the eyes, and shook his head.

“So?” said Lindquist. His eyes, so stupid and dull a while before, were blazing now. Aye, it was evident his law-abiding mind had arrived at a lawless decision; his lowering face boded no good for the brute who had maltreated his young friend. “Gott, if he die!” he said. It was a full-mouthed promise to avenge, that sentence.

As we left, I became aware that Boston and Blackie had followed Newman and me, and had witnessed the scene. Said Boston to his mate, in a low voice that I just caught,

“If the kid croaks we’ll have the squareheads with us.”

CHAPTER XI

Captain Swope did not emerge from the cabin that day, nor the next day, nor the next. But we obtained plain confirmation of the lady’s word he was drinking, when, every morning the Chinese cabin boy brought empty bottles out on deck and heaved them overboard. Whereat, all the thirsty souls forward clicked their tongues and swore.

But this interim, during which Yankee Swope stayed below, and moped and drank, was, you may be sure, no peaceful period for the foc’sle. The *Golden Bough’s* mates could be trusted to hustle the crowd whether or not the skipper’s eyes were upon them. There was bloody, knock-about work with belaying pin and knuckles, while the ship settled down into deep sea form, and the mob of stiffs learned to keep out of its own way and hand the right rope when yelled at.

Since leaving port, the *Golden Bough* had been standing a southerly course, on a port tack. Now, on the third day, the wind hauled around aft, and came on us from the nor’east, as a freshening gale. We squared away, and went booming down before it, true clipper style. By nightfall it was blowing hard, and the kites were doused.



The night came down black as coal tar, with an overcast sky, and lightning playing through the cloud in frequent, blinding flashes. My watch had the deck from eight to twelve, and Mister Lynch (and his satellites, Chips and Sails) kept us hustling fore and aft, sweating sheets, and taking a heave at this and that.

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Few watches in my life stand out so sharply in my memory. And it was not the near tragedy that concluded it that so impressed my mind; it was the sailing. For Lynch was cracking on, and there was no faint-hearted skipper interfering with his game. Indeed, had Swope been on deck before the hour when he did come up, I do not think he would have protested. This reckless sailing was what made half the fame of the *Golden Bough*. It was said that Yankee Swope sailed around Cape Stiff with padlocks on his topsail sheets! And this night we showed the gale the full spread of her three t'gan's'ls, and the ship raced before the wind like a frightened stag.

Oh, I had seen sailing before. I had been in smart ships, had run my Easting down in southern waters more than once, had made the eastern passage of the Western Ocean with the winter storm on my back the whole distance. But this night was my introduction to the clipper style, where the officers banked fifty per cent on their seamanship, to avert disaster, and fifty per cent on blind chance that the top hamper would stand the strain. An incautious system? Aye, but cautious men did not sail those ships.

It was so dark we had to feel our way about the decks. I could not see the upper canvas, but I could imagine it standing out like curved sheet iron. Every moment I expected to hear the explosion of rent canvas, or the rattle of falling gear on the deck. Not I alone thought so, for once when Chips and Sails went to windward of me, I heard Sails bawl to his companion,

"He'll have the spars about our ears before the hour is out!"

"Not he," responded Chips. "Trust Lynch and his luck!"

True enough. The hour passed, and another, and Lynch still carried on without mishap. Indeed, the wind had moderated a bit.

Throughout the watch I kept close by Newman's side. That warning, to look behind me in the dark, had by no means escaped my mind. When we came on deck, Newman said to me, "A good night for a bad job, Jack! Keep your eyes open!" Small advice on such a night, when a man could not have seen his own mother, stood she two feet distant!

That warning had puzzled me, and I did not dare question Newman concerning it. He was not the kind of man one could question. But what was likely to lurk in the dark? "Death," said he. Did that mean he feared a stealthy assassination, a knife thrust from the dark? Did he think that Captain Swope was planning the cold-blooded murder of an able seaman?

There was the question. In one way, it opposed my reason. Of course, this was a hell-ship, and murder might very well take place on board. But that the captain should

deliberately plot the removal of a foc'sle hand! Able seamen were not of such importance in a hell-ship.

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Yet Newman was more than a foremast hand. God knew who he was, or what his business in the ship, but it was plain he was Swope's enemy, and there was a private feud between them. His mere appearance had caused the Old Man to run below, and remain hidden for three days! . . . There was the lady. She was Newman's friend. She knew the Old Man's moods, and she was positive about it. The warning was doubtless well founded, I concluded. And Newman was my friend, my chum for the voyage, I hoped. If there were danger for him in the dark, it were well his friend stayed handy by. So, throughout that black watch, I stuck as close as possible to his elbow.

Six bells went when the watch was forward at a job. Suddenly, down the wind, came a dear, musical hail, from aft.

"Ahoy—Mister!"

"B'Gawd, the Old Man's on deck!" ejaculated Lynch to his assistants. Then he bellowed aft, "Yes, sir?"

"Reef t'gan's'l's, Mister!" came the command.

"*Eh!*" blankly exclaimed Lynch. "Now, what is he up to?" But he yelled back his acknowledgment, "Reef t'gan's'l's, sir!"

When the sails were clewed up, Newman and I were ordered aloft on the mizzen. The stiffs were useless aloft on such a night, and the fore and main were given the handful of squareheads and the two tradesmen.

When we jumped for the sheer pole we passed within a foot of a figure lounging across the rail at the poop break, and we knew it was Swope. There had been no word from him since the initial order.

It was so dark we did not see his face. As we swung up into the mizzen rigging, Newman shouted words in my ear that I knew the wind carried to the captain.

"The devil is abroad, Jack, and there is hell to pay!"

And when we had gained the yardarm, he added, "It is coming, Jack; one hand for yourself and one for the ship!"

But he did not act upon the advice himself. No more did I. Indeed, one needs both arms and a stout back to pass reef points. We leaned into the work, put our united brawn into it, and progressed briskly. All the while I stared beneath me, into the whistling, inky void, trying to discern that spot on the deck below, where the braces that held this yard steady were made fast. I felt this lofty spot was no healthful abiding place for Newman and me. I had a premonition of what was coming!



Yet, when it did come, I was caught unawares. I felt the wood I leaned on draw suddenly away from me. There came a jerk that nigh snapped my neck. My feet left the foot rope, and I was falling, head foremost, into the blackness. They said I screamed loudly. I was not conscious I opened my mouth.

It is strange, the trick a thing like that can play with one's senses. I seemed to be falling for moments, an immeasurable distance. Actually, the whole thing occurred in about a second's space, and my feet just about cleared the yardarm when Newman's grip fastened upon my ankle.

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My face was buried in the smothering folds of the threshing sail; then Newman had drawn me up until my body balanced on the yard. A second later my feet were again on the foot rope, and my hands fastened for dear life to the jackstay.

I was conscious of using my voice then. Aye—but I swore! “By heaven, he let go the port brace!” I yelled to Newman.

For answer, Newman grabbed me around the waist, just as a fork of lightning zigzagged through the sky. For the briefest instant, the ship stood out in a bright light. Far below us, on the deck, we saw Captain Swope standing, looking up at us. Then blackness again. I felt myself for a second time jerked clear of my foothold—to immediately wrap my limbs about a wire rope. For Newman had leaped for a backstay, as the yard swung close, and carried me with him.

For a moment we hung there, one above the other, then we commenced to slide to the deck. Mister Lynch’s voice came booming up to us, and we saw the light of a lantern bobbing about. A moment later we clattered off the poop, on to the main deck.

A group was bunched together in the lee of the cabin, Captain Swope, and Lynch and the tradesmen. Lynch carried the lighted hurricane lamp that hung handy in a sheltered nook during the night. Forward, a respectful distance, the stiff of the watch made a vague blot in the gloom. As, we came down the poop ladder a voice I recognized as Boston’s called to us from this last group, “He tried to get you, Big ‘Un!” So I knew that the lightning flash had revealed to the watch what it had revealed to us.

“The brace was slipped,” said Newman to Lynch.

“I know,” replied the second mate, shortly. There was contempt in his voice, and I knew, when I looked at his grim, disdainful face, that he had had no hand in the affair. Bucko Lynch might kill a man in what he considered the line of duty, but snapping men off a yardarm was not his style. But I also knew that he was an officer of an American ship, and would consider it his duty to back up his captain no matter what villainy the latter attempted.

Swope smiled sweetly at us. One might think that a man, even a ship’s autocrat, when detected in an attempt at cold-blooded murder, would make some specious explanation of his act. Not Swope. No hypocritical contrition showed in the face the lantern lighted; rather, a cool, pitiless inhumanity that squeezed my bowels, even while rage surged within me.

We had understood that Swope was drunk for the past three days, but the smiling features showed no mark of his dissipation. Neither did he exhibit any of the fear he had shown at Newman’s sudden appearance the other afternoon. It was plain that Captain Swope had taken heartening counsel with himself regarding the danger he

might incur from Newman's presence on board. Whatever was the mysterious feud between the two, Swope had the upper hand. He rested secure in the knowledge of his power as captain, in his knowledge of Newman's helplessness as a mere foremast hand.

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And so he smiled, and said musingly, and distinctly, to Newman, "A miss is as good as a mile, eh? But it is a long passage!" The cool insolence of it! God's truth, it chilled me, this careless confession of the deed, and threat of what the future held. And then, as though to remove the last possible doubt in our minds that the slipping of the brace was an accident, that the whole job of striking sail was but a pretext to get Newman aloft, Swope turned to the second mate.

"I think she'll stand it, Mister," he said. "You may as well shake out the t'gan's'l's again!"

CHAPTER XII

I went below after that watch with the thought of mutiny stirring in the back of my mind. But in the back, not the front, mind you. For mutiny on a ship is a dreadful business, as I, a sailor, well knew. A neck-stretching business! Yet there the thought was, and it stuck, and pecked ever more insistently at my consciousness as the days passed.

Of course, I was wild with rage at Swope's attempt. And I was anxious on Newman's account. You see, I looked upon him as my chum, and—had he not saved my life, up there, on the yard? It is true, there were none of the usual manifestations of foc'sle friendship between us; we did not swap tobacco, and yarns, and oaths. Newman did not permit such intimacy; always he was a man apart, a marked man. But, from the very first, the man's personality dominated me, and, after that night on the yardarm, I felt a passionate loyalty to him. He was not insensible to my friendliness, I knew; he welcomed it, and found comfort in it.

If he had come to me that night, or afterwards, with a scheme for taking the ship, I should have joined in straightway, no matter how harebrained it might seem. But, of course, he did no such thing. Indeed, he never mentioned the incident to me, after we left the deck that night. For all of him, it might never have happened. And, you may be sure, I did not intrude upon his reserve with queries, or reminiscence.

Nor did the rest of the watch approach him. Rather did they avoid him, as a dangerous person. With that thought of rebellion in my mind, I watched my watchmates that night with more tolerance than my eyes had yet shown them. I wanted to judge what stuff was in them.

The stiffs whispered together and eyed us furtively. I did not like the stuff I saw in them. Rough, lawless, held obedient only by fear, the scum of the beach—I did not like to imagine them sweeping along the decks with restraint cast aside, and passions unleashed. The squareheads were a different kind. Good men and sailors, here, but men whose habit of life was submission. Yet, I saw they were gravely disturbed by what had taken place on deck. No wonder. I knew their minds. "Who is safe in this ship?" they thought. "Who, now, may go aloft feeling secure he will reach the deck again, alive

and unhurt?" Those squareheads had proof of the mate's temper in the person of their young landsman, lying broken in his bunk. Now, they had proof of the skipper's temper.

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My eyes met those of Boston and Blackie, eyeing me speculatively, and the contact brought my musing to a sharp turn. What did Boston and Blackie think of it? I could tell from their bearing that, for some reason, they were pleased. I thought of them as fighting material—and did not relish the thought. Fighters, yes, but foul fighters. I did not like to think of being leagued with them in an enterprise. And what was this “rich lay” they spoke of? What was this game they were willing I should enter? Did they, too, think mutiny?

These thoughts plagued me for days, and I found no answer, or peace of mind. Hell was preparing in that ship, I felt it in my bones; and we were getting enough hell already, with drive, drive, drive, from dawn to dawn. Yet, there were rifts in the clouds.

For one thing, Lynch quieted my mind of the fear that the Old Man would again get Newman aloft at night, and attempt his life with better success. The very next day, Lynch came to the foretop, where Newman and I were working on the rigging. He examined the work, and then said, abruptly, to Newman,

“I had nothing to do with that affair last night.”

“I know you had not,” answered Newman.

“I give you warning—he intends to get you,” continued the second mate. “But he’ll not get you that way in my watch. From now on, you need not go aloft after dark.”

“Thank you, sir,” said Newman.

“You need not,” was the response. “I’m not doing this for your sake. Well—you understand. And make no mistake, my man, as to my position; I am a ship’s officer, and if trouble comes it will find me doing my duty by my captain’s side.”

“There will be no trouble if I can prevent it, sir,” was Newman’s reply.

“Then you have your work cut out for you. You—understand?”

“Yes, I understand,” said Newman.

I watched Mister Lynch leap nimbly to the deck, and go striding aft, a fine figure of a man. “Why, he’s on the square!” I exclaimed.

“Yes, he is not like the others,” said Newman. “She says his heart is clean.”

She says! Well, it was hardly news to me. I was sure he was in communication with her. He always made it a point to meet Wong, the steward, when the latter came forward to the galley. And there were times in the night watches below when his bunk was empty. He was a great hand for pacing the deck in lonely meditation, and for

stowing himself away and brooding alone in odd corners. We did not spy upon him, or force ourselves upon him, you may be sure. Not upon Newman.

The lady was, we understood, forbidden by the Old Man to come forward. The daily visits to our dogs' kennel, dispensing cheer and mercy, and for which she was famous the world around, were to be denied us this voyage. Because of Newman's presence. We missed the visits; they would have brightened the cruel days. But I don't think any man felt resentful against Newman. Our sympathies were all with the lady, and the lady's feelings, we knew, were all with Newman. So it was upon Yankee Swope's unheeding head we rained our black curses.

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The lady was doing what she could to aid us. She held, every morning, a levee in the cabin for the lame and sick, all who could drag themselves aft, and tended them skillfully. But this did not help the bedridden ones. It did not help young Nils.

But nothing could have helped Nils. The bucko had done his work too well. Not once did the boy rally; daily and visibly his life ebbed.

You must understand the callous indifference of the afterguard to realize its effect upon the foc'sle. The boy lay dying for weeks, and not once did the Captain come forward to look at him. Medicines and opiates were sent forward by the lady, but, though they eased the chap, they were powerless to salvage his wrecked body. Newman said Nils' ribs were sticking into his lungs.

Lindquist went aft to ask permission to move the boy to the cabin, where the lady could nurse him. Swope blackguarded the man, and Fitzgibbon kicked him forward. Lynch ignored the very existence of Nils—the lad was not of his watch, and the whole matter was none of his business. But Mister Fitz came into the port foc'sle every day, to make sure Nils could not stand on his feet and turn to; and on deck he would sing out to his watch that Nils' fate was the fate of each man did he not move livelier. "Jump, you rats! I'll put you all in your bunks!" he would tell them.

The sight of their young landsman in agony stirred the berserk in the squareheads of the crew. It made them ripe for revolt, drove them to lawless acts, as their shanghaiing and the brutality of the officers could not have done.

These squareheads were no strangers to each other. They were all friends and old shipmates. The Knitting Swede had crimped them all out of a Norwegian bark, plied them with drink, and put them on board the *Golden Bough* after he had promised to find them a high-waged coasting ship.

Young Nils was a sort of mascot in this crowd. He was making his first deep-water voyage under their protection and guidance. Most of them were his townsmen; they had known him from babyhood. As Lindquist said to me, his blue eyes filled with pain and rage, "I know his mudder. When Nils ban so high, I yump him by mine knee." So it was that rage over the pitiful fate of their dear friend fanned into flame a spark of rebellion in the squarehead's disciplined souls, and caused them, eventually, to leap the barriers of race and caste prejudice and make common cause with the stiff.

Now, I do not wish to idealize those stiff. No use saying they were honest workingmen kidnaped to sea. They were not. They were just what the mates called them—dogs, scum, vile sweeps of jail and boozing-ken. With the single exception of the shanghai'd parson, there was not a decent man in the lot. Bums and crooks, all.

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These men had lived violent, lawless lives ashore. Here, at sea, the mates hammered the fear of the Lord and the Law into them. This was well and good. But the mates hammered too hard. They aimed to cow the stiffs, and cow them they did. But the stiffs' fear of the afterguard became so great they were like cornered rats. They came below after a watch on deck with fresh marks upon their faces and bodies, and heard little Nils moaning in his pain. And each man said to himself, "I may be the next to get what the little squarehead got."

Misery loves company, so these stiffs naturally drew close together. Their common hatred and fear of the afterguard fused them into a unit. By the time we were a month at sea, the stiffs, like the squareheads, were in a most dangerous temper, and ripe for any devilry.

This common state of mind grew beneath my eyes, but at first I did not see significance in it. A mutinous state of mind is a normal state of mind in a hell-ship's foc'sle.

But a mutiny was incubating in that ship. There were men forward who were vitally interested in bringing trouble to a head, in causing an outbreak of violence, in fomenting an uprising of the slaves. One day, my eyes were opened to their game.

For weeks I noticed Blackie and Boston circulating among the men during the dog-watches. They were great whisperers, a secretive pair, and they never spoke their minds outright before the crowd. I paid them little attention, for I did not like them, and felt no interest in what I thought was their gossip. It never occurred to me they were industriously fanning the spark of revolt, suggesting revenge to the squareheads, and tickling the rascally imagination of the stiffs with hints of golden loot.

So far my rule as cock of the foc'sle had been unchallenged. All hands had accepted my will in foc'sle matters willingly enough, and I had been careful not to hector. As number one man, it was my place to see that the men stood their "peggy"—that is, they took their regular turn about at getting the food at meal time, and cleaning up the foc'sle.

It came Boston's peggy day. He didn't like it a bit. He thought himself too good for such menial tasks, and suggested that Shorty, the smallest and weakest of the stiffs, be made permanent peggy. I vetoed this as unfair, and Boston went about the work, but sullenly.

Next day was Blackie's peggy, as he well knew. When we came below at noon, he made no move to fetch the grub from the galley.

"How about dinner, Blackie?" I demanded.

"Well—how about it?" he replied. "I'm no servant girl! Get your own grub!"

All hands looked at me, expectantly. This was open defiance, and they wanted to see what the cock would do about it. There was only one thing I could do, and I did it gladly.

I took that chesty stiff by the throat, and squeezed until his eyes popped. Then I carried him out on deck and stuck his head in the wash-deck tub, to cool his ardor; the whole watch following us as interested spectators.

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"Well, Blackie, how about dinner?" I asked, when I released my grip.

In answer, he backed quickly away from me, spluttering oaths and salt water. I watched him warily, for his affair with the second mate had shown him to be a knife wielder, and I had no wish to be stabbed. True enough, he jerked out his sheath knife.

"Stop that, you fool!" came Boston's voice, from behind me. "Do you want to crab the whole game?"

Those words had an astonishing effect upon Blackie. His bellicose attitude vanished abruptly, he stopped cursing, and his knife went back into its sheath.

"That dinner, Blackie," I insisted.

"Sure—I'll get it," he answered submissively.

But I wasn't satisfied with my victory. Of course, I was confident I could have knocked him out as handily as Bucko Lynch, himself, but I knew it was not fear of me, but obedience to Boston's words that caused Blackie to give in so readily.

Those words bothered me. "Do you want to crab the whole game?" Now what the deuce did Boston mean? What game were these two worthies up to? Undoubtedly, it was that "rich lay" they had spoken to Newman about. But what had I to do with it? How could I crab their game? I began to think there was something besides loose talk in these hints of revenge and loot the pair were dropping in the foc'sle.

I guess Boston knew my suspicions must be aroused, and thought it time to sound my sentiments. Also, as it turned out, he wanted to pump me regarding Newman. I was Newman's one close friend, and Boston must have thought I knew something of the big man's intentions.

Anyway, after supper that evening, as I was sitting on the forehatch, whittling away at a model of the *Golden Bough* I was making, Boston came and sat down beside me.

"Should think you'd be so fed up with this hooker, you wouldn't want any model of her," he remarked, by way of opening a conversation.

"She's a bonny ship," I told him. "It is not the ship, it is the men in her. You'll never see a better craft than the *Golden Bough*, Boston."

"*Faugh!*" he snorted, and followed with a blistering curse. "Blast your pretty ships! I'd like to see this old hooker go on the rocks, by God I would! Well—maybe I will see her finish, eh?"

I glanced at him sidewise, and discovered he was likewise regarding me, with the lids drawn over his pale eyes till they were mere slits. I didn't like Boston's eyes. For that matter, I didn't like anything about Boston. But I was interested; I sensed this was no idle talk. There was something behind the words.

"Small chance of your seeing her finish," I said. "As well found a ship as there is afloat—and you may call the Old Man and his buckos what you will, but they are sailormen."

"I've heard of ships sinking in storms," says he.

"You talk like the stiff you are," I scoffed. "Show me the weather that will drown the *Golden Bough*, with good sailors aft! Besides, Boston, we're not likely to have any bad weather, for which you can say a prayer of thanks, for you stiffs would catch it if we did pick up a decent blow."

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"Why not?" he asked.

"It's a fair weather passage," I explained. "These trades will blow us clean across one hundred and eighty, into the sou'west monsoon, and with luck that'll carry us into the China Sea. Of course, there is always the chance of meeting a hurricane this side, or a typhoon on the other side. You'll squeal if we do, I bet!"

Says he, "Well, now how about running on a rock? We'll be going among islands, *hey?* These South Sea Islands?"

"Forget it," I replied. "We'll not sight the beach this side of the Orient, unless the Old Man makes a landfall of Guam. We are running along sixteen north, and that takes us south of the Sandwich group, and north of the Marshalls and Carolines."

"Well, now, I guess the Big 'Un has been showing you his map, *hey?*"

"What's that to you?" I said, shortly.

"Nothing. Nothing at all," he answered, hurriedly.

In truth, I was surprised and nettled. I hadn't got the point of Boston's questions, and I hadn't supposed he was watching Newman and me so sharply.

For Boston had it right, I had been looking at the Big 'Un's "map." Newman had a fine, large scale chart of the Pacific in his bag, and this he brought out every day, and traced upon it the progress of the voyage. He got the ship's position either from the steward, or from the lady, I did not know which.

I had been privileged to see the chart, but I knew that none other had ventured to approach when it was spread out on Newman's bunk. Newman had traced the ship's probable course clear to Hong Kong, for my benefit, and explained to me the problems of the passage. He did not speak like a man merely guessing, but with authority, like a man who had sailed his own ship over this course. I absorbed the information greedily, but did not venture to inquire how he was so positive about Yankee Swope's sailing plans. Somehow, I knew he was correct.

It pricked my conceit to discover that Boston was aware Newman had fathered the information that was falling from my lips.

"Say, how long before we reach Hong Kong?" went on Boston.

"You had better ask Newman, himself," I retorted.

"Now don't get mad, Jack," he said humbly. "You know I didn't mean nothing. Guess you *sabe* as much about sailing as the Big 'Un, anyway."

“Well, this is a fast ship—none faster,” I told him, mollified by his flattery. “Say seventy days, at the outside, from ’Frisco to Hong Kong. Probably sixty days would be nearer to it.”

At that he burst out cursing, and consigned the ship and all her afterguard to the Evil One. “My God, another month of this hell!” he cried. “Will you stand it, Shreve?”

“Sure. We’ll all stand it. What else to do?” I replied.

“What else!” said he. His voice was suddenly crafty. “Well, now, Shreve, didn’t it ever strike you as how we’re blasted fools to let those fellows aft knock us about? There are thirty of us, and two of them!”

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"More than that," I warned him. "You forget Captain Swope, and the tradesmen. There are seven of them, aft, all armed, and of a fighting breed. You are hinting at a silly business, Boston."

"Oh, I don't know," he persisted. "Thirty to seven ain't so bad. And they haven't all the arms—we got our knives, ain't we? And maybe other things, too."

"Forget it," said I. "Don't imagine for a minute these stiffes will face guns. You and your mate might, but as for the rest of the gang—why, Lynch could clean them up single-handed. Better stow that kind of talk. It's dangerous. You have the law against you, and it's a neck-stretching affair."

"The law?" he echoed. "What do you think that gang cares for the law? Mighty few laws they ain't broke in their time! And they may be stiffes, right enough, but they'll fight—for money!"

"Dare say," I remarked, sarcastically. "And I suppose you'll hire them with your bags of gold, which you probably have stowed under your bunk?"

"Well, now, maybe I'd just have to promise them something," he said. He glanced around, then leaned towards me and lowered his voice to a whisper. "Shreve, there are a hundred thousand dollars in hard cash aft there in the cabin!"

"What's that?" I exclaimed.

"Yes," he said. "I know. You bet I know. Blackie and me knew before ever we come on board this cursed hooker. The Swede didn't shanghai us, you bet!"

"Oh, stow that sort of guff, Boston," I told him. "Maybe the Swede didn't shanghai you; but if he didn't, it was because you and your mate were willing to ship with the devil himself in order to get out of the country."

My words touched his temper, as I thought they would. "You seem to know a lot more than I know myself," he sneered. Before I could answer, he regained control of his tongue, and continued with oily suavity. "I guess the Big 'Un has been talking to you? Hasn't he? I guess maybe he's told you that Blackie and me are two men who can take a chance without weakening? Say, Jack, what has the Big 'Un been saying to you about us? I want particular to know."

"He hasn't said a blessed word about you," I answered, truthfully.

Boston cursed, and favored me with an evil squint; then he hid the look behind a forced laugh. "Well, If you don't want to tell me, I guess you don't have to," he remarked. "It don't hurt me and Blackie none, whatever the Big 'Un says. And say, Jack, you and us ought to be good friends. Blackie and me know that you're a good man, the kind that'll

take a chance, and keep his word. Well, we're the same. There are only a few of us in this end of the ship that have any backbone to speak of, and we ought to stick together. There's pay-dirt in this ship if we only play the game right."

"What do you mean?" I wanted to know.

But Boston concluded he had said almost enough for once. He rapped his pipe against the hatch-combing to dislodge the dottle, and got to his feet. I thought he was going to leave me without replying to my query, but after he had taken a step or two he spoke over his shoulder, softly.

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"That's true what I said about the money, Jack. It's there, just waiting for a few lads of nerve to come and take it."

"If that talk gets aft, the Old Man will have you thumped into a jelly, just as an example to the other stiffes," I warned him.

He gave the devil's cackle that passed with him for a laugh, and stepping close to my side, spoke directly into my ear.

"Who is going to take the talk aft? Not you. Blackie and me know that Jack Shreve ain't a snitch. Not the Big 'Un. You can tell him what I said if you like. You can tell him something more. Blackie and me think there is a snitch in this gang, and the Big 'Un had better keep his eyes peeled for a double-cross. You tell him that. You tell him to ask Nigger about it."

"What do you mean?" I cried.

His answer was a mysterious shake of the head, and he disappeared into the foc'sle.

CHAPTER XIII

If Boston meant to give me something to think about, he succeeded. He left me worried. Not about the treasure or mutiny at which he hinted; for the time being I put this subject out of my mind. I was concerned over his unexplained warning. What did it mean? Did some new danger threaten my friend?

I went in search of Newman, to give him the warning. He was not in his bunk, so I stepped into the port foc'sle, expecting to find him by Nils' side. Nils was dying—we had been expecting him to go at almost any hour for a week past—and Newman had been spending a goodly share of his watches below by the lad's side.

But he was not there now. The parson, and some of the squareheads of the port watch, were keeping sick vigil. Nils was very near the time when he must slip his cable; he lay quiet, eyes closed, hardly breathing, and his thin, white face seemed already composed into its death mold. Holy Joe sat holding the boy's hand; his head was bowed, and I judged he was praying. The others stared miserably at the floor, or ceiling, or at each other. Aye, the taste of bitter sorrow was in the air of the port foc'sle. I left without disturbing the silent watchers, but I wondered at their boldness. They should have been on deck. Mister Fitzgibbon did not give his men respite, even during the dog-watches.

I went poking about the odd corners of the fore deck, expecting to find my man tucked away somewhere smoking and meditating, for Newman was a solitary fellow, very fond of his own company in his free time. I laid the ill-success of my search to the dusk; it was past seven bells, and although there was still a glow in the western sky, on board



ship it was quite dark and the sidelights had been out a half hour. Finally, I decided to lay off, waylay the Nigger when he came for'ard from his trick at the wheel, and ask him myself what was the meaning of Boston's talk of "snitch."

Now it was no light undertaking for a foremast hand to trespass abaft the main mast in the *Golden Bough*. There was risk in it, risk of a beating, or worse. A man might lay aft in that ship to work, or in obedience to orders, but for no other reason. Hell-ship discipline.

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So I slipped aft without making a noise, and avoided attracting to myself unwelcome attention from the poop. I was barefoot, and I crept along the rail, keeping within the shadows on the lee deck. When I came abreast the roundhouse, I darted into the black shadow it threw upon the lee deck, and crouched there, composed to wait. My eyes were aft, upon the break of the poop, and I was ready to take instant flight for'ard, did discovery threaten me.

After I had lain there a moment, I noticed the figure of a man standing motionless, flattened against the cabin wall, on my side of the deck. He was so still he appeared to be lifeless, a part of the ship; I looked hard before I decided it was a man. It was too dark to make out his features, almost too dark to discern outline, but by the bigness of the blot he made against his background I was sure the man was Newman. What he was doing in such a position I could not guess, but I was so sure of my man, I did not hesitate to move towards him. I even spoke his name, in an urgent whisper.

My hiss brought a prompt response, but not the one for which I was looking. To my surprise the fellow ran away from me; he slipped across the deck (padding noiselessly, for he was barefoot, like, myself) and, bending nearly double, scurried for'ard beside the weather rail.

I stared after him, undecided what to do. The man looked like Newman, but he did not act like him. I had half a mind to pursue his flitting figure.

Then all at once I discovered I must take cover myself. I heard the mate's voice, up on the poop; he was hailing his tradesmen.

"We'll take a whirl for'ard," says he. "I'll give the bums a sweat at the braces so they won't think I'm asleep."

I had moved away from the shadow of the round-house, and was revealed, as I stood, to any eye looking over the poop rail. I was in a ticklish position altogether. If braces were to be tightened, the lee of the roundhouse would be a poor hiding-place for me. In fact it would be no hiding-place at all. But get out of sight I must, and quickly, or suffer the unpleasant consequences of discovery.

I heard boots clumping on the poop deck. There wasn't time for me to escape forward. So I darted aft and flattened myself against the cabin wall, in exactly the same position, and in very nearly the same spot, as that occupied by the fellow I had scared away. I was not a second too soon. Sails and Chips came down the port ladder, and paused on the main deck, almost within arm's reach of me, waiting for the mate to join them.

If they had glanced in my direction they must have seen me. But they were looking forward, and were also occupied with talk.

Said Chips, “But what’s the game? He’s working up trouble, that’s plain. But what’s he after this time?”

Said Sails, “He’s after that fellow in the Greaser’s watch, or I’m a damn bad guesser. But, his game—well, ask me something easy. Did you ever know anybody to fathom his game?”

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This I heard with one ear. At the same time my other ear was getting filled with different kind of talk. Aye, my post was between two conversations, and I found myself eavesdropping in two directions.

This wall I hugged was the forward wall of the sail-locker, which, in the *Golden Bough*, was a large room in the cabin space, and as I stood, my starboard ear was but a few inches distant from the sail-locker door. This door was in two parts, and the upper half was barely ajar. Through this narrow slit I heard—I couldn't help hearing—the murmur of low-voiced talk. Two people were in the sail-locker, talking. Oh, aye, I had discovered Newman. I recognized his voice. I recognized the other voice—the lady's voice.

"Oh, Mary—little love—it doesn't seem to matter any more. When I am with you, it is just a hideous dream from which I have awakened." It was Newman speaking, and in a voice so tender, so vibrant with feeling, it was hard to believe the words came out of the mouth of the foc'sle's iron man. "But now I wish to live again. Ah, little love, I have been dead too long, dead to everything except pain and hate. But now that I know, now that we both know—oh, Mary, surely we have earned the right to live and love. God will not hold it against us, if I take you from that mad beast. God—I am beginning to believe in God again, Mary, when I am with you."

"I, too, wish to live—and in clean air," came in the lady's voice. "Oh, Roy—five years—and the piling up of horrors—oh, I could not have stood it very much longer, Roy. But now—we can forget."

"That lad for'ard is all ready to slip his cable," came from the other direction, from Chips. "The steward says he's all set to go."

"He's been all set for a fortnight," was the other man's comment, "but he hangs on. Takes a lot to kill a squarehead. Most likely he'll be hanging on when we make port."

"Not if I know Fitz and—him," said Chips. "You don't think they'd leave evidence of that sort for a port doctor to squint at. Remember that Portagee, last voyage, and how he finished?"

"Aye, it was hard on the lady, that job was. But he—he's a devil, sure. No use standing out against him."

"Five years! My God, how have you been able to stand it, Mary?" said Newman. "Five years—and most of them spent at sea in this blood ship!"

"It has been my penance, Roy. It has seemed to me that in sailing with him, in lessening even a little bit the misery he causes those poor men, I have been atoning, in a little measure, for my lack of faith in you. Oh, it was my fault in the beginning,

dearest. If only I had had faith in the beginning, if only I had trusted my heart instead of my eyes and ears. I might have known that time that Beulah was lying.”

“Hush. How could you know? It was my stubborn, stupid pride. If I had not rushed away and left the field to him. And I never knew, or even guessed, until Beasley told me.”

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"If I was that big fellow, I'd just hop over the side and have it over with," came from Sails. "If the Old Man is after him, he's bound to get him, and making a quick finish himself would save a lot o' bother all around."

"What's it about, anyway?" says Chips.

"How do I know?" answered Sails. "I don't go poking my nose into Yankee Swope's business, you can bet your bottom dollar I don't. I take my orders, and let it go at that. Same as you. Same as the others. There's Fitz up there now, chinning with him, and I bet Fitz don't know much more of his game than you and me. He takes his orders just like we do."

"That's right. We ain't hired to think. Not in this ship," agreed Chips.

"Do you think, Roy, that Beulah—that she jumped—herself?" The lady's voice was trembling.

"I don't know, dear. I think maybe she did. But Beasley thought—oh, well, what does it matter now?"

"Beasley thought he did it. I knew—I felt it was him, oh, long, long ago. It would be like him, Roy. He has never dropped a hint that would incriminate himself, but I have known his guilt of the other thing—for which you suffered—ever since our marriage. When he dropped the mask, revealed himself in his true character—oh, I knew he must be guilty. And I was helpless."

"My God, five years!" muttered Newman. "How could you stand it?"

"It was not so hard, except at first," said the lady. "Too much horror numbs, you know. And one thing made it endurable—he has spared me the intimacy of marriage. It is true, dearest; I am as much a maid as I was five years ago. He is that kind of a man, Roy. It is not women he lusts for, it is—oh, it is blood. There is something horrible in his mind, a diseased spot, an unnatural quirk, that drives him to abominable cruelties. It is some tigerish instinct he possesses; it makes him kill and destroy, it makes him inflict pain. Oh, Roy, it is his pleasure—to inflict pain."

"Lynch doesn't like it," said Sails, in reply to some question I had missed hearing.

"Little good not liking it will do him," was Chips' opinion. "He'll do what the Old Man wants him to do, just like the rest of us."

"Has he ever used you—as victim?" said Newman, a new, hard note in his voice.

"No, no, not in that way," answered the lady. "It is to the crew he does that. He has never hurt me physically."

“But mentally, eh?” remarked Newman, “He enjoys refinements of cruelty, also? Mental torture, when he finds a mind intelligent enough to appreciate subtleties? That is it?”

“Yes, that is it,” said the lady. “It was horrible at first. But afterwards, when I had found my work, I did not mind him very much. He let me go on playing doctor to the crew because he thought it hurt me to see and handle those poor creatures. Oh, it did hurt! But the work, the being useful—it has saved me, Roy, it has kept me sane.”

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"He's a good man, none better," said Chips, still talking about Lynch, "but he's too soft for a bucko's job in this wagon."

"Five years; good God! The prison was heaven compared to what you have lived through. Oh, my poor darling! And he—the vile brute——"

"No, no, not that attitude! You have promised——" exclaimed the lady.

"He's not soft," Sails disputed with Chips. "He's as hard as they're made. But he's a square-shooter, Lynch is, and the rest o' us ain't. That makes the difference. Now we got good reasons to do anything the skipper says, we being what we are, and him being what he is, and we knowing he can turn us up, and will, if we don't suit. But Jim Lynch—not Swope, or any other man, has a hold on him."

"No man, maybe," says Chips. "But in the other quarter, now. If Lynch ain't soft there, I'm a soldier."

"Who ain't a bit soft in that quarter?" Sails demanded. "I'm mighty sorry for her, same as you are, same as everyone is, save Fitz. If it wasn't that Swope has me body and soul, I'd side with Lynch, b'Gawd, in anything he wanted to start."

"Shut up!" exclaimed Chips. "That's damn fool talk to come out o' your mouth."

"Oh, you have softened me, Mary, you have unmanned me!" I heard Newman say. "I came to this ship to kill, and now—there is little bitterness left in my heart. I am only eager now to be gone with you beyond his reach."

"I am glad, more glad than I can tell," the lady told him. "His lies have ruined your life, and mine, but I do not want you to stain your hands with his blood. Oh, there has been so much bloodshed! You must not; you have promised!"

"Yes, and I will keep my promise," said Newman. "But you have promised, too, and you know how I qualified my promise. We cannot take too many chances with him, and you know that he has no scruples about shedding blood. He knows, he must know, that I do not intend to leave you in his hands; he must realize, also, that now he is not safe so long as either of us is alive and at large. Why, dear, you know the trap he is preparing!"

"Yes, yes, I know," was the response. "But my prayer is that we may get away before he is ready."

"It is my prayer, too," said Newman. "I gladly give up my revenge for your sake, little love. But I intend to protect you, and myself—that, too, is my promise."

"Here comes Fitz now," said Sails.

It was touch-and-go with discovery a second time as Mister Fitzgibbon stamped down the ladder. But he was already bawling for the watch, and had his eyes fixed straight ahead; and immediately he went forward with the tradesmen at his heels.

I waited until the mate's bellow sounded well forward, and I was sure my retreat would be unobserved. Then I placed my lips to the opening in the sail-locker door and called softly, "Newman! Come out of that at once; you are spied upon!"

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I heard the lady gasp, and knew my message was received and understood. I waited for no other response. I scuttled away from that perilous spot as fast as caution permitted my legs to travel. Jack Shreve was no Newman; I had not his cool nerve when it came to flouting hell-ship rules. In truth, I was in a blue funk all the time I was aft, for fear I would be discovered. And there was another reason for my haste in getting forward. There was a sudden uproar in front of the foc'sle that bade fair to carry through the ship.

There was trouble in the air; I could sniff it as I ran. Although time enough had elapsed since the mate sang out his order to man the braces, the watch was not yet at the rail; and this was a strange thing in a ship where men literally flew about their work. The trouble was in the port foc'sle; I could see the crowd bunched on the deck before the door, and Mister Fitzgibbon's voice had risen to a shrill, obscene scream as he poured blistering curses upon some luckless head.

I dodged across the deck and around the starboard side of the deck house, and thus came upon the scene in a casual manner, as though I had just stepped out of my own foc'sle to see what was wrong. I mingled with my watch mates, who had turned out to a man to watch the row.

Over on the port side of the deck a royal shindy seemed to be preparing. Aye, the mate had at last struck fire from his squareheads! They were on the verge of open rebellion. The stiffs of the port watch had fallen to one side, and stood quaking and irresolute, but the squareheads, all of them, were bunched squarely between the mate and the foc'sle door, and to the mate's stream of curses they interposed a wall of their own oaths. Mister Fitzgibbon had his right hand in his coat pocket, and all hands knew that hand was closed about the butt of a revolver; moreover, the tradesmen stood on either side of him, prepared to back him up in whatever course he chose to take. They were good men, those tradesmen, fighting men, and skilled in just such battles as this promised to be. The port watch Sails, who stood nearest to me, was armed with a heavy sheet pin, and he stood with his face half turned towards the starboard side. Aye, they were canny fighters—if it came to blows they would not be taken in the flank by surprise.

Mister Fitzgibbon was swearing over the heads of the squareheads. He threw his words into foc'sle. He was calling upon Holy Joe, the parson, to come out of it blasted quick and be skinned alive, b'Gawd! Broken bones were being promised to poor Holy Joe. That was why the squareheads were showing fight—not to protect their own skins, but to save the parson from the mate's wrath. For their little Nils was dying, and Holy Joe was by his side, praying for his passing soul. As I learned afterwards, when the mate sang out for his watch to man the braces, all jumped to obey save the parson; he stayed with

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Nils. His absence was noted immediately, for the mate was lynx-eyed; and Fitzgibbon was all for invading the foc'sle and hauling out the truant by the scruff of the neck. Aye, Mister Fitz was all for teaching a lesson with boot and fist, for Holy Joe was a small man and a pacifist, fair game for any bucko. But the squareheads would not have it so. For Nils was dying, and Holy Joe was praying for his soul.

Suddenly Mister Fitzgibbon stopped cursing, and in a voice that meant business, ordered the watch aft to the braces. The stiffes tumbled over themselves in their eagerness to obey; but not a squarehead budged. They still stood between the mate and his victim. So he drew the revolver out of his pocket, and pointed it at Lindquist.

"Lay aft—or I'll splatter lead among you!" he said.

He meant it. He would have shot Lindquist, I am sure, for winging a man, or worse, meant little to the mate of the *Golden Bough*, and the squarehead bravely stood his ground. But the threat to shoot into the men who were shielding him had the effect of drawing the parson out of the foc'sle. He suddenly appeared in the lighted doorway.

"*Oho*, that brought you out of it—*hey*, you sniveling this-and-that!" hailed Fitzgibbon. He lifted his aim from Lindquist, and brought the weapon to bear upon Holy Joe. "Step aft, here, you swab, or I'll drill you through, s'help me!"

The words brought a menacing growl from the squareheads; there was a stir among them, and they seemed about to fling themselves upon the trio. But Holy Joe checked the movement with a word.

"Steady, lads," said he. "No violence; obey your orders. Spread out, there, boys, and let me through; I will speak with him."

That was what he said, but it was *how* he said it that really mattered. Aye, Holy Joe might have been the skipper, himself, from his air. He spoke with authority, in a deep, commanding voice, and the squareheads instantly gave him the obedience they had refused the mate. They did not, indeed, tumble aft in the wake of the stiffes; but they did spread out and make a lane through their midst down which Holy Joe advanced with quick and firm step. Right up to Fitzgibbon he walked, and stopped, and said to the bucko's face,

"Put away that weapon! Would you add another murder to your crimes?"

To me, to the mate and his henchmen, indeed, to all hands, it was a most astounding situation. And perhaps the most surprising element in it was the fact that Holy Joe was not immediately shot or felled with a blow, and the additional fact that none of us expected him to be.

It was the stiff, not the officer, who commanded the deck that moment. By some strange magic I could not as yet fathom, the little parson had assumed the same heroic proportions Newman had assumed the day he chased the skipper from the poop. Oh, it was no physical change that took place; it was rather as if the man doffed a mask and revealed himself to us in his true self. There he stood, a full head shorter than his antagonist, with his head tilted back to meet the larger man's eyes, and Bully Fitzgibbon quailed before his gaze.

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I watched the little man, awe-stricken. I had been bred to worship force, it was the only deity I knew, and Holy Joe was in my eyes the symbol of force. He radiated force, and it was a strange and wonderful force. I had glimpsed this power in Newman; now, for the first time in my life I saw it fully revealed. The only kind of force I had known or imagined was brute force, the kind of force Mister Fitzgibbon epitomized; but now, in this duel of wills that was taking place before my eyes, I saw another and superior power at work. It was a force of the mind, or soul, that Holy Joe employed; it was a moral force that poured out of the clean spirit of the man and subdued the brute force pitted against him.

“Put down that weapon!” Holy Joe repeated.

Slowly, the mate lowered his arm.

The parson turned to the squareheads; aye, he turned his back full upon the bucko, and the latter made no move against him.

“Obey your orders, men,” Holy Joe said to the sailors. “Go to your work as he commands. I will stay with the boy.”

The squareheads obeyed without question. They knew, just as all of us knew, that their little champion was in no danger of mishandling, at least not at that moment. They trooped aft, heavy-footed, murmuring, but docile, and joined the stiffs at the lee braces. Holy Joe, now alone on that deck so far as physical backing went, turned again to the mate. But indeed he needed no physical backing; his indomitable spirit had cowed the bucko.

“Your men will give you no further trouble, sir; they are at their stations,” said he.

It was the first time he had used the “sir.” For an instant it seemed a weakening. It gave Mister Fitzgibbon the heart to bluster.

“I ordered you aft with the rest,” he began. “What d’ye mean——”

“I have other work to do this watch—as you know,” interrupted the parson. He said the words so solemnly and sternly they sounded like a judgment; aye, and they nipped the rising courage of the mate. He could only mumble, and stammer out,

“You—you refuse duty?”

Holy Joe was silent for an instant. All of us were silent. One could have heard a pin drop upon the deck. Then, out of the port foc’sle, a dreadful sound came to our ears, a low, strangled moan. It stabbed the vitals of the most hardened of us; with my own eyes I saw the mate tremble. Aye, in some way Holy Joe had sent a fear into the brute soul of Fitzgibbon; in some way he had sent a fear into the brute souls of us all, and, at least

in my case, a great wonder. The pain-filled wail of Nils, coming as it did, seemed magic-inspired to light for me a universal truth. I felt it crudely, saw it dimly, but there it was, dramatized before my eyes, the age-long, ceaseless battle between the Beast in Man and the God in Man, the resistless power of service and sacrifice. Aye, and Holy Joe's softly spoken reply to the mate's words confirmed what I saw and felt.

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"You speak of my duty, sir," said he. "I see it—and do it!"

With that he turned on his heel and walked into the foc'sle.

When he had disappeared something seemed to have gone from the air we breathed, something electric and vitalizing. There was an immediate let down of the nervous tension that had gripped us, a common sigh, and a half-hysterical snigger from some fellow behind me. Mister Fitzgibbon seemed to come out of a trance; he shook himself, and stared at Sails and then at Chips. He glared across the deck at us of the starboard watch. He even swore. But there was no life to his curse, and he made no step to follow the defiant stiff into the foc'sle. Instead, he went to the job at hand, and quite obviously sought to regain mastery and self-respect by sulphuric blustering towards the men bent over the ropes. He was a defeated man. He knew it, and we knew it.

A hand fell upon my shoulder. Newman stood behind me.

"A brave act and a brave man," said he. "But they will not let him keep his triumph." After a pause he added, "They dare not."

CHAPTER XIV

I seized Newman's arm and led him aside, intending to impart my news. But eight bells struck, and while they were striking, Mister Lynch's voice summoned the starboard watch to assist in the job the mate had started. We hurried aft with the crowd, and I found chance to say to him no more than,

"Be careful; someone is spying upon you. Boston told me—and I saw him."

"Who?"

"I couldn't see. It was too dark, and he cleared out on the run. Ask the Nigger."

When we had belayed, the watch was relieved, and Newman went aft to the wheel. Lynch kept the rest of us on the jump, as ever, and I had no chance to steal a word with the Nigger when he came forward. At four bells I relieved the wheel. I found Captain Swope and the mate pacing the poop with their heads together. As I took over the wheel, Newman whispered to me, "Keep your weather eye lifted for squalls, Jack!"

I did not need his warning; the mere presence of either of the pair was sufficient to keep any sailorman wide awake and watchful of his *p*'s and *q*'s while steering her. There was nothing uncommon about the Old Man's presence; he was in the habit of appearing on the poop at all hours of the night, though he never went forward. But for the mate to give up his sleep in fair weather was unprecedented. There was something in the carriage and attitude of the two, as they slowly paced fore and aft, or stood at the break

staring forward, that gave me a feeling of impending disaster. Aye, I could smell trouble coming.

Captain Swope could smell it, too. That is why he walked the deck with Fitzgibbon by his side. I could feel the alertness of the man. Yankee Swope had his finger upon the pulse of his ship. A mutiny, however sudden, would not catch the master of the *Golden Bough* napping. That is what I thought as I watched him, and Boston's vague scheme became harebrained in my eyes.

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The second mate was seldom aft during the two hours I stood at the wheel. The times he did appear, he engaged in conversation with the Old Man, beyond my hearing. But near midnight he clumped aft hurriedly, bringing the tradesmen with him. The strollers happened to be near me at the moment he appeared, and he came towards them, speaking.

"Well, sir—he's gone," he said.

So I knew that Nils was dead.

"Very good," said Swope. "And the hands?"

"All quiet, sir."

Mister Lynch's voice was quite respectful, but I fancied I detected in it a note of contempt.

"There was danger of trouble, even before the boy went out," he went on. "Morton stood by the door and heard it all." This Morton was the sailmaker in the starboard watch. "The big Cockney in the port watch was all for trouble, a rush aft of all hands; he said he had the backing of my watch. The squareheads were willing; they want revenge. But the big jasper in my watch, Newman, went into the foc'sle and squelched the scheme with a word. He clapped a stopper on the Cockney's jaw, and told the squareheads there was to be no trouble. So there will be none, Captain."

A black curse slid out of the skipper's mouth. Aye, the man breathed fury.

"So—he commands for'ard, eh?" he said. "Well, I command aft." He seemed to think over the matter for a moment, and arrive at a decision. "Well, Mister, if it doesn't happen to-night, it may happen another night," he said. "Tell your men to keep their eyes and ears open. And—better have that body carted aft, and your sailmaker fit him to canvas. We'll dump him at dawn."

"Very good, sir," replied Lynch, and he went forward again.

The Old Man and the mate immediately went into conference. They moved over to the rail, and spoke in soft tones, so I overheard nothing they said. A ray of light from the companion hatch fell upon them, and watching them furtively, it seemed to me that Captain Swope was laying down the law to Fitzgibbon, giving him certain orders, to which he at first objected, and then agreed.

It looked wicked to me, this secretive conversation. My excited mind saw evil in it. I smelled evil, tasted evil, the very skin of my body was prickled with the air or evil that lay upon the ship. A case of nerves? Aye, I had nerves. Most sailormen had nerves when they were within sight of Captain Swope. This night he seemed to drench the ship with

evil, it poured out of him as ink from a squid, it was almost something tangible. Somehow I knew that Newman's long grace was ended. This black villain had prepared a net to trap my friend, and was even now casting it. Somehow I knew that fresh wrongs and miseries were to be heaped upon the wretched foc'sle. As I watched Captain Swope out of the corners of my eyes, God's truth, I was afraid to my marrow.

Presently the second mate returned aft. "You may have your trouble now, Captain, if you wish," he said in the same clear, carrying voice he had before used, as he approached the skipper. "The squareheads won't give up the body. They'll fight if we take it. They say they'll drop him overside themselves."

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The captain appeared pleased with this news. He laughed, that soft, musical little chuckle of his that contained so much malice and cruelty. "Oh, let the dogs dispose of their own offal, Mister," he said, carelessly. Then, when Lynch went down to the main deck, Swope spoke eagerly, though in low voice, to the mate. Aye, the Old Man was gleeful, and the mate received his instructions with servile pleasure. Presently, they went below, and the yelp of the cabin boy—roused from sleep, doubtless, by the toe of the skipper's boot—and the subsequent clink of glasses, told me they were toasting the occasion.

I was consumed with dread. But just what to dread, I could not guess.

The Cockney took over the helm at midnight. I hurried forward, eager to see what was happening in the fore part of the ship, and anxious to speak with Newman.

The air of unease, of expectancy, which I had felt so strongly aft, was even more evident forward. My watch, though off duty, did not go below directly. Men were standing about whispering to each other. The wheel and lookout had been relieved, but the mate did not summon his watch to labor, as was his custom; he kept to the poop, and we heard not a peep from him. The squareheads had taken a lamp from the lamp-locker and a sack of coal from the peak, and Lindquist had the body of Nils upon the forehatch preparing it for sea-burial. He stitched away in silence, his mates watched him in silence. But it was not a peaceful calm.

I found Newman in the port foc'sle, talking to Holy Joe. When I entered, I heard Newman say: "They are good, simple lads—use your authority as a minister. Reason, command, do your best to convince them they must be obedient. Tell them they will be the ones to suffer in case of trouble."

"I will do my best," the parson answered. With a nod to me, he went out on deck.

"Who was he?" I asked, when we were alone.

Newman looked blank.

"The spy," I added. "Didn't you ask the Nigger?"

"Oh, that—I have been too busy to bother about it," was the careless response. "It really doesn't matter, Jack; I dare say it was some one *he* set to dog my heels." He inclined his head aft to indicate who "he" might be.

"But—remember what happened that night on the yardarm! And—I heard some of you talk aft there; I couldn't help hearing! I tell you, Newman, the afterguard is awake and waiting; the Old Man is afraid of trouble. I think he is afraid you will lead the crowd, and try to take the ship."

“No; he is afraid I won’t,” said Newman.

I blinked. The words struck me with the force of a blow.

The big man smiled at my puzzled expression, and his hand clapped upon my shoulder with a firm, friendly pressure. “Strange things happen in this ship, eh, Jack?” said he, in a kindly voice. “No wonder you are stumped, you are too young and straightforward to be alert to intrigue. You do not understand, yet you are eager to risk your skin in another man’s quarrel? And you believe in me, eh, Jack?”

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I felt embarrassed, and a little resentful. I did not like to be reminded so bluntly of my youth and inexperience.

"You saved my life, and I don't forget a debt like that," I growled, ungraciously.

Newman gave a little chuckle. He knew very well it was liking, not debt, that made me his man.

"I want you to know, Jack, that your friendship is a strength to me," he said, with sudden earnestness. "It is a strength and a comfort to her, too. Your unquestioning faith in me has given both of us courage. You have helped me regain my own faith in men and in right. Heaven knows, a man needs faith in this ship!"

Oh, but I was exalted by these words! I was in the hero-worship stage of life, and this mysterious giant by my side was my chosen idol. The lady aft had quickened into activity whatever chivalry my nature contained, and it was pure, romantic delight to be told I had served her by loyalty to the man. Aye, I felt lifted up; I felt important.

"You can count on me. I'll back you to the limit," I said. Then I rushed on, eagerly, and blurted out what was on my mind. "You are in danger; I know it, I feel it. That Old Man is planning something against you. Remember that night on the yardarm! Remember the lady's warning! Look at Nils! I tell you, we'll have to fight! You can depend upon me, I'll back you to the limit in anything. So will the squareheads—you know how desperate and bitter they are. So will the stiffs—they are just waiting for you to say the word. Every man-jack for'ard will follow you!"

He checked me with stern words. "Put that thought out of your mind!" he exclaimed. "There will be no mutiny, if I can prevent it. If one occurs, I shall help put it down."

I was astonished and crestfallen. But after a moment he went on, more kindly.

"I know you are thinking of my safety, lad, and I thank you. But you do not know what you are proposing. Mutiny on the high seas is madness, and these jail-birds for'ard would be worse masters than those we now have. Besides, you do not understand my situation—an uprising of the crew whether or not led by me, is the very thing the captain expects and wishes. You are quite right in thinking he intends to kill me—and not me alone—but at present he is checkmated. I am an able seaman, I do my work and enjoy the favor of my watch officer, and both Lynch and the tradesmen revere the lady and hate, while they fear, their master. But in case of a mutiny—why, Jack, those fellows aft would unite, and back up Swope in anything he chose to do. Their own safety would depend upon it. He would have his excuse to kill."

"But if we win—" I commenced.

“We would be murderers, and our necks would be forfeit,” he interrupted. “Put away the thought, lad, for only evil can come of it. A mutiny would mean disaster to the crew, to you, to me, and above all, to her. For her sake, Jack, we must prevent any outbreak.”

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"For her sake?" I echoed. I was aghast. Somehow, it had never occurred to me that the lady might be in any danger. "You don't mean that she would be harmed!" I exclaimed.

He nodded, and there crept into his eyes an expression grim and desperate. "I have cursed myself for giving way to the storm of hate and passion that brought me on board this ship," he said, moodily. "And yet—it could not have been otherwise."

He observed my questioning face, and added, "Swope knows we have talked together, she and I. He knows he must extinguish us both if he would rebury for good and all the truth he thought was already buried."

"His wife—his own wife!" I exclaimed.

The words probed the quick. For a minute Newman's reserve was gone, and the tormented soul of the man was plainly visible.

"It is a lie, a legal lie!" he cried.

He calmed immediately. His self-control took charge; it was as if his will, caught napping for an instant, awoke, and drew a curtain that shut out alien eyes.

I was dumb, ashamed and sorry to have unwittingly hurt my friend. But now he was speaking again, in his accustomed sober, emotionless voice.

"Of course, I trust you absolutely, Jack. I'd like to tell you the whole story. But—I am not free to talk——"

"You don't have to tell me anything," I blurted. "I know you are my man, and you know I am your man."

"You *are* a friend!" he exclaimed. "But I will not sail under false colors in your eyes, lad. I am a jail-bird, an escaped felon."

"Oh, I knew all about that long ago," I said, carelessly.

He looked his surprise.

"I heard that bum's story through the wall, that night in the Knitting Swede's," I explained. "I didn't try to listen, but I couldn't help hearing him. About the frame-up they worked on you—Beulah Twigg, and Mary—that's the lady, isn't it?—and the one Beasley called 'he'—I know 'he' is Yankee Swope. Oh, it was a dirty trick they played on you, Newman. I'm with you in anything you do to get even."

He shook his head, smiling. "What a young savage you are, Jack!" says he. "An eye for an eye, eh? But you guess wrongly, lad. That treachery you heard Beasley explain

was but the beginning. I was sent to prison for a murder, the brutal and cowardly murder of a helpless old man.”

“I know it was a frame-up,” I cried. “And, anyway, I don’t care. I know you’re on the square, and that is all that matters with me.”

“If I were not, your faith would make me on the square,” he answered. “But—I was not guilty. I came on board the *Golden Bough* intending to become a murderer—but that madness is past. Now I am anxious to prevent killing—any killing. Now I am determined to preserve peace in this ship.

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“For she is safe so long as I am alive, and he cannot easily dispose of me so long as the crew is peaceful. You can understand that, can you not? Angus Swope is a fiend; he is more than half-insane from long indulgence of his cruel lusts. But he is cunning. I am a menace to his safety, and now he knows that she is also a menace. But he will not offer her violence or do her any harm while I am at large. By God, it would be his death, and he knows it. I give him no chance to strike at me alone and openly, so he is striking at me through the crew.

“For he must consider the attitude of his second mate. Lynch is her friend, remember that, Jack. He is an honest man. He is bluff and harsh and without imagination, as brutal a bucko as one is likely to find in any ship, but he is ‘on the square,’ as you put it. Also, he has more than an inkling of the true state of affairs in the ship. He knows who I am, and he guesses why the captain fears and hates me. I wish I could tell you what he has done, and is doing, in my—no, in her behalf. And in spite of his bucko’s code. He would not lift a finger to aid me in case of trouble (you remember the warning he gave us that day we were in the rigging) for he is an officer, a bucko, and I am a hand. But he would not stand for another such attempt at murder as Swope made the night we were aloft. He told Swope he would not stand for it, he would not keep silent. It was a brave thing to do, to defy such a master. This is Lynch’s last voyage in the *Golden Bough*, as he well knows. So our canny skipper set to work his crooked wits, and for weeks he has been fomenting a rebellion of the port watch. Mister Fitz is a more pliant and obedient tool than Lynch.”

I was excited, wide-eyed. For I was suddenly seeing a light. The words I heard were truth, I knew. It explained what I had seen and heard that night upon the poop. This trouble that threatened was made to order, to the captain’s order; even as Newman said.

“Good heavens—then Nils’ death—and the hazing”—I could not continue. The heartlessness, the malignant cruelty of the man who had ordered these things was too horrifying.

“Nils’ injury was unpremeditated, I believe,” said Newman, “but leaving him die without attention or nursing was a calculated brutality, designed to inflame the boy’s mates. Fitzgibbon’s bitter hazing, without distinction or justice, was for the same purpose. They kept a close eye upon the boy’s condition; they evidently figured that the hour of his death would be the hour of explosion. As you know, it very nearly was—only the parson’s courage averted trouble in the dog-watch, and but a little while ago I had to quiet a storm. But the danger is passed now, I think. The little fellow’s mates are naturally quiet, law-abiding fellows.”

“The squareheads may be kept quiet,” I said, “but how about the stiffes? How about Boston and Blackie?”

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An expression of disgust and contempt showed in his face as I mentioned the names. "I will attend to them if they try any of their tricks," he said.

"But they are, and have been, trying their tricks," I persisted, "and for some reason they are eager to have you know what they are up to. Boston told me to tell you." I repeated Boston's gossip. "He knew about the spy," I said.

He nodded. "I know; I have had an eye upon them. What Boston told you about the treasure is quite true; the ship is carrying specie. And they are precious rascals, capable of any villainy; I know them well, they—they broke jail with me. But they have wit enough to know that their gang of stiffbs could put up no sort of fight, unless backed by the sailors in the crew. It is loot they are after, and there will be trouble from them before the ship makes port; but now we are in mid-sea, and they realize they would be quite helpless with a ship on their hands and no navigator. That is what they want of me. A pair of poisonous rats, Jack!

"But they will keep quiet. They had better. I promised them I would kill them both if they disobeyed me!"

I gazed at the big man with admiring awe. He spoke so coolly, was so conscious of the strength and power that was in himself. Here was the sort of man I should like to be, I thought, here was the true hard case, no bully, no ruffian, but a man, a good man, a man so hard and bright, so finely tempered, he was to the rest of us as steel to mud. Oddly enough, as I had this thought, it also occurred to me that there was a man in the ship who might with justice claim to be Newman's peer, another man of heroic stature—poor meek little Holy Joe.

"If Swope does not interfere with the decent burial of that poor boy, there will be no outbreak," added Newman.

"He will not interfere," I was able to assure him. I repeated the skipper's words to Mister Lynch. "'Let the dogs dispose of their own offal!' is what he said."

To my surprise Newman was disturbed by this news. He stared at me, frowning.

"Swope said that?" he exclaimed. "Now what is he up to?"

He sat thinking for a moment, then he said:

"The burial of Nils is the weak point in my defense. If Swope offers an indignity to the boy's body, even I will not be able to restrain Nils' mates. Surely Swope has guessed that. I have planned to bury the lad from the foredeck just as quickly as preparations can be made; that is why Lindquist is at work on the forehatch. If Swope is overlooking this chance, he must have something else up his sleeve."

He got to his feet and moved toward the door.

“Lindquist must be nearly finished. I will carry out my plan at any hazard. Common decency demands we should not let the boy be cast into the sea by the very men who murdered him.”

At the door we were met by Olson, one of the squareheads, come to tell Newman that all was ready for the burial. So we joined the crowd, and Nils was put away, in the dead of night, by the light of one lantern and many stars. The hum of the wind aloft and the purr and slap of the waters against the bows were his requiem.

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That scene left its mark upon the mind of every man who took part in or witnessed it—and every foc'sle man save the helmsman saw Nils go over the side. It was already late in the middle watch, but no man had yet gone to his sleep; and, considering the habits of sailors and the custom of the sea, this single fact describes how disturbed was the common mind.

Yet the putting away of Nils was peaceful. We knew that the mate was not alone upon the poop, that the men aft were alert and must know what was going on forward; but, despite Newman's fears, there was no interference from that quarter.

Nils' bier was a painter's stage, and four of the lad's shipmates held the plank upon their shoulders, with the weighted feet of the shrouded form pointed outboard. The rest of us, sailors and stiffs, stood about with bared, bowed heads; aye, and most of us, I think, with wet eyes and tight throats. It seemed a cruel and awful thing to see one of our number disappear forever, and Holy Joe's words, spoken so softly and clearly, were of a kind to squeeze the hearts of even bad men. That parson had the gift of gab; he was a skilled orator and he could play upon our heartstrings as a musician upon a harp.

Yet he did not preach at us, or even look at us. He wasted no words, and the ceremony proceeded with the dispatch Newman desired. All Holy Joe did was lift his face to the night and pray in simple words that Nils might have a safe passage on this long voyage he was starting. The words seemed to wash clean our minds. For the moment the most vicious man in that hard and vicious crowd thought cleanly and innocently. Our wrongs and hatreds seemed small and of little consequence. Aye, while Holy Joe prayed for the dead we stood about like a group of awed children. When he was finished praying, he recited the beautiful words of the Service, and raised his hand—and the pall-bearers tipped their burden into the sea.

Silently we listened to the dull splash, silently we watched the four men lower the stage to the deck. It was over. The parson fell into step with Newman, and the two paced up and down, conversing in low tones. The crowd dispersed.

Some of my watch went into the foc'sle, to their bunks. Most of the men sat about the decks, and smoked and talked in whispers. But the topic of Nils was avoided, as was talk of mutiny. The squareheads did not mutter threats, the stiffs did not curse. The spell of the parson's words was still upon us, and peace reigned.

Newman had won, I thought, and danger was passed.

I found the Nigger seated upon the fore-bitts, whetting his knife upon a stone. There was something sinisterly suggestive about his occupation at that hour; it was the first break in the strange calm which had fallen upon the crew.

“Tell me, Nigger, who’s the man that’s spying on the big fellow?” I said abruptly, as I sat down beside him.

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Nigger did not pause in his work, but he turned his battered face to me. A couple of days before he had fallen afoul of the mate's brass knuckles for perhaps the twentieth time since he had been in the ship, and his face was a mass of bruised flesh, a shocking sight, even though his color hid the extent of his injuries.

The Nigger had been, perhaps, the worst misused man in the crew—and this notwithstanding the fact he was by far the best sailor in the port watch. But Fitzgibbon hated “damned niggers,” especially did he hate “these spar-colored half-breeds,” as he was fond of calling this fellow. I do believe he chose the Nigger for his watch so he might pummel him to his heart's content. Beat him up he had, constantly, and without cause, and as a result Nigger had become a surly, moody man.

“Who say dat Ah know?” demanded Nigger, in reply to my question.

“Boston said so.”

“Dat man's too free wif his lip. Ah don't tell him Ah knows who's the spy; Ah tells him Ah knows dey is one.”

I waited patiently, for Nigger's temper would not bear pressing. He reversed his stone, spat upon it, and resumed his monotonous whetting, then, after looking around to make sure he could not be overheard, he explained what he did know.

“Night befoh last Ah was hangin' 'round aft——”

“What?” I cried, surprised. “Hanging around aft—what for?”

“Dat's my business,” he told me, curtly. Then, after a moment, he added, “But Ah don't care if yoh know, because Ah knows yoh ain't no snitch. Ah was hangin' 'round waitin' to meet Mistah Mate when he ain't got them othah two debbils wif him. Ah was waitin' 'round to meet dat man alone. And he come to de break ob de poop wif de Old Man, and de Old Man say, ‘Ah got a good man watchin' every move he makes; he can't turn around in de foc'sle wifout me knowin' it. We'll be wahned befoh it happens.’ Dat's what de Old Man say to Mistah Mate. And Ah knows he mus' be talkin' about de big fellow, and so Ah tells Boston about it.”

“But didn't you hear any names mentioned?” I asked him.

“Dat's all Ah hears,” he answered. “Den dey went away.”

I was disappointed. The Nigger's news amounted to just nothing; we already knew that a spy was watching Newman. But indeed this fact seemed not so threatening as it had a few hours before. Newman's careless contempt of the spy had made me contemptuous, too. And, indeed, what could a spy report against the big man that could

injure him? Newman was openly working for peace, counseling obedience. His actions invited scrutiny.

I voiced this thought to my companion.

“Well, anyway, a spy can’t hurt Newman. He is doing nothing underhand, or wrong. He’s keeping peace in this ship.”

Nigger gave a queer little hoot of derision. “Does Ah look like peace?” he said. “Dis am a debbil-ship; Ah tells yoh dey can’t be no peace in dis ship nohow.”

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I gestured towards the forehatch. A dozen men sat upon it, quietly smoking and gossiping. “The squally weather is past,” I said. “Those lads don’t want trouble. A few hours ago they were all for fight—but now they’ve settled down. And don’t you try to start trouble! The big fellow wants peace, the lady wants peace, we must help them to keep peace. Don’t you want to help the lady and the big fellow?”

“De lady been awful good to me,” said Nigger, in almost a whisper. “Ah gone crazy long ago if it ain’t foh de lady.” He stopped his whetting and tried the edge of the blade with his thumb; then, suddenly, he reached out and clutched my wrist, and continued in a voice so charged with pain and grief, that I was appalled.

“Ah’d do mos’ anything foh de lady, but, Shreve, it ain’t foh me, and it ain’t foh any of us forward to say what’s goin’ to happen in dis ship. Ah ain’t no sea-lawyer; man and boy Ah’ve gone to sea twenty year, and Ah ain’t nebber made no trouble in no ship, no suh. But, oh mah Lawd, yoh knows what all’s happened to me in dis ship! Dey won’t let me be a man. ‘Yoh niggah, yoh black beast!’ Dat’s what dey calls me, and dat’s what dey makes me! Ah wants peace, yoh wants peace—but does dey want peace? No, suh! Yoh say de ship peaceful now? Dis am a debbil-ship, and dey’s a king debbil aft! And dey’s a shark overside, and he wasn’t waitin’ foh what jus’ went into the water, no, suh! Yoh ebber sail out East? Yoh ebber see de quiet befoh a typhoon, so quiet seems like yoh can’t breathe? Dat’s de kind ob peace dat’s on de *Golden Bough*. Ah don’ want to make no trouble no time, but, oh mah Lawd, when Ah does mah work right an’ gets hazed foh it, when dat mate makes a beast out ob me—does yoh think Ah stand dat fohebbber?”

I had no answer of good cheer. What could I say? The man’s wrongs were too bitter, his hurts too constant, to be glossed over or soothed by any words I could think of. For I knew he still had weeks of brutal mistreatment ahead of him. This Nigger was a man who would not, perhaps could not, cringe and whine—and so the mate was “breaking” him.

But after all Nigger gave me the promise I was after. “Ah nebber talks trouble. Ah nebber wants trouble, and Ah nebber stirs up no trouble.”

CHAPTER XV

The day following Nils’ death was the most peaceful day we had had since leaving port.

There was less cursing and driving from the men aft, and less wrangling among ourselves. But it was a strange peace. An air of suspense lay upon the ship; we went around on tiptoe, so to speak. The quiet before the typhoon—aye, Nigger’s phrase just about described it. We went around telling each other that the trouble had blown over,

and nothing was going to happen, and all the time we were watching and waiting for something—we didn't know just what—to happen.

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During the morning, Mister Fitzgibbon and his bullies came swaggering forward and into the port foc'sle. Now that was a moment that very nearly saw the calm broken; for an instant I was sure there would be a grand blow-up. For the mate was after Nils' belongings, his sea-chest. Even though it was the custom to take a dead man's gear aft, the squareheads resented the removal of Nils' effects. Especially did they resent Fitzgibbon's part in the removal. The lads in my watch crowded the door connecting the rooms, and the port watch men collected on deck and glowered in at the proceedings.

The muttered curses grew in volume. Oh, it looked like trouble, right enough—for just a moment. Now that I was enlightened as to the skipper's game, I could see what the mate was up to. He, who was largely responsible for Nils' death, had come forward upon this errand because he knew—or Swope knew—his presence would enrage Nils' mates. The Chinese steward, or the tradesmen alone, could have taken Nils' gear without raising a murmur from the squareheads, but quite naturally they would resent Fitzgibbon's pawing over the poor lad's treasures.

But Newman took the sting out of the mate's visit, Newman and Holy Joe, working separately, but with a common end in view. Oh, it was rich—but you must know the foc'sle mind to understand how rich we thought it was. It was nothing subtle, nothing above our heads. Newman made us laugh, at the mate's expense, and—presto!—impending tragedy was turned into farce.

Fitzgibbon, himself, was overhauling Nils' gear. The tradesmen stood idle and watchful, one near either door of the foc'sle. Out on deck, Holy Joe was busy; we could hear him urging his crowd to be quiet and peaceful. Newman pushed through our crowd until he was fairly into the port foc'sle, and there he stood, filling the doorway, and effectually blocking any attempt on the part of those behind him to rush the room.

Well, Newman looked down at the mate, and he commenced to chuckle very softly to himself. After a moment we began to chuckle too, every man-jack of us. We didn't laugh out loud—not one of us, except Newman, who had the nerve to laugh out loud at Blackjack Fitzgibbon—but, hidden behind the big fellow's back, we chuckled and snickered readily enough. And the butt of the joke was the mate, himself.

It was the mate's behavior. Anybody could see with half an eye that the fellow was looking for trouble. He expected trouble, and it made him nervous. He was determined he would be ready for it. So he kept one hand in his coat pocket, where he carried his gun, and tried with the other hand to cast adrift the lashings that held the chest to the bunk posts. It was a two-hand job, and he made slow work of it. But he wouldn't call one of his tradesmen to help him—that would have left a door unguarded, you see. Nor could he fix his attention upon the job; he kept twisting his ugly face this way and that way until his head looked as if it were on a pivot.

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If Newman hadn't pointed it out, I doubt if any of us would have seen the humor of the scene. But Newman's chuckle forced it upon us. Mister Fitzgibbon did look ridiculous—fumbling blindly with the ropes, and at the same time trying to keep both ends of the foc'sle in sight at once.

"I'll lend you one of my hands, Mister," said Newman, suddenly.

The mate glanced at him, startled, but before he could open his mouth, Newman stepped past the tradesman and bent over one end of the chest. "It's neatly wrapped; the lad would have been a good sailorman, Mister," he remarked as he undid the lashing.

The mate realized he was at a disadvantage. He glared vindictively at the big fellow, and snarled an oath in reply. Then he drew a knife, and committed the lubberly act of cutting through the lashing at his end of the chest. Newman had finished undoing the rope at his end, and now he stepped back into the doorway.

I've never been sure, but I think Newman did it purposely. The rope's end was spliced about the handle of the chest, and when he cast the rope loose, it trailed upon the floor. Newman left the bight turned about the bunk-post, and in such fashion that it would tighten into a clove-hitch.

Now that it was a case of our laughing at him, the mate was eager to get out of the foc'sle with as little loss of dignity as possible. He started to walk away, dragging Nils' chest after him. The clove-hitch checked him. He jerked, with all his strength, and his strength was enormous—there was a crack like a pistol shot as the bunk-post snapped, the chest leaped like a live thing at the man, and Fitzgibbon's heels flew out from under him. He landed upon his back, and the chest landed upon his stomach; and the wind went out of him with an explosive *oof!*

Oh, it was rich. Aye, it was the kind of joke the foc'sle could appreciate. We did appreciate it. We did not quite dare roar our laughter, but our chuckles would have shaken windows ashore. Even the tradesmen grinned—behind their hands—as they lifted the chest from off their boss, and him to his feet. He needed assistance, too; he had no wind for curses, and bent double nursing the injured spot while he grunted at the tradesmen to pick up the chest and carry it aft. He paid no attention to the rest of us, but as he hobbled out of the foc'sle in the wake of the others, he gave Newman a look of such malignant hatred that we all knew just where he placed the blame for the episode.

It did not bother Newman, that look. He was on deck at the mate's heels. Bravado, I thought at first, and I was close behind Newman, for I wanted to have a hand in any further fun. He followed the mate aft, at a respectful distance. Suddenly, I understood his action, for I saw how warily he was watching the hands, the port watch



squareheads, particularly, who were bunched about the foredeck. Newman wasn't following the mate to make sport for us; he was seeing that the mate, and the tradesmen, got aft without trouble. He was seeing to it that no one on deck gave the bucko the excuse to start trouble that had been denied him in the foc'sle. Aye, Newman was a wise lad; he would not be caught napping.

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Yet, despite his care, he nearly lost. Mister Fitzgibbon brushed past Cockney, who was standing alone by the forward end of the deck-house. He croaked something at the man, an oath, I thought. Cockney waited until he passed by, and then suddenly whipped out his knife and drew back his arm to throw it at the mate's back.

Newman might possibly have reached Cockney. But he did not try. Instead, he leaped in the other direction, a cat-like bound that took him over to the rail, as far away from Cockney as he could get. It was Holy Joe who spoiled Cockney's knife-play. He was standing behind Cockney, and, quick as Newman himself, he leaped forward and struck Cockney's arm. It spoiled the aim. The knife did not go in the mate's direction at all; it went flashing across the deck, and stuck quivering in the rail.

"You fool!" cried Holy Joe.

The mate wheeled about at that. Aye, and he had his pistol half out of his pocket as he turned. We could see by his face that he understood what had happened; indeed, he would have been blind not to have been able to read the meaning of the scene—Cockney still bent in the attitude of throwing, and the parson clutching his arm. I expected—we all expected—he would shoot Cockney. Surely, this was his chance, if he wanted trouble.

But he hardly glanced at the man. His eyes passed him by, and darted about until they spotted Newman lounging over there by the rail, with his hands in his pockets. I guess it was an unpleasant surprise to find Newman over there, just opposite to where he expected to find him. The knife was sticking in the rail close by Newman's shoulder; there could be no connecting it and Newman—indeed, Newman's own knife was in plain view, in its sheath.

Newman shook his head. "Not this time, Mister," says he.

The mate was stumped, and enraged. His face grew actually purple with his choked rage, as he glared at Newman. But he did not draw the gun free of his pocket; he had no excuse to offer Newman violence, and he did not deign to notice Cockney. He did not even seem to notice the naked knife. Slowly his hand opened, and the butt of the weapon dropped back into his pocket. Then he turned, and went aft.

I breathed again. So, I guess, did the others. When Fitzgibbon was beyond ear-shot, Cockney began to damn Holy Joe for spoiling his aim. But he didn't get very far with his tirade before Newman had him shouldered against the wall of the deck-house.

Cockney changed his tune then, and mighty quick. For Newman looked as he had looked that day in the Knitting Swede's; aye, there was death in his face.

“Ow, Gaw’, ’ear me. Hi didn’t mean no trouble!” Cockney bleated. “Hit was the nyme ’e called me. ’E myde me see red, that’s wot.”

“Would have been a damn good job if he’d landed!” cried Boston’s voice. There was an emphatic chorus of approval of this sentiment from the hands, from squareheads and stiffs both. “We’d have been rid of one o’ them, anyhow!” piped up Blackie.

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The backing gave Cockney heart. “Hi’d ’ave spliced ‘is bleedin’ ’eart but ’e spoiled me throw, the blarsted Bible shark, the——”

“That will do,” said Newman quietly, and Cockney shut up.

“Cockney has the guts, anyway,” says Boston.

“The bucko hain’t; he backed down,” says Blackie.

“That will do you,” Newman threw over his shoulder, and they shut up.

“If I were sure——” said Newman to Cockney. He left the sentence unfinished, but he must have looked the rest for Cockney fell into a terrible funk.

“Ow, s’ ’elp me, Hi didn’t mean no trouble. Hit was the nyme ’e called—’e called me old mother hout o’ ’er blinkin’ nyme, that’s wot! Hi didn’t mean for to do it—but me temper—the wy the blighter’s used us blokes—hand the nyme on top o’ that——”

“Well, remember, if I thought for a moment——” broke in Newman.

I thought Cockney would flop at the big fellow’s feet this time. But he recovered quickly enough when Newman turned away, without further words, and without offering to thump him. He slouched forward, and immediately became the hero of the hour with the gang. Aye; I was even a bit envious. It took a hard case to heave a knife at a bucko—even at his back.

“But why didn’t he shoot Cockney?” I asked Newman. “Didn’t he see him?”

The big man glanced at Holy Joe, and smiled. “Perhaps he didn’t want to see him,” he replied.

And I was so thick-headed I didn’t understand. But it really was a peaceful day. After Nils’ chest went aft, we might have been a comfortable family ship so little were we troubled by the afterguard. Lynch, of course, kept his watch busy while it was on deck, but he didn’t haze; and Fitzgibbon all but forgot he had a watch. It was a queer rest. It got upon my nerves, this waiting for something—I didn’t know what—to happen.

It carried over into the night, this unusual quiet. Aye, Captain Swope kept the deck that night in the first watch, as well as Fitzgibbon, and not a single man was damned or thumped. When we turned out for the middle watch, we found the port watch lads crowing that they had farmed away their hours on deck.

Well, we didn’t farm, by a long shot. Trust Lynch to keep hands busy. It was rule number one with him. He sweated us up in the usual style, yet his manner was milder than usual and he didn’t lay a finger on even the most lubberly of the stiffes. Aye, for the

first time during the voyage—perhaps for the first time in the life of the ship—a full day passed in the *Golden Bough* and not a man felt the weight of a boot or a fist. It was an occasion, I can tell you!

Yet, for all of the afterguard's surprising gentleness, that mid-watch was a nightmare to me. Newman disappeared.

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Ever since the night at the beginning of the voyage when Captain Swope tried to snap us off the yardarm, I made it a practice to stick close to the big fellow during the night watches. I owed him my life, and, anyway I was eager to give him the service of a friend, of a mate. I was always dreading that Swope would try again some dark night, and with better success. It is so easy to do things in the dark, you see; get a man separated from the watch, beyond the reach of friendly eyes, give him a crack on the head and a boost over the rail, and then what proof, what trace, have you? Just a line in the logbook, "Man lost overboard in the night." Aye, many a lad—and many an officer—has had just that happen to him.

So it was that in the night watches I became Newman's shadow. It was literally shoulder to shoulder with us, we handed the same lines, bent over the same jobs. Newman never mentioned it, never asked me to stick close, but I knew he welcomed the attention. He knew the danger of walking alone in the dark in that ship. Mister Lynch kept his word and never again sent either of us aloft at night. In fact, the second mate did more than that; from that night on, whenever Newman had a night wheel, Lynch stayed aft on the poop during the trick. Oh, there was no friendship between the two; I know that for certain. Lynch was an officer, and Newman just a hand. But he was a square man, and he was seeing to it that Newman got a square deal, at least in his watch. And, I guessed, the lady had something to do with Lynch's attitude. She was not friendless in the cabin, as I had discovered.

This night Newman had no wheel. Neither had I. During the first half of the watch we touched elbows. As usual, the second mate worked sail and kept us dancing a lively jig. He made work, Lynch did. He would walk along the deck and jerk each buntline in passing—and then order lads aloft to overhaul and stop the lines again. He would command a tug on this line, a pull on that; no sail was ever trimmed fine enough to suit him. Oh, aye, he was but following his nature and training; he could not bear being idle himself, and he knew that busy men don't brood themselves into trouble. And running a watch ragged was hell-ship style.

We were aft on a job—brailling in the spanker, I recall—when I missed Newman. An instant before we were together, we had handed the same line; suddenly he was gone from my side. At first I thought he had passed around to the other side of the mizzenmast, for we were coiling down gear that had been disarranged during the job, and I was not worried. But when the second mate ordered us forward to another job, my friend was not with the gang.

The second mate left one of his tradesmen aft, and during the remainder of the watch kept us forward of the waist of the ship. He drove us, kept us jumping, at perfectly useless jobs on the head sails. It was as plain as the nose on my face that he was purposely keeping us forward. Something was going on, aft there by the boat skids, by the break of the poop; it was a moonless night, but once or twice I saw shadows flitting about the main deck.

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I was in a quandary. Something was going on aft—but what? Newman was missing. The bucko knew he was absent from the gang, he must have known. Yet he ignored his absence. Was it treachery? Was Newman in trouble? Had he and I been mistaken in our judgment of Bucko Lynch? Oh, I was tormented with fear—and with doubt. I wanted to gallop aft and lend him a hand, succor him, at least help him to put up a good fight. But I wasn't sure he was in trouble, that he would welcome my advertising his disappearance. Perhaps he was keeping a rendezvous, with the second mate's aid.

That was what the other lads thought. Oh, aye, they missed him too. But they didn't have wit enough to realize that Lynch also had sharp eyes; they thought Lynch didn't know Newman was gone. They thought it was a great joke, a score against the cabin. They thought Newman had boldly slipped away from work to meet the lady.

"The Big Un's queenin', b'gawd, right under the Old Man's nose!" That's how Boston put it.

I did nothing. I made no break. Luckily. At seven bells, Lynch marshaled us aft again, to set the spanker this time. As we worked, Newman slipped into the group as quietly and unobtrusively as he had slipped out nearly two hours before. Coiling down gear, I discovered that the running part of the spanker vang was off the pin, and trailing over the side. It dropped down past the open and lighted porthole of one of the cabin berths. Whose berth? Well, I thought that Boston had the right of it. Newman had been "queenin'," with his feet in the ocean, so to speak.

But he had been up to something else, as well. As he and I walked forward, after the watch was relieved, we were overtaken by Lindquist, who was coming from the helm.

"Vat you ban doing mit da longboat to-night?" he asked Newman, curiously.

"Nothing, lad. You must have dreamed at your Sybeel—understand?" was Newman's prompt reply.

It took a moment to filter into the squarehead's mind. But he got it. "So—*ja*, it ban dream; I see noddings," he said.

"And you say nothing?"

"Ja, even to mineself I say noddings," promised Lindquist.

At the foc'sle door, Newman placed a detaining hand upon my shoulder and held me back.

"Was there much comment among the hands?" he asked.

I told him what Boston had said, and that it was the common opinion.

"That will do no harm," he remarked. "So long as they did not see, or guess—yes, it is a good blind."

I was a little resentful, and showed it. "You know I don't want you to tell me anything you don't want to tell me, but I think you might have dropped a hint in my ear. How was I to know that the greaser hadn't played a trick on you, and given you over to the Old Man? I don't know what game you're playing, and if you don't want to tell me I don't want to know—but I tell you I came pretty near spoiling it, whatever it is. I was on the verge of going aft and raising a row, just to find out what had become of you."

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"Jack, it isn't my mistrust that keeps you in the dark," says he. "You know I trust you absolutely. But I cannot explain—others have that right. But, lad, I can tell you this—things are moving, aft there, and the sky is brighter for me—and for her. And, you must not worry about me if this should happen again, some other night. I shall be safe; don't come hunting me, it might ruin everything. You will know soon just what is happening. And you already know, Jack, how I count upon you—and she, too. If things should go wrong, if he outwits me, it is your head and arm I count upon to aid her."

"Anything, any time," was my eager response. "Oh, I want to help."

I found my hand being tightly squeezed in his, and there was a little catch in his voice. "A thick-and-thin friend, eh, Jack? I've learned something about friendship since I have known you."

CHAPTER XVI

This strange peace, this interlude of quiet, lasted for several days. It was a curious time, a period of uneasy suspense for me, for I could feel hell simmering beneath the smooth surface of the ship's life, but I could not see it, or guess when or where it would bubble over.

Even Lynch toned down his adjectives, and slackened his driving. He was commanded to do so by Captain Swope while the watch was within hearing. The Old Man told him to "go easy with those boys, Mister; we've made it too hard for them this voyage." Aye, that was a nice bitter pill for Bucko Lynch to swallow before his watch; oh, the lads enjoyed it, I can tell you.

Fitzgibbon, the roaring lion, became the bleating lamb. He hardly worked his men during those days, let alone haze them. He let Nigger alone. He stopped swearing at Holy Joe. Why, a man might fancy from his manner that he had become afraid of his men. Aye, a man might fancy from their behavior that the lot of them aft possessed a sudden fear of the crew. Even the tradesmen were publicly ordered to treat the men with civility. But I didn't fancy they were afraid. I knew better. It was part of the game Swope was playing.

"I took the trick when Nils died," explained Newman, when I asked him what the new program meant, "and now our sweet captain is dealing a new hand, from a cold deck. He is nursing the scum, because this time he will strike through them, instead of through the squareheads."

By "scum," Newman meant our unsavory mob of stiffes. And indeed they were being "nursed," and without even suspecting it. Inevitably, the unwonted gentleness of the men aft was interpreted as weakness and fear, and of course their stiffes' courage



mounted and slopped over. Aye, he was a canny brute, was Captain Swope; he knew just how to play such a crowd as we were. And I think he thoroughly enjoyed such a cat-and-mouse game.

There was valorous talk in the foc'sle, and half-veiled insolence on deck. These cringing stiffes began to swank and swagger. They began to bluster openly about what they could do and would do; they began to tell each other how easy it would be to "dump 'em over, and take charge o' the hooker." That's the sort they were. It took bucko methods to keep them decent.

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Blackie and Boston were plainly jubilant over this turn of events. Now they were fairly shrewd men, even if they were damned rascals, and one would have thought they possessed sufficient insight to at least be suspicious of the skipper's sudden 'bout-face. But they were not. They were just as convinced as the rest of the stiffs that the afterguard had suddenly become afraid of the foc'sle. Just lack of imagination, I suppose; I've read that it is usually a characteristic of professional criminals.

They ceased hinting darkly and whispering in corners, and came out fiat-footed with their great news. Aye, and it was a weighty argument with the stiffs. Even though they knew about it already—as most of them did—it was a delight to talk about it openly. There was money in the hooker. That is what made their tongues wag. Aye, money; kegs and kegs of shining trade dollars, aft in the lazaret, to be had for the taking by lads with stiff backbones. And their backbones were stiff enough for the job. So Boston and Blackie told them, so Cockney told them, so they told each other.

It surprised me that Newman ignored this state of affairs among the stiffs. He could have clapped stoppers on Boston's and Blackie's jaws by just telling them to shut up. They stood in such awe and fear of him. He could have as easily silenced Cockney; aye, and the gang, too. We all stood in awe of him. There wasn't a man forward who would dream of opposing him openly.

But Newman was contemptuous of stiffs' talk. "Oh, let them blow off steam," says he. "Big talk, small deeds; that's their caliber, Jack. They'll have their sauciness hammered out of them quickly enough when Swope plays his next card."

"Aye, but what if Blackie and Boston, or that Cockney, make trouble? They are bossing the stiffs."

"Those two jail-birds know what I will do to them if they go beyond talk," said Newman. "As for that Whitechapel beauty, he is quite harmless, I think. They would not follow him into a fight; they know he is scum, like themselves, for all his bluster. They would follow me, or you, if we led the sailors aft. But so long as the sailors are quiet, there is no danger. That scum would not fight alone. And, as you know, our little friend has his Norsemen eating out of his hand."

This last was certainly true. By "our little friend" Newman meant Holy Joe. The squareheads idolized him. For one thing, his being a parson gave him, from the beginning, standing with them. They were decent, simple villagers, with an inbred respect for the cloth. But more important, was the service he had rendered their dead shipmate. They were not the men to forget a thing like that, or fail to be impressed by the fine courage Holy Joe had exhibited when he faced the angry mate.

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Now there was a curious thing. The decent men in the crew gave Holy Joe unstinted admiration; his bravery that day clinched his authority over the squareheads. They would have done almost anything for him; aye, they loved the little man, and admired him. Yet the stiffes were not much impressed by what Holy Joe did to the mate. I guess they simply couldn't understand it. But Cockney's trying to stick a knife into the mate's back quite captured their fancy. Aye, that attempted murder was a great deed; it made Cockney their hero. I won't say that the rest of us damned Cockney. We were, after all, foc'sle savages, and our hatred of Fitzgibbon was very bitter. But it took the stiffes to honor Cockney for that knife-play.

Well, Newman might dismiss this fellow with a contemptuous word, but I couldn't. Cockney had become a rival I must reckon with. I didn't like the way he lorded it over the stiffes in my watch, even if the stiffes themselves did like it. I didn't like the noise he made in the starboard foc'sle, or the hard case airs he assumed. I was number one bully in my watch, and intended to remain so. I was, in fact, cock of the crew (Newman excepted, of course) and I thought that Cockney's chesty boasting was in a way a defiance of me.

No doubt I was right. As I discovered in time, Cockney had a good reason behind his blatant tongue. It was necessary that he accustom some of the crew, even a few stiffes if no more, to follow his leadership. But he couldn't blow big in his own foc'sle, because Holy Joe wouldn't allow it; and he didn't dare lay a curse or a finger on the little parson because he knew if he did the squareheads would jump him in a body. So he ventured into my bailiwick, hoping, I suppose, that the open support of Boston and Blackie, his size, which matched my own, and his newly got reputation as a bad man with a knife, would bluff me.

It didn't. His dirty and violent talk sickened and wearied me, and just as soon as I had a reasonable pretext I ordered him out of the foc'sle. This wasn't as high-handed as it sounds, for Cockney had the gall one afternoon to leave the deck during his watch out, and break into my watch's rest with his obscene gabble.

He was disposed to dispute my order, and the stiffes backed him up with talk. So I turned out and turned to. I slapped a few stiffes, and threw Cockney through the door. He invited me out on deck, and of course I accepted. We had a nice set-to before all hands. Even the tradesmen came forward to see the sport.

Well, Newman's estimate of the man was correct. Cockney was scum, yellow scum. His fighting methods were as foul as his tongue; he tried all of his slum tricks, the knee, the eye-gouge, the Liverpool-butt, and when he found I was up to them, and the stronger man in the clinches, he wanted to call enough. But I was too incensed by this time to let him escape easily, and I battered him all about the foredeck. Finally he turned tail and fled aft. Of course I did not pursue beyond the deck-house. His fleeing

the battle really pleased me more than knocking him out. I felt sure that such an ignominious defeat would cook his goose with the stiffs.

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It did. Boston and Blackie stopped grooming Cockney for mob leader; they had seen that he lacked guts in a pinch, and that finished him with them. The other stiffs still welcomed and admired him (for, although he was a good sailor, he was one of them at heart, and, after all, hadn't he tried to stick the mate?), but he was no longer their hero. Aye, it was quite a fall for Cockney; he lost a lot of face when he ran away from my fists. He kept out of my foc'sle thereafter.

I mentioned that this fight started because Cockney came into our foc'sle during his watch on deck. Now, that illustrates the surprising slackness of discipline in the port watch. Just a few days before the mate was ready to shoot Holy Joe for going below during his watch on deck, but he never bothered his head about Cockney's much worse offense. In fact, during these strange days he seemed not to bother his head about anything his men did. He promenaded on the poop during his watches on deck, alone, or arm-in-arm with the captain, and just about left the ship to sail herself. No wonder the stiffs commenced to believe they could take liberties; in fact, they could take them in the mate's watch, and get away with it.

But they couldn't take liberties in the second mate's watch. You bet they couldn't! Bucko Lynch curbed his vocabulary and stopped using his fists, as the captain ordered, but he didn't stop working his men. There was no slackness in his watch; he kept us up to scratch. That made the starboard stiffs especially bitter against him. They felt themselves cheated of the easy times Fitzgibbon's men were having.

But the sailors didn't feel that way about it. They were worried, just as I was. The sailors knew ships as the stiffs did not. They could *feel* ships. Those dumb squareheads could not reason it out as I could (with Newman's assistance), but they could feel the undercurrent of intrigue. They were glad to escape the thumpings to which the mates had accustomed them; but they were not satisfied with the new order for they could feel that this strange peace was unreal, unhealthful. Aye, the calm before the typhoon. They felt it just as I felt it, just as Nigger felt it. As for pessimistic Nigger, so strictly did he mind his own business these quiet days he was like a dumb man, a silent brown shadow. But he went on sharpening his knife.

To heighten the squareheads' foreboding, and to scare the wits half out of us all, Nils' ghost visited the ship. You know what sort of men we were in that foc'sle; save Newman and the parson, we were ignorant men, and superstitious. We all believed implicitly in ghosts, I, and the squareheads, Nigger and Cockney, and even the stiffs who had not the sea in their blood. Aye, even Blackie and Boston believed in haunts. It seemed reasonable to us that Nils should come back to the scene of his earthly misery. Reasonable, and fearsome.

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Nils came at night, in the middle watch, always in the middle watch. That circumstance might have aroused suspicion in sceptical minds. But we were not sceptical.

Lynch had us busy forward this night. Aye, it had become a practice with him to keep us busy in the fore part of the ship during the night watches. One of his tradesmen, Connolly, kept the poop watch for him. No, we did not think this arrangement odd; we worked too hard to think.

Newman had the first wheel. At four bells, a lad named Oscar went aft to relieve the big fellow. A moment later he reappeared forward, wild-eyed and spluttering his own lingo. Oh, he was a frightened squarehead. All we could understand of his speech was the word "Nils."

The word was enough. We didn't need the commotion and consternation among Oscar's countrymen to help us interpret. He had seen Nils.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Lynch.

Lindquist answered for Oscar. Nils was at the wheel. Oscar had gone aft to relieve Newman, and he had seen his dead shipmate at the wheel, steering the ship. He was afraid to relieve a ghost.

"Oh, rot!" says Lynch. "Here, come along aft with me, the lot of you. We'll lay this ghost."

Oscar did not want to go aft again, but he had to. It was better to face a ghost than disobey Bucko Lynch. That is what the rest of us thought, too. We were all afraid to go aft, but more afraid not to. So we huddled close upon the second mate's heels, and clumped noisily upon the deck, as though to rout the wraith with our racket.

Perhaps our racket did send Nils away. It certainly aroused the men sleeping in the cabin, and the roundhouse. But we saw Newman at the helm, not Nils.

"Well, m'son, where's your ghost?" demanded Mister Lynch.

Oscar was still too frightened to muster his scant English, but Lindquist talked for him. "He say like dis, sir, Nils ban at da wheel when he koom aft, oond den he yump vrom der wheel oond run for'ard yust like da time da captain thoomp him."

"Rot!" says Lynch. "My man, have you permitted a ghost stand your trick at the wheel?" This last to Newman.

"Hardly a ghost, sir," answered Newman. We could not see his face, but from his tone I knew he was smiling. "Do I look like one? Not yet, I hope. I was just about to turn over

the wheel to the lad, sir, when he shied—at the shadow of the mizzen stays’I I think—and rushed away forward.”

“What is wrong, Mister?” inquired the captain’s soft voice. Aye, we all jumped as if it were the ghost talking. Captain Swope, with Mister Fitzgibbon behind him, had popped up from below as quietly as If he were a ghost.

“Nothing wrong, Captain,” replied Mister Lynch. “One of my jaspers declared he saw the little squarehead’s ghost dancing about the poop, and now the lot of them have nerves. I brought them aft to teach them better in a peaceful way.”

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This was a straight dig at the Old Man's "be gentle" orders, but it didn't pierce his skin. Swope laughed, genuinely amused, his soft, rippling laugh that always frightened us so much. "Peaceful, eh? By the Lord, Mister, it sounded like an army overhead. And it was no more than a ghost!" He peered aft, and discerned Newman at the wheel, recognizing him by bulk, I guess, for the binnacle lights were half shuttered and Newman's face invisible. But I'm sure he recognized him, for he pursed his lips in a way I had seen him do before when he looked at Newman. He strolled away forward, to the break of the poop, glancing this way and that, and back again to the hatch. "If it were moonlight, I'd say your man was touched," says he to Lynch. "But I suppose he was half asleep and dreaming."

"I'll wake him up and work the dreams out of him," promised Mister Lynch.

"But no hazing, Mister. The men are in bad enough temper as it is."

Aye, thus to Lynch, as though the rest of us were beyond ear-shot. But all the time his eyes were upon us, measuring the effect of his words. Oh, he was a sly beast, a "slick one," as Beasley said.

"Which is the lad who beheld this—ghost?" he added.

The second mate shoved Oscar forward so that he stood in the light that streamed up from the cabin.

"So one little ghost scared you, eh?" says he to poor trembling Oscar. "Why, my man, if all the ghosts in this ship were to begin walking about, we living men would be crowded into the sea." With that he went below, laughing, as though he had just made a fine joke, and leaving us more frightened than ever.

The mate went below again also, but he wasn't laughing. We sensed that the news worried Fitzgibbon, and that strengthened our conviction. Blackjack Fitzgibbon had cause for worry. So we thought. Wasn't it he, as well as Swope, who mishandled the boy to his death?

That ended the scene aft. Oscar relieved the wheel; he had to. Lynch put the rest of us to work again, and during the balance of the watch we saw ghosts in every corner.

When we went below at eight bells, we held a grand talk in the foc'sle, a parliament that practically all hands attended. Aye, we were quite convinced that the ghost was abroad. Oscar stuck to his yarn, and embellished it, and left no room in our minds for doubt. Newman laughed at us, and denied the presence of a spook on the poop; that done he turned in and slept. But his evidence didn't shake our belief. Oscar gave too many particulars.

The compass had not been shuttered when he went aft to relieve the wheel, and he had seen Nils standing in the light. He couldn't be mistaken. "Yust as plain like a picture." He knew him by his boyish stature, by his beardless features, by his clothes. He was wearing his Scotch-plaid coat and red tam-o'-shanter; Oscar couldn't be mistaken in them, because he had helped Nils pick them out in a Glasgow slops shop "last ship." Didn't his mates remember those togs?

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His mates remembered them. So did the rest of us. That coat and cap had hung on the wall opposite Nils' bunk all during his illness. He was very proud of these colorful garments. Of course, we told each other, he would appear in them after death. And, of course, he was bound to come back. Didn't murdered men always come back? So we assured each other; and the older men began spinning yarns about other ghosts in other ships. Aye, we talked so much we were afraid to turn in. Captain Swope's words about the ghost crew in the *Golden Bough* impressed us mightily. We told each other that many men must have died cruel deaths in this notorious hooker; very likely Nils' spirit was but one of many. Some of the lads recalled mysteries of the night that they had encountered in this ship, shadowy things melting into darkness, strange noises, and the like; and always they had seen or heard these things aft, around the break of the poop or beneath the boat skids—in just about the spot where Nils had been beaten up, first by the skipper and then by the mate. Aye, Nils gave us the creeps. Another herald of storm, I felt.

Next night Nils did not walk, though the lads in both watches insisted they saw and heard things that were not right or natural. The night following in the midwatch—our midwatch—half the watch swore they saw him flit across the main deck and disappear behind the roundhouse.

The next night marked Nils' last and most startling appearance. In the heart of the middle watch, while my mates were sound asleep, the ghost walked into the empty port foc'sle.

That is, the port foc'sle should have been empty, since the mate had the watch out. But it happened that Nigger, coming from the wheel, seized an opportunity to slip into the deserted room for a quiet smoke-O. It was a liberty he was safe in taking, now that the bucko mate had reformed.

My bunk in the starboard foc'sle was handy to the door connecting the two rooms, and when he burst terror-stricken through that door my unconscious head was right in front of him. I awakened abruptly to discover Nigger clawing my hair; aye, and when I looked up and saw his convulsed face and gleaming, bulging eyes, I knew at once he had seen Nils.

He was too scared to talk; he could only stutter. "Gug-gug-gug-God!" But he pointed into the other foc'sle.

Well, my bowels were water, as the saying is, but nevertheless I turned out promptly. I had to. Other men were waking up. Even Newman, in the bunk opposite, had his eyes open; and he was regarding me in a very curious way. So I couldn't hold back. I was bully of the crowd, and I would not let the crowd think I was afraid to face anything, even a ghost.

Out I rolled, and into the doorway I stepped. There I stopped. God's truth, I was frozen to the spot with terror. For Nils' shadow lay athwart the floor of the port fo'sle, his moving shadow. It was this shadow coming in through the deck door that had frightened Nigger. He recognized the shadow as Nils because a tam-o'-shanter crowned the silhouette, and Nils had owned the only tam on board.

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I recognized that awful shadow, too. But I saw more than the shadow. I saw a white hand appear on the door jamb. A ghost-like hand, it was so white and small, a patch of plaid cloth, a little bare, white foot lifting above the sill, and then the tam and the white face beneath it. Aye, that white face with its great, staring eyes!

So much I saw during the instant I stood in the doorway. Then Newman pushed past me and crossed the port foc'sle in a bound. He joined the white face in the other doorway, and disappeared with it into the outer darkness.

Not a man save I—and Newman—had had nerve enough to turn out. Not a man save I—and Newman—had seen that white face. Even Nigger had not seen it; he had run out on deck through the starboard door. But my watch-mates were awake and eager. "Is it gone?" they chorused.

"Yes," I answered gruffly. I rolled into my bunk, and turned my face to the wall. My wits were still spinning from shock, and I didn't want to answer questions.

"Where did Big 'Un go?" came from Blackie's bunk.

"How do I know? Stow the guff, the lot of you; I want to sleep."

But I didn't sleep. I lay there thinking about the face I had seen. Nils' shadow, Nils' clothes—and the lady's face! The ghost that had scared all hands was the lady dressed in Nils' clothes!

CHAPTER XVII

The lady brought Newman bad news. As I afterwards learned, the steward overheard a conversation between the captain and the mate, and reported it to her, and she immediately risked her masquerade forward to carry the tale to Newman.

During the morning Newman said to me, "Watch your step to-day, Jack. Trouble brewing."

I watched my step, but not until the middle of the afternoon watch, when I went aft to relieve Newman at the wheel, did I see any indications of a coming breach of the afterguard's own peace. I sensed it then, before I saw it. Aye, as soon as I stepped upon the poop I smelled the old air. The very carriage of the officers said that the old times were back again.

Newman gave me the course. I repeated it aloud, as is the custom. Then he whispered, hurriedly.

“I think he intends to lock me up. Help Deakin keep peace for’ard. Remember, lad, my life—and hers—may depend upon it.”

He started forward. I wanted to call after him, run after him, ask him a score of questions and directions.

But I was chained to my task. I dare not leave the wheel. Neither dare I call out. For Captain Swope had appeared on deck. He stood lounging against the companion hatch, staring aft, in our direction. Bucko Fitzgibbon stood by his side. They had suddenly appeared from below as the helm was changing hands.

Aye, and as soon as I clapped eyes upon them I knew that at last hell was about to bubble over. They had thrown off the masks of meekness that so ill fitted them. Fitzgibbon was truculence personified. The expression in Swope’s face when he looked at Newman was so terrible it might almost of itself make a lad stop breathing—an expression of gloating, pitiless, triumphant cruelty.

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Lynch, in charge of the deck, stood apart from the others, but he too was looking aft, not at me, but at Newman. There was something in his bearing also which declared plainly that some ugly thing was about to happen.

Yet Newman was permitted to pass the companion hatch without interference. In fact, the pair turned their backs to him. I had, for an instant, the wild hope that Newman was mistaken in his fears. But only for an instant. Because, when Newman neared the forward end of the poop, the two tradesmen of the port watch suddenly popped up from the ladder and confronted him. Sails carried a sawed-off shotgun in the crook of his arm, and Chips had a pair of handcuffs dangling in his grasp.

Newman stopped short. Who would not, with the muzzle of a shotgun carelessly pointed at his breast? No order to halt was needed.

Suddenly I saw through the skipper's game. Aye, and the devilish craft of it horrified me, and wrung a cry of warning from my throat. For when Newman halted, Swope and Fitzgibbon turned towards him, and, while Swope continued to lounge against the hatch, the mate closed in behind Newman, and I saw a revolver in his hand. At the same time, the man with the shotgun said something to Newman, something that angered the big fellow, I could tell from the way his shoulders humped and his body tensed. Squarely behind him stood the mate.

Oh, it was a clever murder Yankee Swope had planned, a safe murder! If Newman made any motion that could be interpreted as resisting arrest, and was shot in the back and killed—why, the officer who shot him was performing his duty, and an unruly sailor had received his deserts! That is the way the log would put it, and that is the way folks ashore would look at it.

The second mate saw through the scheme, also. I am sure he had no previous knowledge of it, for an expression of surprise and consternation showed in his face, and he threw up his arm in a warning gesture. But it was I who warned Newman. I sang out lustily,

"Look out—behind you!"

Newman looked behind him. He threw back his head and laughed. It amused him to see the mate standing there so sheepishly, with his pistol in his hand. But I did not laugh, for Yankee Swope was staring at me, and there was fury in his face. God's truth, my hair stood up, and my toes crawled in their boots! Oh, I knew I had let myself in for it with that warning shout.

But if Newman laughed, he did not venture to move. He, too, saw through the skipper's plan, and by his action promptly defeated it. He laughed, but he also elevated his

hands above his head to show his unarmed condition and his pacific intent. Then, ignoring the mate, he spoke to Captain Swope.

“Am I to consider myself under arrest, Captain?”

Swope turned his face to the speaker, and glad I was to be free of his gaze. He was a furious man that moment; I could see him biting his lips, and clenching and unclenching his hands from excess of anger. Yet he answered Newman in a soft, even voice, and in the same half-bantering vein the big fellow had used. He was a strong man, was Swope; he could control his temper when he thought it necessary.

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"Yes, my man, you may consider yourself under arrest!" he said.

"Then you will notice I offer no resistance," added Newman. "I am unarmed, and eager to obey all legal commands of my captain. Shall I lower my arms, and permit this gentleman to fasten the irons upon my wrists?"

"No less eager to break into limbo, than to break out of it—*eh?*" commented the captain. "Yes, I grant you permission to be handcuffed—but not that way!—turn around, and place your hands together behind your back."

Newman promptly complied with the directions, and the carpenter stepped forward and slipped on the cuffs.

"Lock those irons tightly, Connolly," Swope directed the tradesman. "We have to deal with a desperate man, a tricky man, a damned jail-bird, Connolly. Squeeze those irons down upon his wrists. It doesn't matter if they pinch him."

From where I stood I could not see, but I could imagine the steel rings biting cruelly into my friend's flesh. I felt a rage against the captain which overcame the sick fear of what he might do to me. But my rage was impotent; it could not help Newman.

Mister Lynch tried to help him; and by his action indicated plainly what was his position in the matter of the arrest. He crossed the deck, and examined the prisoner's wrists.

"These irons are too tight, and will torture the man," he said to the captain. "In my judgment, sir, it is not necessary to secure him in this fashion."

"In my judgment it is," was Swope's bland response. Then he added, "And now, Mister Fitzgibbon, and you, Mister Lynch—if you will escort this mutinous scoundrel below to the cabin, I'll see that this affair is properly entered in the logbook, and then we will put him in a place where he cannot work further mischief. Connolly, you and your mate may go for'ard."

A moment later I was alone on the poop. So quickly and quietly had the affair been managed that none of the watch on deck seemed to be aware of it. They were busied about the fore part of the ship at the various jobs Lynch had set them to. But the tradesmen of the watch were not in sight, and I had no doubt they were forewarned, and had joined the port watch tradesmen before the cabin, to guard against any possible trouble.

I wondered what to do. Do something, I felt I must. If I sang out and informed the watch, the afterguard would reach me and squelch my voice long before my mates could lay aft. And indeed, laying aft in a body was what the crew must not do. That would be trouble, mutiny perhaps, and Newman's injunction was to keep the peace.

I could do nothing to help my friend. But I felt I must do something. The cabin skylights were open, for it was tropic weather, and a murmur of voices ascended through the opening. I could not distinguish words, but I felt I must know what they were saying to Newman, or about him. So I took a chance. I slipped the wheel into the becket, and crept to the edge of the skylights.

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I could peek into only a narrow section of the saloon, for I did not dare shove my face into the opening. They would have seen me. But I could hear every voice, every word, and my ears gave me an accurate picture of the scene below.

The first voice I heard was the voice of one of my foc'sle mates, and he was giving testimony against Newman.

"'E was in the syl-locker mykin' hup to 'er," the speaker said, "an' tellin' as 'ow 'e'd lead the crew arft, and kill the hofficers, and tyke charge 'imself. That's wot 'e says, s' 'elp me!"

"Ah, yes, he was making up to her, eh? And plotting mutiny? And my wife lent herself to such a scheme, did she?" This came in Swope's voice, soft, purring, the very tone an insult. "So my wife was in the sail-locker with this convict, and he was making up to her? Well, well!"

"You know that creature is lying, Angus!" broke in another voice. Aye, and I very nearly gave myself away by craning my head to see the speaker. For this was the lady's voice, hot with anger and resentment and loathing. "You know very well why I met Roy in the sail-locker; you know very well we were planning to avoid bloodshed, not cause it."

"What are you doing here?" exclaimed the captain, with a savage edge to his words. "This is a man's business, madam! Return to your room at once. Mister Fitzgibbon, take her to her room!"

There was the sound of movement below. A chair scraped. Then Lynch's voice rang out sharply, "Stop that, Fitz!" The lady's voice said, "You need not touch me, I am going." A second later she spoke again, from a different point, and I judged her to be in the doorway of her stateroom. "You, at least, Mister Lynch, will bear witness that I deny these charges against myself and against—against him. They are lies. This spy is lying, my husband is lying. I know the truth. Do you hear me, Angus? I know the truth, and you cannot silence me with lies!" A door closed.

"Now we will continue our examination," said Captain Swope.

Just then I heard a faint slatting of canvas aloft. I sped for the wheel, and when, an instant later, the tradesman, Morton, poked his head above the level of the poop, and looked aft, I had the ship steady again. Morton's head disappeared, and after waiting a few moments to make sure he did not intend coming up on the poop, I returned to the skylight.

My precious shipmate was talking again. "Hi 'eard 'im sy in the Knitting Swede's 'ow 'e was shipping in this ship just to ryse 'ell."

“He said that, did he?” commented Captain Swope. “Now what have you to say to that, Newman?”

For the first time I heard my friend’s voice. His words were cool, contemptuous. Aye, they heartened me; they told me he was far from being defeated.

“The rat lies, of course, as all of you know.”

“And you say that Newman has persistently endeavored to stir up the crew to acts of disobedience and violence?” continued the captain.

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"Yes, sir," was the answer. "E would sy as 'ow there was a lot o' money in the lazaret, and if we would follow 'im arft 'e would give hit to us."

"Now I know that is a lie," broke in Lynch. The second mate's voice was also contemptuous, but not cool; I could tell he was excited and angry. "I've watched this crowd, Captain; I know them like I know the back of my hand. This man, Newman, is the best sailor for'ard, and the strongest influence for peace. He, and the little Holy Joe the crimp gave us, prevented a riot the night the boy died. I know this fellow is lying, Captain!"

"That will do, Mister Lynch," exclaimed Swope. "I did not ask your opinion in this matter. I would suggest, sir, that it is your watch on deck, and the ship may need your attention."

"Very good, sir," retorted Lynch. "But I wish to tell you this, Captain—I know this man is innocent of these charges, and I will not be a party to your action against him."

"Have a care, sir; I am captain of this vessel," cried Swope.

"I recognize your authority, but that does not alter my stand in this case," said Lynch.

"That will do, sir; go on deck!" was the captain's command.

I was at the wheel, and the ship was on her course, when the second mate appeared. Oh, but he was in a towering rage! He stamped the deck like a full watch. He sang out to me, "Damn your eye, man, watch your wheel; the wake is like a snake's track!" I answered meekly, "Yes, sir," and held her nose true. He looked at me sharply, and I knew that he guessed what I had been up to. But he said nothing more; instead, he stormed for'ard, and worked out his rage among the stiff.

I overheard no more of the proceedings in the cabin, for I did not dare leave the wheel while Mister Lynch was on deck. But I was easier in my mind concerning Newman's fate, for what I had overheard convinced me the big fellow stood in no immediate danger of his life. That Swope meant to kill, I had not the least doubt—Newman, himself, said as much—but the time was not ripe for that act.

So I occupied myself with thoughts about the traitor in the crew. At that moment Captain Swope was not the only man on board with murder in his heart! My fingers pressed the spokes as though they had hold of the Cockney's throat.

I cursed myself for a stupid fool not to have known Cockney was the spy. I should have known. He was that sort, a bully and a boot-licker by turns. In the foc'sle he was more violent than any other in his denunciation of the buckos; on deck he cringed before them. He had always fawned upon Newman, but I suspected he hated my friend, because of what happened in the Knitting Swede's. But I had not suspected him of

treachery to his foc'sle mates, because he was an old sailor and a good one, and there were plenty of stiffs on board more fitted, I thought, for spy's work. But Cockney was the man. I could not mistake his voice for another's. He was even now down below bearing false witness against my friend.

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I watched the deck closely, and pretty soon I saw Cockney go forward. So I knew that the farcical examination of Newman was ended, and that he was probably locked up with the rats in the lazaret. I promised myself I would have a heart-to-heart talk with Cockney just as soon as eight bells released me from the wheel.

But when eight bells did go, I had something else to think about. Indeed, yes! My own skin, no less.

All hands were mustered aft when the port watch came on deck. This was unusual, a break in routine, for it was not customary to call the crew aft at the close of the day watches. Moreover, the men were herded aft by the tradesmen, who were armed. Mister Lynch came up on the poop, and was obviously taking no part in the proceedings. Oh, it was the end of the easy times, and all hands knew it.

When the men were collected by the main mast, the little parson was plucked out of the crowd and ushered into the cabin, where the skipper and the mate awaited him. Aye, that was the reason for the muster; Holy Joe must be punished for his defiance of Fitzgibbon. Five minutes after he entered the cabin, he was thrown out upon the deck, bruised, bleeding and unconscious, and his mates were told to pick him up and carry him forward.

The Old Man and the mate appeared on the poop immediately afterwards. The instant I clapped eyes upon Swope, I knew that my turn was next. I saw it in his eyes, in his face and carriage. He looked and behaved just as he had that day he attacked Nils. He looked at me with a bright, cruel glare; he smiled, and licked his lips with his tongue. Oh, I was frightened; worse, I felt sick and weak. And I felt anger, too; aye, there was rising in me a wild and murderous rage, which, if I let it go, would, I knew, master both fear and caution. I kept repeating to myself during the few minutes of grace allowed me, "I must not lose my temper, I must not lose my temper." For if I did lose my temper, and defy my masters with fist and tongue, I knew I should be beaten until I was physically disabled, perhaps fatally disabled. And then who would hold the crew in check, who would labor to save Newman?

The Cockney came aft to relieve the wheel. There was a smirk on his face, and a swagger in his walk, as he came along the lee side of the poop. I noticed him leer confidentially at the mate, as he passed that worthy. That Cockney thought himself a very clever fellow, no doubt, having been taken into the confidence of the ship's masters, having been assigned to do their secret dirty work. It was all I could do to keep from flying at his throat, when he came within reach of my arms.

He murmured some hypocritical words as he stepped into my place. He was a good dissembler.

“My heye, but poor ‘Oly Joe caught it,” says he. “They bloomin’ near skinned ‘im alive. They ‘arve Newman in the lazaret. Blimme, Shreve, we got to do somethink abaht it!”

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The answer he got was a grunt. My mind and eyes were on the officers. I started forward, saying to myself, "I must not lose my temper."

CHAPTER XVIII

"Not so fast, my lad. I think I should like to look you over."

These were the words with which Captain Swope arrested my progress. He had permitted me to almost reach the ladder leading to the main deck, before he hailed. The cat and the mouse; aye, that was it! He must play with his prey. Such teasing gave him pleasure.

I stopped, of course, and turned, and faced him. Never did Captain Swope remind me more of a cat than that instant, when I met his glittering, pitiless eyes, and saw his smiling, red-lipped mouth, and listened to his soft, purring voice. I was his mouse, helpless, trapped. God's truth, I felt like one!

He looked me over slowly, from head to foot. The mate walked around behind me, and I knew the attack would come from that direction. Swope knew that I knew it; that is why he held my eyes to the front with his deliberate and insulting inspection. The cat and the mouse—he would enjoy my nervousness.

I think I disappointed him, for I tried hard to appear unconcerned. So, finally, he spoke again.

"What is your name?"

"Jack S-hreve, sir," I answered.

"Shreve? Now, what signboard did you rob? Shreve is a good name, too good for a foc'sle rat. Did you come by it honestly? Did you have a father by that name? I dare say not. A gutter product would not know his father, *eh*, my lad?"

There was no mistaking the deliberate intent of the insult, or its foul meaning. Despite my efforts, I felt the blood in my cheeks, and my fingers clenched of their own accord. I thought how white was Yankee Swope's neck, and how near, and how easily I could reach out and choke the vile words in his throat. I very nearly lost my temper—and with it, my life, and, I think, the other two lives, which I actually valued above my own.

The thing which saved me was the glimpse of a cold, speculative gleam in my tormentor's eyes. It was the mere shadow of an expression, but it acted like cold water upon my hot thoughts. I divined, suddenly, that something more than sport was behind the captain's insults. He wanted me to blow up in a great rage, and attack him, or the mate. I suddenly knew this was so, and the danger of my losing my temper was past.

I lowered my eyes, afraid their expression would betray my knowledge, and said submissively, “Yes, sir, I guess so, sir.”

“I was told you had a long tongue, but you do not seem very glib this minute,” Captain Swope went on. “You’ve taken a reef in it, *eh*, Shreve?”

I said, “Yes, sir.”

“But you forgot to take a reef in it awhile back, didn’t you?”

I knew he was referring to the shout that warned Newman. I did not venture a reply.

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"So now you have put your tongue in gaskets," he commented, after a pause. "Too bad you didn't do it before. A long tongue is a very bad habit, my lad, and I do not allow my hands to have bad habits. I correct them—so!"

He struck me then, not a heavy, stunning blow, but a short-armed, slashing uppercut, which ripped the flesh of my cheek, and sent me stumbling backwards against the mate's body. I took that blow meekly, I took Fitzgibbon's harder blow meekly. I stood there and let the two of them pummel me, and knock me down and kick me, and I made no show of resistance. I buried my head in my arms, and drew up my knees, and let them work their will on me.

Oh, it was a cruel dressing down they gave me! My face became raw meat, my body a mass of shooting pains. I took it meekly. I tried to guard my vitals, and my addled, star-riddled wits clung to the one idea—"I must not lose my temper!"

I took my medicine. I did not lift a hand against them. I grovelled on the deck like a cur, and did not fight back.

It was hard to behave like that. It was the hardest thing I had ever done—keeping my temper, and taking that beating without show of resistance. I was a fighting animal; never before in my life had I tamely turned the other cheek. Long afterwards I came to realize that those few moments, during which I lay on the deck and felt their boots thud into my flesh, were educative moments of vital importance in my growth into manhood. I was learning self-control; it was being literally kicked into me. It was a lesson I needed, no doubt—but, oh, it was a bitter, bitter lesson.

They gave over their efforts, finally. I had not much wit left in me, but I heard the captain's voice, faintly, as though he were at a distance, instead of bending over me.

"There's no fight in this rat," he said. "Might as well boot him off the poop, Mister, and let him crawl into his hole. He's not dangerous, and the ship needs him as beef."

No sooner said than done. I had obligingly saved them the trouble of booting me very far, for I had been inching myself forward ever since the onslaught. When the captain spoke, I was almost at the head of the ladder to the main deck—an instant after he spoke, I was lying on the main deck at the foot of the poop ladder, and all the stars in the universe were dancing before my eyes.

I got dizzily to my hands and knees, and then to my feet, and staggered forward. Captain Swope's soft voice followed me.

"Next time reef your tongue before you open your mouth!" he called.

I made my way into the foc'sle, and my watchmates grabbed me, and swabbed and kneaded my hurts, and swore their sympathy. My injuries were not very severe—some



nasty gashes about the head and face, and innumerable bruises upon the body. Fortunately I was in no way disabled. My bones were intact. I was in far better case, they told me, than poor Holy Joe. He was lying in his bunk unconscious, that very moment; he had a broken arm, and most of his teeth were gone.

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I saw at once that the men were quite wild with rage and anxiety. From the sounds that came in the foc'sle door, I knew that the mate was hazing his men. Aye, he was going after them in the good old way, quite as if there had been no peaceful interlude. I did not have to see the mates' men to know their temper; I could tell from the temper of my own watch how the other watch felt.

It was a terrific shock to most of them, that sudden return of brutality. Aye, just in that I saw the devilish cunning of Captain Swope. He knew what the effect would be upon the minds of the men of slackening his hell-ship discipline, and then, when the habit of passive endurance was weakened, suddenly tightening the reins. He knew that then the bit would be well nigh unendurable. Oh, Swope had calculated shrewdly; he foresaw the effect not only of an outburst of promiscuous brutality, but of the arrest of Newman, and the beating up of Holy Joe.

I could see the effect at a glance. The stiffs were panicky. These valorous stiffs were glowering, really dangerous at last. The squareheads were hysterical with rage. The squareheads knew why Holy Joe had suffered—because of them, because of Nils. Because of Newman, too, but they did not guess that. Then, the knowledge that Newman was trapped was a heavy blow to sailors and stiffs alike. They had all, consciously or unconsciously, depended upon Newman's sane strength. With him taken from them they felt—every man-jack—that their backs were to the wall.

Just as soon as the blood was washed out of my eyes, and I could see my mates' faces, just as quickly as the ringing in my ears subsided, and I could hear their voices, I knew that the moment was past when the peace could be kept in that foc'sle. Perhaps Newman could have composed the crowd, but I doubt it. The captain had succeeded in driving them too far and too hard, in frightening them too much. He had won, I thought despairingly; he would get his mutiny.

For it was now the elemental instinct of self-preservation that swayed the men and determined their actions. Oh, there was plenty of sympathy for me, and for Holy Joe and Newman; there was rage on our account; but underlying the sympathy and rage was a very terrible fear. It was a fear of death, a fear that each man felt for himself. Self-preservation, that's it!

My shipmates, sailors and stiffs, had reached a point where they were afraid not to take some violent and illegal action against the men in command of the ship. Their long misuse, the wrongs and indignities each man had suffered, the fate of Nils, the events of the afternoon, had all culminated in the belief these men now had—good men and bad men both, remember!—that they must revolt, that they must kill the men aft before the men aft killed them! There were other factors at work, of course, greed for gold and lust of revenge, but this simple, primal fear for their own skins was the determining factor in the situation.



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"By God, I never go on deck but I'm scared o' my life!" swore one of the stiffes, named Green. And he voiced the common feeling.

I was, of course, much concerned for the parson. I went into the port foc'sle to look at him—and he looked bad, lying there unconscious. The squareheads had washed his face, but had not ventured to touch his arm. His face was in a shocking state, and I feared his body might be broken, as was Nils' body. He was much worse off than I; for he had not my iron muscles, to withstand hard knocks, nor my skill in rough-and-tumble fighting, which had enabled me to protect the vital parts of my body.

"We'll have to get him aft, where the lady can attend to him—or else get her for'ard," I declared.

"No chance," answered Boston.

"If we take him aft dey ban kill him," asserted one of the squareheads.

"She can't come for'ard; she's locked in her room," said another.

"How do you know that?" I cried.

"Cockney says so. He was there when the skipper locked her in," said Boston.

For an instant I forgot Holy Joe, and his evil plight.

"What yarn did that Cockney bring for'ard with him?" I demanded.

"Why, he was there when they got the Big 'Un," answered Blackie. "He was helpin' the steward break out a cask o' beef from the lazaret, when they brought Big 'Un into the cabin, cuffed up, and with the drop on him. He says the hen squawked, and the Old Man shut her in her room. Then they kicked him out on deck, so he wouldn't see too much o' what was goin' on. He says they put the Big 'Un down in the lazaret, and they're goin' to croak him sure, and if we got any guts we'll go aft tonight and turn him loose. That's what Cockney says."

Well, I let myself go, verbally. I said things about that Cockney, and I was only sorry Cockney was not there to hear them. I knew most of the hard words of three languages, and I used them all. Oh, it was a relief to give even verbal release to the ocean of hate and rage in my soul! I told the crowd what I thought of Cockney. Then I told them why. I told them what had really happened in the cabin, what Cockney really was.

They believed me. They knew me; they knew I would not lie in such a case, they could not help but sense the sincerity of my loathing. They knew Cockney, also. They knew he was the sort to spy and perjure—a good many of them were that sort themselves!—



and as soon as I paused for breath, this man and that began to recall certain suspicious acts of Cockney he had noticed. Aye, they believed me, and the curses heaped on Cockney's head were awful to the ear.

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They had good reason to curse. My disclosure gave them a fresh fear. Consternation was in their faces and voices, especially in the faces and voices of the stiff. I knew very well what frightened them. Cockney had been most violent and outspoken among those advocating mutiny, far more outspoken than the cautious Blackie or Boston, and the disaffected had naturally confided in him. I knew that every man in the crew who had expressed a willingness to revolt was known by name to Cockney (and without doubt to Yankee Swope) and these men now could not escape the feeling that they were marked men. If anything had been needed to settle the conviction of the foc'sle that mutiny was necessary, this unmasking of Cockney supplied the need.

I felt this, rather than thought it out. It was in the air, so to speak. At the moment, I was too much concerned for the little parson to reason coolly. Oh, I reasoned about it a little while later, not coolly perhaps, but certainly quickly, and leaped helter-skelter to a momentous decision. But just then I thought about Holy Joe.

I wanted to get his arm set, and his body examined. I, myself, was not competent to do either. The squarehead had spoken truth—it would be madness to carry the man aft for treatment; and I judged Cockney had spoken truly, too, when he said the lady was locked up. That agreed with what I, myself, had heard, I appealed to the crowd.

“We’ve got to get Holy Joe fixed up. Any of you know anything about bone setting? Who’ll lend a hand?”

To my surprise, Boston volunteered. “I worked in a hospital once,” he said.

He set to work immediately in an efficient, businesslike manner. I was astonished. His fingers were as deft—though not as gentle—as Newman’s. I thought, as I tore a blanket into strips, under his direction, how characteristic it was of the fellow to let a hurt shipmate lie unattended when he possessed the skill to help him. Aye, that was the sort of scut Boston was!

“A clean break; no trick to set it,” he announced, after examining the arm. Nor was it. We cut up a bunkboard for splints, used the blanket for bandages, and triced the injured member in short order. Boston was deft, but he didn’t try to spare his patient any pain; when he snapped the ends of the bone together, Holy Joe came out of his swoon with a cry of agony.

He half raised himself, and looked at us. “Let there be no trouble, boys—for God’s sake, no fighting!” he said. Then he fainted away again.

We undressed him, and Boston pronounced his ribs sound. Then we carried him into the starboard foc’sle, and placed him in my bunk, which had a comfortable mattress.

“Now you see what he got?” said Boston, wiping his hands on his greasy pants. “And you see what you got. And you know what happened to Big ‘Un. Well, how about it, Shreve? Do you stand with us?”

“With the crowd, sink or swim—that’s what we want to know?” added Blackie.

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I sized them up. Sailors and stiff, they stood shoulder to shoulder. There was no longer a division in that crowd. And they looked to me to lead them.

I was thinking, desperately trying to discover a course that would help Newman. So I tried to put the crowd off.

"You heard what Holy Joe said?" I asked.

"He's balmy—and besides what d'ye think a Holy Joe would say?" retorted Boston. "Now, here's the lay, Shreve—we got to put a stop to this sort o' work." He pointed to the bunk that held Holy Joe. "That means we got to take charge of this hooker," he went on. "All hands are agreed to it. But where do you stand—with us, or against us?"

I made my plea for peace, knowing beforehand it was useless. "How about Newman?" I said. "You know as well as I that the skipper is out to kill him. And I have Newman's word for it that the Old Man wants to kill the lady, too. He's just waiting for an excuse. That's why he's dressing us down this way, and hazing us raw—so we'll mutiny, and give him the excuse he needs. Can't you see that?"

"He'll croak 'em anyway—and maybe we can save them," retorted Boston.

"No, Lynch won't allow it," said I. "He's for Newman and the lady. The Old Man will not dare do it unless we give him the chance by attacking the cabin, because Lynch would testify against him at the Inquiry. The Old Man has logged Newman as a mutineer, and our going aft would make him out one. As it is, Lynch is standing up for him—and for us."

But this was too much for the crowd to swallow. Too many of them had felt the weight of the second mate's fist.

"Lynch for us? By God, when I have my knife in his gullet—then he'll be for us!" swore Blackie, and the chorus of approval which followed this statement showed what the rest thought.

"The last thing Newman said to me, when I relieved him," I went on, "was a command to prevent this trouble. He said his life, and hers, depended on our keeping quiet."

"And how about us, how about our lives?" demanded Boston. "That damned murderer aft is out to croak us, too, ain't he—all of us he can spare? Look what he's done already! No, by God, we're going to put a stop to it—and we want to know if you are with us?"

I tried sarcasm. "I suppose you'll end it by walking aft and letting them empty their shotguns into you! I suppose you'll chase them overboard, guns and all, with your cute little knives, and your belaying-pins! Good Lor', men, have you gone crazy? If I hadn't

overheard Cockney, I suppose he'd have led you aft, and got half of you filled with shot. As it is, they know you are talking mutiny, and they will be expecting you. You can't surprise them—and what can you do against their guns?"

Blackie cursed Cockney in a way to curdle the blood. Then he made plain the fear that was driving the men.

"They know we are talking mutiny—yes, and what's more, they know *who's* talking mutiny."

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"We got to do it now, guns or no guns—ain't that right, mates?" said the man, Green.

"And the money, too!" added Blackie, artfully. "Enough of it aft there to set us all up for gents."

Boston plucked me by the sleeve. "Me and Jack are goin' to have a few words private," says he to the rest. "He's with us—no fear—a feller like Jack Shreve stands by his mates. Come on, Jack."

I went with him willingly. I was anxious to hear what he had to say "private." I was even more anxious to get away from the crowd for a few moments, and think out some scheme whereby I could avert the impending catastrophe.

Boston led me up on the foc'sle head, and we sat down upon an anchor stock.

"We ain't such fools as you think, Blackie and me," he commenced abruptly. "We ain't goin' to face guns with knives—not us. But guns to guns—well, that's different now, ain't it?"

"What do you mean?" I demanded. "Have you got a gun?"

In answer, he lifted my hand and placed it over his dungaree jacket, I felt something hard, of irregular shape, beneath the thin cloth, the outline of a revolver.

"It ain't the only one," he assured me. "Two brace we came on board with—and we weren't drunk, you bet. We hid them safe before them fellers aft went through the dunnage. And Cockney didn't find out about them, either. They don't know aft that we're heeled. The rest o' the gang ain't acquainted with the fact yet, either. We'll let them know when the time comes."

He paused, and looked at me inquiringly. "Well?" I asked.

"Well!" he echoed. "Well, just this—a gang that has guts enough to face shotguns with sheath-knives is a pretty tough gang, ain't it? And it'll be a lot tougher when it finds out it has four guns of its own, and plenty o' shells. And it kind of evens up the chances, doesn't it?"

I was thinking fast. All chance to keep the peace was gone, I realized. Unless——

"We ain't goin' to let them fellers slaughter us; don't you worry none about that," went on Boston. "This ain't the first gun-play me and Blackie has took part in, you bet! He's a dead shot, and I'm a good one. We got it all planned out, Blackie and me. We never intended going aft like the Cockney wanted us to. We're goin' to lay low, behind cover, and pick 'em off—the mates, and old Swope, too, if he shows his blasted head. Then, where will them sailmakers and carpenters be, with their boss gone? They'll be rattled,

they'll be up Battle Creek, that's where they'll be. We can rush 'em then. And if a few of our fellers swaller lead—why, there'll be the fewer to share the swag."

"Newman—" I began.

"We'll do the best we can for Big 'Un," says Boston. "We need him. We'll try and get the Old Man first pop—and if we have decent luck plunkin' the mates, it'll be over so quick nobody can hurt Big 'Un."

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I thought, and was silent.

“What’s holdin’ you back?” demanded Boston. “I know you ain’t afraid. Look here, Shreve, you know you can’t hold the crowd back. You and Blackie and me could all be against it, and still they’d go aft. They’re goin’ to get Swope before Swope gets more o’ them. And if it’s Big ‘Un you’re worryin’ about—why, we got to do this to save him. Look here—let me give you a tip, if the Big ‘Un hasn’t: When Big ‘Un come on board this ship he found out somethin’ from the skipper’s Moll that he wanted to find out, and now, if he gets ashore alive with what he found out, there’ll be a sheriff’s necktie party for Yankee Swope. That’s what all this bloody business has been about. You can lay your last cent that Swope will get Big ‘Un, if we don’t get Swope.”

“Boston, give me that gun,” I said.

He took a look at my face, and smiled, satisfied. He drew the weapon from under his clothes, a long-barreled, heavy caliber service Colt’s, and passed it to me. I thrust it out of sight, beneath my own waist-band.

“Now, I’m boss,” I said. “I’ll give the word.”

His smile widened. This was what he wanted, as I well knew. Boston and Blackie could plan and instigate. But they could not lead that crowd. The sailors despised them, the stiffs hated and feared them second only to the afterguard. They needed me as leader. They flattered themselves, I dare say, that they could control me—or extinguish me when the time came.

For my part, I had made my decision. It was a desperate, a terrible decision. It was necessary that I pretend to fall in with Boston’s plans if I were to execute my decision.

“When it gets dark, I am going aft—alone,” I told him. “You and Blackie keep the crowd quiet, and forward of the house, until I return.”

“What you goin’ to do?” he asked.

“Make sure that Newman will be safe when we make the attack,” I explained. “We must make sure of that—he’s our navigator.”

“That’s so,” he agreed. “But how’ll you do it?”

“I’ll kill Captain Swope,” I said.

CHAPTER XIX

I was in earnest. I meant to do the murder. Aye, murder is what the law of man would call it, and murder is the right term. I planned the deed, not in cold blood perhaps, but certainly with coolness and foresight. I intended to creep aft in the night and shoot down the captain.

But you must understand my motive before you judge. More than that, you must bear in mind my environment, my character and its background, and the dilemma which faced me. I intended to become an assassin—but not for hate, or greed, or, indeed, any personal satisfaction or gain.

I was, remember, a nineteen-year-old barbarian, The impressionable, formative years of my youth had been spent in deepwater foc'sles, among men who obeyed but one law—fear. The watch, the gang, was my social unit; loyalty to a shipmate was the one virtue I thoroughly understood and respected. And it was loyalty to Newman that determined me to kill.

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Newman was my friend—aye, more than that, he was in my youthful eyes a demi-god, a man to revere and worship above all others. He was prisoner, helpless. The crew were bent on mutiny; I could not stop them. The mutiny was planned and expected by the captain; and its outbreak would be the needed excuse for the slaying of Newman, and, Newman said, of the lady.

How could I save Newman? That was my problem. How indeed? The evil choice was inevitably mine; and I considered it the lesser evil. If I killed Swope, Newman would be safe. Perhaps the mutiny would collapse, would never come off. This last was something Boston and Blackie, blinded by their greed, quite overlooked. But I knew it was hate and fear of Swope, rather than greed, that impelled the squareheads to revolt. If Swope were killed, they might not go on with it, and what the sailors decided, the stiff must agree to. And in any case, Newman would be safe.

I did not approach my task in a spirit of revulsion and horror. Indeed, no. Why should I have felt thus? In my experience I had not yet gathered the idea that human life was sacred. Certainly, my experience in the *Golden Bough* had not taught me that. I confess, the job I planned was distasteful, extremely so—but, I thought, necessary.

I planned Yankee Swope's murder in spite of self-sacrifice. Aye, truly I did! I dare say few acts in my life have had a finer, cleaner, less selfish motive.

I did not expect to escape after firing the shot. I expected the mates or the tradesmen would kill me. True, I thought of hiding on the dark deck, and picking off the captain when he appeared on the poop. That is what Boston and Blackie expected me to do. But I dismissed this thought without serious consideration. It was uncertain, and I meant to make sure of the brute. Besides, it was, I felt, cowardly, and I would not be a coward. I intended to get into the cabin and shoot Swope in his own arm-chair, so to speak. Afterwards—well, they could do what they pleased with me. My friend would be safe.

So I lived through a few very exalted hours before the first night watch came. Unhappy? Not I. In moments I touched the skies in exaltation.

For I was the sacrifice. I was the center of the drama. I was Fate. I was a romantic-minded young ass, and the situation flattered my generous conceit. I was tossing away my life, you see, with a grand gesture, to help my friend. I was dying for my friend's sake. My imagination gave my death nobility. I imagined Newman and the lady remembering me sadly all their lives long, thinking of me always as their saviour. I imagined my name on sailors' lips, in ships not yet launched; they would talk of me, of Jack Shreve, the lad who killed Yankee Swope so his shipmate might live.

My resolution did not weaken; rather, it grew firmer with the passage of the hours. Of course, I did not take the crew into my confidence (there might be, I thought, another

Cockney among them), but I laid down the law to Boston and Blackie, and they promised faithfully to obey my injunctions. They promised they would keep the men in check until I had completed my task. They promised also to mislead the spy, and see that no man laid violent hands upon him.

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This last I considered important. The crowd was eager for vengeance upon Cockney. He had committed the unpardonable sin, he had betrayed his mates. Blackie wanted to slit his throat, and drop him over the side; and the men voted an emphatic aye to the suggestion. Sentence would have been executed as soon as Cockney came forward from the wheel had I not interposed my veto and given my reasons.

It was not solicitude for the spy's life that influenced me. I, too, considered he had forfeited his right to life by his act. But I pointed out that offering immediate violence to Cockney might alarm the afterguard, and change their plan of action; moreover, we might use the spy to carry false tales of our intentions to the enemy.

So when Cockney breezed into the foc'sle, at four bells, his reception in no way aroused his suspicions. Everything seemed going his way. He sympathized volubly with me, and would have awakened Holy Joe (who had dropped into a healing sleep, after regaining consciousness) to sympathize with him, had I permitted. Aye, he was a good dissembler, was Cockney—but we matched him. His mouth dripped curses on Swope and his minions, he exhorted us to “arve guts” and rush the poop at muster time. He was willing to risk his own skin by leading the rush. “Wot did we think abaht it?”

Boston told him we thought early evening a bad time for the adventure. We were going to wait until morning, until the beginning of the “gravvy-eye” watch, just before dawn. That was the hour in which to strike. Men slept soundest just before dawn; those who were awake were less alert. The mutiny was timed for four A. M.

“Hi cawn’t ’ardly wyte that long, Hi’m that eager to get my knife ‘twixt that myte’s bleedin’ ribs,” said Cockney.

The Nigger had come in during the discussion. He seated himself, and recommenced his favorite task of stropping his knife upon a whetstone. At the Cockney’s last words he lifted his head.

“Don’ yoh touch de mate,” he said to Cockney. “Dat man’s mah meat, yes, suh, mah meat!”

Cockney disputed this. He raved, and swore, and even threatened Nigger. Aye, he made a fine bluster. “‘E wasn’t goin’ to give hup ’is chawnce at the bleedin’ myte, not ’im! ’E ’ad a score to settle with that blighter, so ’e ’ad. The Nigger could ‘arve the bloomin’ second myte, that’s wot.”

Nigger was so incensed he got up and left the foc’sle, leaving the last word to the spy. Nigger had brooded so much over his wrongs he was a bit cracked; he took no part in the councils of the crew, and did not know, I am sure, that Cockney had been unmasked as a traitor. Else he would never have acted as he later did.

It came down night. It was a good night for my purpose, dark and shadowless, with a mere sliver of a new moon in the sky. I had little difficulty in gaining entrance to the cabin.

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After the eight o'clock muster, when my watch was sent below, I slipped around the corner of the roundhouse, where the tradesmen lived (it was on the maindeck, between the mainmast and the after-hatch) and crouched there in the darkness while my mates trooped forward. This roundhouse (which was really square, of course, like most roundhouses on board ship) was very plentifully supplied with ports. Designedly so, no doubt, for it was the cabin's outpost. There were two portholes in its forward wall, commanding the foredeck, and three portholes in either of the side walls. The door to the house was in the after wall. It was built like a fortress, and used as one.

As I lay there on the deck, pressed against the forward wall, I saw the muzzles of shotguns sticking out of the portholes above my head. There was no light showing in the roundhouse, but the tradesmen were in there just the same. Aye, and prepared and alert. They were covering the deck with guns; and I knew they would continue to cover the deck throughout that night.

Oh, Swope was canny, as canny as he was cruel. He would provoke mutiny, but he would run no chance of losing his ship or his life. He was prepared. What could a few revolvers do against these entrenched men? My shipmates' revolt could have but one end—mass murder and defeat!

So I thought, as I lay there on the deck, watching my chance to slip aft. Swope's plan, Swope's mutiny, I thought. Swope was the soul of the whole vile business. His plan—and I was going to spoil it! I was going to put a bullet in his black heart.

I might have picked him off at that very moment, if I aimed carefully. For, as my mates' footsteps died away forward, I edged around the corner of the roundhouse, and saw the enemy standing on the poop. The three of them were there, both mates, with the skipper standing between them. I picked him out of the group easily, even in the darkness, for he was of much slighter build than either of his officers, and besides I heard his voice.

"The rats have discovered some courage—but they'll lose it soon enough, when they face our reception," I heard him say. "But—no nodding to-night, Mist'ers! Keep your eyes and ears open!"

Fitzgibbon mumbled something. The captain laughed his soft, tinkling laugh.

"I'm going down to take a look at him now," he said, and the three of them moved aft, out of sight.

Aye, I might have picked him off then. But I didn't even entertain the thought. It was no part of my plan to slay from concealment. I was the hero, the avenger, the saviour! I meant to face him in his own lighted cabin.



The door of the roundhouse was closed, so I did not fear the inmates would observe me entering the cabin. The break of the poop seemed clear of life. I scuttled on my hands and knees until I was past the booby-hatch; then I arose to my feet and flitted noiselessly to the cabin door. I opened it just wide enough to admit my body, and stepped into the lighted cabin alleyway.

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My bare feet made no noise as I crept toward the saloon. This was the first time I had set foot within the sacred precincts of the quarterdeck. From the gossip of those who had been aft to sick-call, or to break out stores, I had some notion of the lay of the land, but not a very clear one.

There were three doors opening upon the alley-way; the one on the port side was the inner door of the sail-locker, the two on the starboard side let into the mates' rooms. That much I knew. I also knew that I need not fear these doors, since both mates were on deck.

But at the end of the alleyway was the saloon, the great common room of the cabin. I paused uncertainly upon the threshold; I didn't know which way to turn for concealment, and I had to get out of the alleyway quickly, for any moment a tradesman might come in behind me.

There were several doors on each side of the saloon. To starboard, I knew, lay the captain's quarters, and, from the sounds, the pantry. To port, I knew, lay the lady's quarters, and the steward's room. But which door was which, I did not know. I decided I had best duck into the captain's room.

But before I could act upon this decision the forward door on the port side slowly opened, and Wong, the steward, stepped out. I shrank back into the alleyway as the door opened, and the Chinaman did not glance in my direction. His whole attention was riveted upon the companion stairs; Swope's voice sounded up there in the entrance to the hatch.

Wong softly closed the door behind him, and ran on tiptoe across the saloon, disappearing into the pantry. I did not hesitate an instant. Wong had not locked the door behind him, and his room would be handy enough for my purpose. From it I could command the interior of the big room, and step forth when the moment arrived. I crossed the corner of the saloon in a bound, and turned the doorknob as silently as had Wong.

I opened the door and stepped in backwards. My eyes assured me I was unseen. I closed the door, all save a crack, through which I meant to watch for the coming of my victim.

I heard a gasp behind me. I shut the door tight and wheeled about—and found myself staring into the wide-open eyes of the lady.

CHAPTER XX

She was on her knees, at the other end of the room. Aye, and it was a room, a spacious cabin, not a cubbyhole berth I had blundered into; the lady's own quarters, no

less. There was a lamp burning in gimbals, and its light disclosed to my first startled glance that it was a woman's room. Aye, to my foc'sle-bred senses the quarters were palatial.

The lady crouched on her knees, with her skirts spread wide, and her hands hidden behind her back. When first her eyes met mine, I saw she was fear-stricken. But immediately she recognized me the fear gave way to relief.

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"Oh, I thought it was—" she began. Then she saw the revolver in my hand, and the fear leaped into her eyes again. Aye, fear, and comprehension. "That—oh, Boy, what do you mean to do?"

I had been gaping, open-mouthed, too surprised to utter a sound. But her swift recognition, and her words, brought me to myself. Also, just then we heard Captain Swope's voice. He was in the saloon, calling out an order to the steward. We listened with strained attention, both of us. He told the steward to open the lazaret hatch, and be sharp about it.

I jerked my thumb over my shoulder, and nodded significantly to the lady. "Don't be afraid, ma'am," I whispered. "He isn't going to hurt Newman. He isn't going to hurt anyone—not any more." Oh, the dread that showed in her face when we heard Swope's voice!

She brought her hands into view, when I spoke. Something she had been holding behind her back dropped on the deck with a metallic clink, and she pressed her hands against her bosom.

"You—you mean—" she began.

I nodded again. I really thought I was reassuring her, lifting a load of care from her heart.

"I'm going out there and get him. Don't be afraid, ma'am. I won't make a miss of it. He isn't going to hurt Newman, or you, or anyone, after I've finished. And ma'am, please—will you try and slip for'ard and tell the men not to mutiny. They'll listen to you, especially when you tell them the Old Man is dead. They don't want to mutiny, ma'am—anyway, the squareheads don't—but they're afraid not to. If you tell them I've killed him, and appeal to them, the sailors will keep quiet, I know; and they'll make the stiffs keep quiet, too. It will save some lives, ma'am—for the crowd is coming aft to-night, like the Old Man plans, and the tradesmen are in the roundhouse, with guns, waiting for them."

There was anguish in her whispered reply. "Coming aft? No, no, they must not! It would mean—his death——"

She stopped. We listened. We heard Swope again, out in the saloon. He was damning Wong for a sluggard, and demanding a lighted lantern that instant or sooner, or "I'll take a strip off your yellow hide, you heathen!"

"No, not Newman's death," I answered the lady. I turned, and laid my hand upon the door knob. My weapon was ready. This was the moment I must act.

Before I could open the door, I felt the lady's cool fingers upon my wrist.

“No, no, not that! Not murder!” she exclaimed. “Oh, Boy, you would not take life—you would not do that!”

I turned and faced her, astonished. Her eyes were but a few inches distant from mine, now, and to my amazement I read in their expression not approbation but startled horror. And I could not mistake the meaning in her voice. She disapproved of my killing Captain Swope.

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I was as shocked as she. Here I had been happy in the consciousness I was playing the hero, I had believed myself cutting a very pretty figure indeed in the lady's eyes, and, instead—well, my bubble was pricked. As I looked into the lady's eyes, I could feel my grand dimensions dwindling in my own eyes. More than that, I began to feel ashamed. Just why that look in her eyes should shame me, I didn't know. My education had not progressed to the self-analytic stage. But shame me it did. I felt mean, vile. I felt, without consciously reasoning about it, that murdering Yankee Swope would, perhaps, be not such a noble deed after all. I confronted something that was superior to the barbarous moral code of my brutal world. I discovered it in the lady's wide open eyes. It vanquished me. It took from me the feeling I was doing right.

But I could not surrender thus tamely. Indeed, the need for the deed remained as urgent.

"But, ma'am, you know I must!" I said. "You know—he will kill him!"

Her little fingers were plucking at mine, which were stubbornly gripped about the revolver's stock. "I know you must not!" she answered. "You must not take human life!" It was a commandment she uttered, and I took it as such. Especially, when she added, "Do you think he would kill in that fashion?"

That finished me. Aye, she knew how to beat down my defense; her woman's insight had supplied her with an invincible argument. I averted my eyes from hers, and hung my head; I allowed her to take the revolver from my grasp.

For I knew the answer to her question. "He" would not creep into the cabin and shoot Captain Swope. She meant Newman, and I knew that Newman would scorn to do the thing I planned to do. Kill Swope in fair fight, with chances equal? Newman might do that. But shoot him down like a mad dog, when he was unprepared and perhaps unarmed—no, Newman would not do that. Nor would any decent man.

I passed another milestone in my evolution into manhood, as I stood there, hangdog and ashamed. I added another "don't" to my list.

She brushed back the hair from my forehead. Oh, there was magic in her fingers. That gentle stroke restored my pride, my self-respect. It was a gesture of understanding. I felt now as I felt the first time I saw the lady, like a little boy before a wise and merciful mother. I knew the lady understood. She knew my heart was clean, my motive good.

She held up the weapon she had taken from me. "This—is not the way," she said. "It is never the way. You must not!"

"I must not," I echoed. "Yes, ma'am; I won't do it now. But—what—how——"

I floundered and stopped. “What—how,” aye, that was it. If I did not kill Captain Swope what would happen to Newman? That was the question that hammered against my mind, that sent a wave of sick fear through me. If I did not kill Swope—then Newman was lost.

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"But—I must do something," I added, miserably. "You know what will happen when the hands come aft. It will be the skipper's excuse; Newman told me it would. I can't see him butchered without doing something to prevent it. Why, ma'am, Newman is my friend!"

"He is my life," said she. Her voice was so low I barely caught the words. "But I would not buy his life with murder; it would lower him to their level." She swayed, and clutched at my shoulder; I thought she was falling, and gripped her arm to steady her. But she was not the swooning kind. Not the lady. She recovered herself instantly. She clutched my lapels, and laid down the law to me.

"There must be no fighting. The men must not come aft," said she. "If they do, it will ruin everything. Boy, you must stop them. Deakin will help you. You must hold them back."

I shook my head. "It's too late," I informed her. "They will not listen to the parson, or me; they are too afraid."

"But they must be stopped!" she cried.

"Only one man can stop them—and that's Newman, himself," I replied.

"What time have they set?" she asked, quickly.

"Next eight bells," I told her. "We gave the skipper's spy to understand it was timed for four o'clock in the morning; but the lads really mean to make the rush at midnight."

"Then we have time," was her verdict. "And you must help me."

She pointed to the deck. My eyes followed her gesture, and for the first time I examined the floor of the room. The first thing my gaze encountered was a large carpenter's auger, or brace and bit; the next thing I saw, was a pattern of holes in the floor. There were two rows of them, parallel, each about eighteen inches long, and the same distance apart. The holes overlapped each other, and made a continuous cut in the deck.

The lady thrust out her hands, palms up, for my inspection. Upon each palm was a great red blister.

"I was nearly despairing," said she, "I could longer press down hard enough. But now _____"

She did not need to explain. The sight of the holes and the auger told me enough to set me to work instantly. Aye, I grabbed up the tool and turned to with a song in my heart and the strength of Hercules in my arms. There was after all a chance to save my

friend, and it depended in part upon my haste and strength. A chance to save him without murder.

The lady locked the door, and came and sat down beside me. While I worked she explained the plot behind the task. She talked eagerly, without reserve; it helped her, eased her mind, I think, to unload into my ears.

I was boring my way to Newman. My task was to connect the two rows of holes already bored through the deck with two other rows; when I was finished there would be an opening in the deck some eighteen inches square. A manhole to the lazaret below, where lay Newman.

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But this was not all. She told me there was a scheme to free her and him completely from the captain and the ship. Well, I had guessed something like that was in the wind; but I did not tell her so. She said that Mister Lynch was in the plot; aye, this hard bucko, this “square-shooter,” as I had heard him called, was the instigator and prime mover in the affair. One of the tradesmen was also friendly, and had brought the lady the tool I was using to cut through the deck. Wong, the steward, who was the lady’s devoted slave, played a very important part.

The plot was this. We were to get Newman out of the lazaret (she always called him “Roy” when she spoke of him or to him; and when she mentioned Swope, it was always with a little hesitating catch in her voice) through this hole we were making. She had the key that would release him from irons. Wong had stolen it from the skipper’s desk.

When he was out of the lazaret, the situation would be managed by Mister Lynch. The ship’s longboat, in the port skids, was ready for the water. They planned, said the lady, to launch this boat at night, in the second mate’s watch, and she and Newman were to sail away together.

For it was no haphazard plan born of desperation after Newman’s arrest. Newman knew all about it. It had kept him occupied this past week; it was responsible in large measure for the mysterious happenings of the past week, for Newman’s absences, and for the lady’s masquerade in Nils’ clothes. She had access to Nils’ chest through Wong, who had charge of it, and she first dressed up in Nils’ clothes so that she might, as she thought, move about at night on deck unobserved. When she was observed, and taken for a ghost, both Newman and Lynch told her to continue the masquerade; it helped their business with the longboat, because it kept spying eyes away from that part of the ship. They had been provisioning and preparing this boat for a week, working thus in the night, and by stealth. Another day or two, and they would have been away.

But the captain’s blow this afternoon had jeopardized the entire scheme. Indeed, it was on the verge of utter ruin. For Newman was in the black hole in irons, and the crew were preparing to mutiny.

It was this last, the threatened uprising, that terrified the lady. It would finally ruin their chances of escape, she told me. At all hazards, we must get Newman out of the lazaret before the sailors’ attack occurred. We must get him forward, she said, so that he might squelch the mutiny before it began. Oh, Newman could tame Boston and Blackie, he could tame the stiffes and compose the squareheads; she had no doubt he could do all that, and instantly. I was not so sure. I didn’t think that anything or anybody could stop the crew—unless it was killing Swope, which she forbade. But I didn’t say so.

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And in any event, the immediate thing to do was to release Newman. It would at least give him a fighting chance. She urged haste, and I worked like a fiend. It was hard work. The deck planking was three inches thick, and the number of holes I must bore seemed endless. I was surprised at the amount of work already accomplished; it did not seem possible that this slender woman had done the two long rows of holes. Nor had she, I learned. Wong had bored most of them, during the odd moments he could slip away unobserved from his work. The tradesman who furnished the tool had even driven a few. The lady had done some of the work, as the condition of her hands proved. But my coming was really providential. She could never have finished the job on time, and now she knew of the crew's intention, she recognized the need of haste.

I longed mightily for a saw. Yet I knew I could not have used a saw had I possessed one. A saw makes a carrying noise. The tool I had was nearly noiseless. I sweated and wondered, and now and then asked a question.

I wondered what Lynch would do when the lads came aft. Aye, and I discovered that this was one reason the lady was so terrified at the prospect of mutiny. For Lynch, she was certain, would make common cause with the rest of the afterguard against any uprising forward. He was helping her and Newman. But he had no interest in helping the hands. The hands were just hands to him, so much beef to work and beat. He would never side with the foc'sle against the cabin.

"I have sailed three voyages with Lynch," said she. "He is a hard man, a cruel man; I have seen him do terrible things to sailors. But he is also, according to his lights, a just man. His brutality is always for what he considers the ship's welfare, never for any personal reason. You know how he has treated you, and Roy, and other men who know and do their work."

"Fair enough," I admitted.

"When my—my husband tried to kill Roy, that night you and he were aloft together, he violated James Lynch's very strict code. He considered that attempt a serious blot upon his honor. He told him—Angus—as much. He told him he would not have that sort of thing in his watch. It wasn't regard for Roy that made him say that; it was just that he thinks it is not right to kill or even hurt a man for personal reasons, but only when the welfare of the ship is at stake. And also, I think—well, he—likes me. He is willing to help me. That is why, a week ago, he came to me and offered his help. He had discovered what my—my husband really intended doing; I think he overheard a conversation between my—between Angus and the mate. He said we were both in danger, I as well as Roy, and that we must leave the ship.

"Roy suggested the longboat, and he agreed. Roy can navigate, of course, and there are islands not distant from our present position. So we have been preparing the boat, and Mr. Lynch planned to launch it some midwatch when the mate and—and Captain

Swope were in their berths. He hoped to get us away so quietly they would know nothing about it until hours later.”

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"But surely Lynch didn't intend staying by the ship? Why, when the Old Man found out he'd skin him alive!" I exclaimed.

"He said not, and I think not," she said. "He has sailed under my—my husband for years. He is not like Mr. Fitzgibbon, and the others. He does not fear my husband. I think Angus fears him. He knows things that have happened in this ship that my—my husband dare not have told on shore. He refused when we urged him to come with us; he declared he would be in no danger, that he could guard himself. I think he can."

The lady clenched her hands, and her voice broke a little, as she disclosed the anxiety that was wrenching her soul.

"But now—I don't know what he will do. If we can free Roy in time; if we can stop trouble forward! Then I know Mr. Lynch will keep his promise; he will lock up Angus and the mate, get them out of the way somehow, until Roy and I have left the ship. But if the men rise before we have gone—then he will think his duty is to the ship. He will not think of us, and my—my husband will do what he wishes. Do you understand?"

"Yes, ma'am. But we have until midnight, or after, and it's just a little past two bells, now. Ten minutes more, ma'am, and I'll have this hole open."

But it took a little longer than ten minutes. Three bells struck while I was still whittling and digging at the caulking in the seams with my sheath knife. But the echo of the big ship's bell forward had hardly died away when I carefully, ever so carefully, lifted up and laid back the cut-away section of the deck. I had left the caulking at one end nearly intact, so the solid piece laid back like a trap-door.

The lady and I knelt by the side of the hole and peered down into the littered darkness. We could make out, dimly, heaps of barrels and boxes. A damp, chill air rushed up into our faces, carrying with it the sound of a scurrying rat, and another sound which made the lady gasp and tremble, and caused me to grind my teeth with rage. It was a long, drawn-out sigh, the moan of a man in agony of flesh or spirit. It was Newman's voice. Mingling with it, and following it, came the low, demoniac chuckle of Captain Swope.

Lying flat and craning my neck into the hole, I saw, far over on the other side of the ship, the flicker of a lantern upon boxes. I immediately drew back, got to my feet, and extinguished the lamp in the gimbals. Then I snatched a blanket from the steward's bunk, and spread it across the hole. That done, there was no danger of light or draught betraying us to the man below.

I asked orders of the lady, and discussed ways and means with her. It was decided at once that I should go below and effect Newman's release—and she gave me the small key that the Chinaman had filched. I was the stronger and more active, and could more easily make my way about in the dark, cluttered lazaret; besides, her work lay above.

Swope was evidently pleasuring himself by viewing and taunting his helpless prisoner; he must be drawn away from this amusement.

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She could not go on deck herself, she said; Fitzgibbon was up there, and would see her—and she was supposed to be locked in her room. But she would send Wong on deck with a message to Mister Lynch; she would have Lynch sing out for the captain's presence on the poop. When the captain responded to the hail, I was to accomplish my task. I was to bring Newman to this room. What happened then depended upon chance—and Lynch. Newman and I must get forward, some way, and quiet the men; Lynch would take care of Swope. She had a fine faith in the second mate, had the lady.

I had never been in the lazaret, the task of breaking out stores having usually fallen to the stiffs. But from foc'sle gossip I knew it was a big storeroom, comprising the whole 'tweendeck beneath the cabin space. The *Golden Bough*, like most clippers of her day, sometimes carried emigrant passengers, and had need of a spacious lazaret.

The lady sketched the lay of the land for me. The hatch to the lazaret was in the saloon floor, well aft, on the starboard side. Wong was more familiar than any man with the lazaret's interior, and he had decided the deck should be cut through from this room, rather than at any other point. This, said the lady, was because farther aft, on this side of the ship, a strong room occupied the lazaret space (aye, the same strong room which so tickled the fancy of some of my shipmates!). The Chinaman had planned with foresight; he had even disposed stores below to convenience and shield the man who played rescuer. When I dropped through the hole, the lady told me, I would find myself in a narrow alleyway, walled with tiers of beef casks and other stores; if I followed this alleyway I would come to the lazaret hatch, near where Newman was secured.

She thought I should wait until I heard the captain leave the lazaret. But to this I demurred. The success of the scheme might well depend upon the leeway of a moment's time. The ship's noises, always present in a ship's hold, would cover any slight noise I might make. Truth to tell, that sound of Newman in pain had thrown me into a fever of impatience to get to his side; and I suspect it rendered the lady less cautious, too.

"God bless you, Boy—and, oh, be careful," she whispered.

I drew back the blanket, and lowered my body into the opening. I hung by my hands an instant, and felt her draw the blanket over my head as she covered the hole again. Then I let go, and dropped.

CHAPTER XXI

I crouched behind a row of flour barrels, which stood on end handy to the hatch, and peered through the chinks. The captain had hung his lantern on a beam overhead, and its rays limned like a stage-setting an open space some six feet square. Aye, a stage-setting, and the scene a torture chamber. I bit my lips to restrain a cry of horror and

rage when I looked through the chinks between the barrels, and it was with difficulty I kept myself from rushing forth and falling upon the fiend who had contrived and was enjoying the scene.

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Captain Swope was seated upon an upturned keg. He had placed the lantern so its light fell full upon Newman (it illumined himself, for my eyes, as well) and he was talking to the prisoner, mocking him.

And Newman! It was the sight of him that made me choke, that made me finger my knife hilt. Newman—my friend!

He was at the far end of that open space, trussed up to the starboard limbers. Trussed up—and in what way! You will remember, when they placed him under arrest, the captain ordered his hands ironed behind his back. The reason was now apparent. His hands were still behind his back; aye, when they trussed him up, they drew up his hands until they were on a level with his head, and secured him in that position. His feet were also ironed, and the chain lashed to a limber. So he stood, or rather hung—for he could not stand properly with his arms wrenched back in that position—and the whole weight of his body dragged upon his wrists and shoulder blades. So he had stood during the hours that had passed since afternoon. Torture, agony—that is what it meant to be trussed up in that position.

I thought I recognized Fitzgibbon's handiwork in this torture; though I dare say it was originally Swope's invention. But we had seen Fitzgibbon use this same method of inflicting pain and terror, we men forward. One day, for an imagined insolence, he had trussed up Nigger to the mainmast in this very fashion, and left him there for a short half-hour. After five minutes Nigger was wild with pain. When he was cut down, his arms seemed paralyzed, and it was a full day ere the ache passed from them.

And Newman had been enduring this pain for hours. But now, I thought, he must be mercifully unconscious, for his head hung upon his breast, and he made no sign that he heard the captain's gibes.

It was sport to Swope's liking, and he was enjoying himself right royally. Aye, I could tell. The words that slid between his full lips were laden with the sensuous delight their utterance gave the speaker. I lay in my retreat waiting for the hail that would draw the beast on deck, and while I waited I listened to him, and observed his manner. Oh, Swope was having a fine time, a happy time. If the lady had not taken the revolver from me, I fear I should have shot the man despite my promise. As it was my sheath knife lay bared in my hand, and I had to fight myself to keep from leaping the barrier and confronting him. Aye, to face him, and make him eat the steel out of my hand!

Yes, Swope was in a happy mood. A rollicking, loquacious mood. He talked. Unconsciously he made me witness to his confession of black treacheries, and deeds more loathsome than I could have imagined myself.

When I reached my position behind the barrels, and was able to distinguish his words—he was boasting of and baring his secrets in a voice not meant to carry beyond Newman's ears—he was taunting Newman.

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"Well, why don't you call upon God to help you?" says he. "He has helped you a lot in the past, hasn't he, Roy? And He has helped her a lot, hasn't he? Helped her to stand me. Oh, that's a joke! The just and merciful One—d'you remember how old Baintree used to rant? You approved, didn't you. You agreed with old Baintree. So did I, Roy, to his face.

"But you—why you were a damned Puritan, Roy. You wouldn't do this, you wouldn't do that, you would be clean of vice—your very words, Roy!—and you would be honest and just with men. That's the sort of thing that paid, says you.

"And didn't it pay you, though! Ho, ho; it's too rich, Roy! You would make yourself as good a man as old Baintree; you would make yourself worthy of his daughter. Remember telling me that? And didn't you, though—with my help! My help, Roy—not God's! It was Black Angus and the Devil did it!

"Well, well, I thought I would surprise you with my little tale of how I used the Twigg girl to spoil your chance with Mary. But Beasley surprised you instead. Didn't he, now? A neat trick, eh, Roy? You never guessed?

"You never guessed, either, all that I had planned for you that time. If you hadn't been in such a hurry to leave town! But then—I was just as well pleased. With Beulah out of the way as well as you—it was plain sailing with Mary, Roy.

"No, I never wanted Mary. Not for herself. She's not my kind, Roy; a damned, sniveling saint isn't my idea of a woman. But I wanted her money. Old Baintree's money. And I got it.

"I got Baintree, too. It was necessary; I had to kill the old fool. He knew too much about me, and if he told Mary—well, I was playing the saint with her, just then. He would never have consented to her marrying me; and also—the money, you know. So I eliminated him, Roy. And God let you suffer for what I did! Ho, ho, that's rich, isn't it? Come to think of it, it's sound theology—vicarious atonement, eh? You got stripes, and I got Mary—and her money, which I have spent most pleasurably.

"But you were always a fool, Roy—a stupid, trusting fool. You trusted me, didn't you? I was your bosom friend, your boyhood chum, whose wild ways grieved you. Fool, fool, if you had possessed the wit of a jackass you would have known I hated you! Hate, hate, hate! I have hated you all my life, Roy! I hated you when we were boys and you made me take second place. I have hated you ever since; I hate you now—so much it is almost love, Roy! Eh, but I never love. I hate. And when I hate—I hurt!"

To all this tirade Newman returned no answer. He did not seem to hear. He hung silent in his bonds, his head on his breast and his face hidden. He might have been unconscious. I thought he was, for he did not even look up when the captain was

excitedly chanting his hate. Swope was plainly piqued at this indifference; he got up from his keg and stepped close to Newman.

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"But you are not thinking of yourself, are you, Roy?" he says. "You are thinking of her, I know. How sweet! Sentiment was always your strong point. Well, think hard about her, Roy, think your fill; for she is almost as near her end as you are near yours. But not quite so near. I intend to break that haughty spirit before I—er—eliminate her. Oh, yes, it will break. Trust me to know the sure way. Roy, don't you want to know what I am going to do to Mary?"

He paused a moment, and, chuckling and smacking his lips, stood looking at Newman's bowed figure. Then he said slowly and deliberately, actually lingering over the words. "I am going to make a strumpet of the wench for Fitzgibbon's pleasure!"

Newman stirred. "Ah, that wakes you up!" cried Swope. It did, indeed. Newman was not unconscious. I could have wished he was, so he might not have heard those words. He lifted his face to the light, and I could see the sweat of agony upon it. He did not speak. He just looked at the man in front of him. It was a look of unutterable loathing; his expression was as though he were regarding something indescribably obscene and revolting. And then he pursed his lips and spat in Captain Swope's face.

The skipper stepped back, and swabbed his cheek with his sleeve. I thought he would strike Newman, kick him, practice some devilish cruelty upon him in payment. Aye, I was crouched for the spring, with my sheath knife ready; if he had laid finger upon Newman I should have had his life in an instant. I was all the barbarian that moment, my new-found scruples forgotten. I was in a killing mood. What man would not have been.

But Captain Swope did not attempt to repay the insult with any physical cruelty. He knew he was already racking his enemy's body to the limit of endurance, and his aim, I discovered, was to supplement this bodily suffering with mental torture. Indeed, Swope seemed pleased at Newman's act. He laughed as he wiped his face.

"That stings—eh, Roy? It's true—be certain of that, you soft-hearted fool. I tell the truth sometimes, Roy—when it serves my purpose. And I want you to imagine the details of what is going to happen to her. Think of it, Roy—the Lady of the *Golden Bough*, the saintly Mrs. Swope, the sweet Mary Baintree that was—lying in Fitzgibbon's arms! Pretty thought!"

Chuckling, Swope resumed his seat. He leaned forward, and watched Newman with hawklike intensity. But Newman gave him little cause to chortle; his head dropped again upon his breast, and he gave no sound, no movement.

"Why don't you call on God?" asked Swope. "Why don't you call on me?"

Newman lifted his head. "You degenerate beast!" he said. He said it evenly, without passion, and immediately withdrew his features from the other's scrutiny.

But the captain was satisfied. He slapped his thigh with delight.

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"It stings, eh, Roy? It burns! It runs through your veins like fire! Doesn't it? It's a hot thought. And here's another one to keep it company— You can do nothing to prevent it! To hairy old Fitz she'll go—and you can't prevent it! Think of that, Roy!"

Newman gave no sign he heard, but the black-hearted villain on the keg knew that the big fellow's ears were open and that his words were like stabs in a raw wound. He talked on, and described villainies to come and villainies accomplished; the tale of his misdeeds seemed to possess him. He gloried in them, gloated over them. And as I listened, I realized, ignorant young whelp though I was, that this man was different from any man I had ever met or imagined. He wasn't human; he was a freak, a human-looking thing with a tiger's nature.

Always he reminded me of a cat, from the very first moment I clapped eyes upon him; never did he remind me more of a cat—or tiger—than when he sat upon the keg and teased Newman. He seemed to purr his content with the situation.

"I know what you are thinking, Roy," says he. "You are thinking that my brave and upright second mate will prevent it happening to our dear little Mary? Am I right, eh? Vain thought. Our friend, Lynch, will not be here to interfere. I have seen to that. He grows dangerous, does Jim Lynch, so—elimination. Ah, I could write a treatise upon the Art of Elimination—couldn't I? Angus Swope, the great eliminator! It is my specialty, Roy.

"Neatness, thoroughness, dispatch, everything shipshape, no loose ends flying—that's my style, Roy. Now there was neatness and dispatch about my running you out of Freeport when I found your presence there inconvenient. Don't you think there was? Eh, you great fool? You pulled my chestnuts out of the fire very nicely indeed. But I was not as thorough as I should have been in that affair. A loose end, or two, eh, Roy? Beasley—and yourself. Ah—but I improved with practice. I left no loose end that night in Bellingham, did I? Unless the fact that your neck didn't stretch, as I intended, could be called a loose end. But then—you'll be tucked out of sight again very soon, and this time for good and all. I never did believe in imprisonment for life, Roy; it is such a cruel punishment. I'm a tender-hearted man, Roy—ho, ho, that's rich, eh? I told that judge, after he sentenced you, that he would have been acting more kindly had he disregarded the jury's recommendation and hanged you out of hand. And do you know what he told me, Roy? He said I was right, that you deserved hanging. Ho, ho, deserved hanging! And he was a godly man, Roy.

"Oh, what a great fool you were! How easily I made you play my game! That night you had me to dinner on board your ship, in Bellingham—you never guessed why I fished for that invitation? Why I persuaded you to send your mates ashore that night? Just another of Angus' scrapes, thought you; he wants to confide in me, and ask my advice. Angus wants my help, thought you. So I did, Roy, so I did.

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"I needed your help badly. But not the kind or help you would have offered; no, I needed your help in a different way. I needed a catspaw, Roy.

"I was skating on pretty thin ice just about then, Roy, I needed old Baintree's money. I needed Mary to get the money. But Mary was only willing to take me because her father wished her to; and I was heartily sick of playing the saint to stand well with him. Oh, well, I'll tell you—why not? The old hypocrite had a Puritan's sharp eyes, and he had caught me in a slip-up or two, and I knew he was about to tell Mary to break the betrothal. And there was another thing, a little investment I handled for him. He was bound to discover about it shortly, when the payments were due, and—well, you know, Roy, what an absurd attitude he had towards a little slip like that. I was in a rather desperate fix, you see; yes, I really needed your help, Roy.

"Besides there was you, yourself, to be taken care of. You were one of my worries, not a big worry, but still a worry. What if you forgot your pride? What if Mary forgot her pride? Of course, you were in Bellingham, and outward bound; and she was home in Freeport—but who can tell what a woman will do where her heart is concerned? Besides, I hated you, damn you! I was not going to overlook the luck that brought the three of us into the same port at the same time. You had been my catspaw once; why not again?

"So I had you invite me off to dinner. That cozy little dinner, in your own cabin, just you and I, and Stord to wait on us. I bet you never guessed until your trial that your steward was my man, if you guessed it then. Aye, body and soul my man. When I crooked my finger, Stord bent his body.

"Do you remember that dinner, Roy? I bet you do! I crucified you, damn you! You would be brave, you would be gallant, eh? You would congratulate me upon the coming marriage, toast the best man, who had won the race. Oh, I enjoyed your hospitality that night! How you wrenched out the words! You didn't want to talk about Mary, did you? But I made you talk, I made you squirm, eh? And then, when I was sick of your platitudes—just a nod to Stord, and three little drops of chloral in your glass!

"Do you want to know what happened next? I'll lay that you've wondered many a time just what happened after you had so strangely dropped asleep, with your head in your plate. Well, I'll tell you what happened. I sent Stord on the run to Baintree's hotel. He bore a message from you. He told the dear captain that you were ill, on your ship, and that you wished very much to see him. You can guess how the old fool would act in a case like that. A chance to do a good deed, store up treasures in heaven, all that, eh? You might have been a bad man in Freeport, but, you were sick and needed him.

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“He came in a hurry, all a-flutter like an old hen. Just as I knew he would come. And as he leaned over you, in your own cabin, I—er—separated him from his temporal worries with an iron belaying pin from your own rail. Then I gave you the clout for luck (it has left a fine scar, I note) and placed the pin on the table. And thus your chief mate discovered you when he came on board, you and your victim, and the weapon you used, just as I planned. And your steward’s testimony, and my reluctant admissions, finished you. You see, Roy—neatness and thoroughness!

“I took Stord to sea with me, as my steward. But, unfortunately, he went over the side one dark night, off the Horn. A loose end tucked in, eh, Roy?

“And I’ll tuck in other loose ends between now and dawn—you, for instance, and our brave Mister Lynch. I have it already written down for Fitz to copy into the logbook. ‘During the fighting, James Lynch, second mate, was stabbed by one of the mutineers; but owing to the darkness and confusion his assailant was not recognized.’ That’s how the log will read when we bowse into port. And—‘During the fighting, the sailor, Newman, attempted to escape from custody, and was shot by the captain.’ You see, Roy, everything shipshape! A line for each in the log—and two loose ends tucked in—eliminated!

“You will have some time in which to think it over, before it happens, Roy. You should thank me for that—for giving you something to think about. It will take your mind off your pain, eh? Yes, you need something to think about, for you’ll hang there for four or five hours yet. No danger of your sleeping, eh, Roy? Well, keep your ears open and you’ll be forewarned. There’ll be some shooting on deck. I’ve gone to a great deal of trouble to bring it about; your shipmates are a gutless crew, Roy, and I had begun to think I could not get a fight out of them. But the swabs are coming aft at the end of the mid-watch. Eight bells in the mid-watch—count the bells, Roy. Eight bells—elimination!

“Then there will be just one loose end left—and you know what I have planned for her! Think about it, Roy—think about our darling little Mary! At the mercy of the wolves, Roy! At the mercy of our dear, gentle Fitzgibbon! At the mercy—yes, I do believe at the mercy, also, of my new second mate.

“Oh, yes, he is already nominated for the office. Of course, he must first remove the incumbent—but that, as I explained, is arranged for. He is a greasy cockney, gutter-snipe—but useful. I wouldn’t think of having him at table with me, Roy—but I think I’ll let him amuse himself with Mary—after Fitz! Ah, that stings, eh, Roy!”

It did, indeed. Newman lifted the face of a madman to his torturer. Aye, the creature’s vile words, and viler threat, had stung him beyond his power of self-control. All the pent-up fury in his soul burst forth in one explosive oath.

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"God blast you forever, Angus!" he cried.

Just that, and no more. Newman had his grip again. He was no man to indulge in impotent ravings.

But the outburst was sufficient to delight Captain Swope. He threw back his head and laughed that chuckling, demon's laugh of his. Delighted—why, he could hardly control himself to keep his seat on the keg, and as he laughed his feet beat a jig upon the deck.

"I told you to call upon God!" was his gleeful answer to Newman. "And you have! Now, we'll see who wins—you and God, or Angus and the Devil! Eh, Roy—who wins?"

"We'll see, Roy—we'll see if God takes your advice. We'll see if He helps you, or Lynch. Or Mary. Ah, the saintly Mary, the pure, the unapproachable! We'll see if He protects her from Fitz's dirty arms, or the greasy kisses of the Cockney! Eh, Roy? We'll see if He keeps her from—eliminating herself!

"That's the way of it, Roy. Clever—yes? Neatness and thoroughness, and everything shipshape and Bristol fashion—that's my style, Roy. I know Mary (who should know her better than her legal spouse, eh, Roy?) and I have arranged matters so she will tuck in her own end. Listen, Roy, I have another item for the logbook which Fitzgibbon will copy. It needs but a date-line to be complete. It will read like this: 'To-day, while suffering from an attack of temporary insanity, the captain's wife destroyed herself. The captain is broken-hearted.' With details added, Roy. And the yarn cabled home when we make port. Suicide at sea—and I am broken-hearted! Artistic, eh? And she'll do it—you know she'll do it!"

He sat there watching Newman, waiting. I suppose he expected and desired a fresh outburst from the prisoner. But in this he was disappointed; Newman gave no sign.

"Ah, well, I fear I've overstayed my welcome this visit," he said, finally. He got to his feet, and stood before Newman with legs spraddled and arms akimbo; drinking in lustfully the picture of the other man's utter misery. "Interesting chat we've had—old times, future, and all that—eh, Roy? But a sailor's work, you know—like a woman's—never done. I have duties to attend to, Roy. But I will return—ah, yes, you know I will return. You'll wait here for me, eh, Roy? Anxiously awaiting my return, counting the bells against my coming. Well—remember—eight bells in the middle watch."

He turned and stepped towards the ladder. With his foot raised to the bottom step, he stopped, and stared aloft, mouth agape. I stared too, and listened.

We heard a shot, a single pistol shot.

The captain wheeled upon Newman. His hand flew to his pistol pocket. But he did not draw. He would have died then and there, if he had, for I was tensed for the leap.

But he was uncertain. This was not the hour—and the other shots, the volley, we both expected did not come. Instead, came the second mate's voice bellowing orders, "Connolly—the wheel! Hard alee! Weather main brace!" Then, clearer, as he shouted through the cabin skylights, "Captain—on deck, quick!"

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It was the hail for which I had waited so long and anxiously. But the news that came with it was strange and startling.

"The man at the wheel," shouted Lynch, "has jumped overboard with the mate!" Then his cry went forward, "Man overboard!"

Swope leaped for the ladder. I saw consternation in his face as he scurried aloft.

So I knew that this was something he hadn't arranged.

CHAPTER XXII

I was at Newman's side before Captain Swope's feet vanished from the ladder. If he had paused to close the lazaret hatch behind him, he must surely have seen me. But he did not pause; I heard his steps racing up the companion stairs to the poop, and his voice shouting his command: "Watch the main deck, Mister! Light a flare!"

I threw my arms about Newman, and babbled in his ear. "Oh, the beast!—it's I—Jack—the devil, I heard what he said!—come to free you!" Truth to tell, the things I had overheard unnerved me somewhat, and I was incoherent, almost, from rage and horror.

But Newman brought me to myself in short order. "I know—but not so loud—they'll hear you!" Aye, his first words, and he smiled into my face. This man on the rack smiled, and thought clearly, whilst I babbled. "Be quick," he bade me. "Cut the lashings."

I obeyed in jig time. The chains of both the hand and foot irons were secured to the limbers by rope lashings. With two strokes of my knife I severed them. Before I could catch him, Newman fell forward upon his face. His misused limbs could not support him.

I knelt by his side, sobbing and spluttering, and fishing in my pocket for the key the lady had given me. It was the sight of his raw, bleeding wrists and ankles that maddened me; aye, the sight of them would have maddened a saint. You will recall that the Old Man had commanded that Newman's wrists be tightly cuffed; and he had seen to it that the leg cuffs were equally tight. Tight ironing was a favorite sport of Swope's; he was notorious for it among sailormen. I saw the results upon Newman.

The flesh above the irons was puffed and inflamed; the constriction and chafing had broken the skin, and the cuffs upon both arms and legs were buried in the raw wounds. Exquisite agony—aye, trust Swope to produce that! I had to push back the swollen, bruised mass before I could insert the little flat key, and effect the release.

When I had them off, I turned Newman over on his back, and, with my arm about him, prepared to lift him erect. Before I could do so, assistance arrived. Light feet pattered

down the lazaret ladder; there was a swish of skirts, a gasp, and the lady was on her knees by Newman's side. "Roy—Roy—I was in time—" she cried. Her arms went around his neck.

I released him to her for the instant, and straightened up and listened. There was noise on deck, and confusion. The ship was in stays; she hung there, aback. I could hear Lynch, somewhere forward, bawling orders; and overhead, Swope sang out to the wheel, and then hailed the roundhouse.

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"Roundhouse, there—on deck and lend a hand! Man the lifeboat—lifeboat falls, there! For God's sake, Mister—what's the matter there on deck?"

Oh, he was worried, was Swope. It showed in his voice; for once his tone was not full and musical, it was shrill and screechy. He was sorely shaken, madly anxious to save his faithful jackal; the Eliminator had not planned Fitzgibbon's removal.

Thoughts, questions, rushed through my mind. I listened for other sounds, for shots and shouts and sounds of strife. For there was confusion up there on the dark decks, and the captain had forgotten his caution and withdrawn his ambush. I knew that Boston and Blackie would not overlook this chance; promise or no promise they would profit by this occasion.

It was this thought that spurred me to action. We must get out of this hole we were in; the lazaret was a trap. The die was cast; the mutiny was on—or would be in a moment.

I said as much to my companions. Newman attempted to get to his feet. "A hand, Jack—it must be stopped," he said.

I gave him the hand. More than that, I took him upon my back and tottered up the ladder with him, the lady assisting as well as she was able. She knew what had happened on deck, and she told us in a word or two.

She had not been able to find Wong (we afterwards discovered that Wong had gone forward to the galley, and surprised the crew at a conference, and had been detained prisoner by them), so she crawled up the companion ladder herself, and lurked in the cuddy, waiting for a chance to speak with Lynch. The Nigger was at the wheel, she said. Fitzgibbon walked up to him and struck him—as he had struck him many, many times before. But this time Nigger did not submit—he whipped out his knife and stabbed the mate. More than that, he grasped the mate in his powerful arms, dragged him to the taffrail, and flung him overboard. It happened so quickly that neither Connolly, the tradesman, nor Lynch, both of whom were on the poop, could interfere. But Lynch took a shot at Nigger, and perhaps struck him, for Nigger went over the rail and into the sea with his victim.

It was Nigger, despised, half-lunatic Nigger, who was not in my reckoning, nor in Swope's, who put the match to the tinder and upset such carefully laid plans. As I feared, the revolt of the crew blazed up immediately. My shipmates were eager, too eager. As it turned out, their precipitancy was to cost them their chance of victory, for they began to riot while the three tradesmen were still handy to the roundhouse door, though, indeed, they had no knowledge, as had I, of the captain's ambush.

I staggered into the saloon, and set Newman down upon the divan which ran around the half-round, and which was but a step from the hatch. He got to his feet at once, and,

though the lady and I stretched out our arms to catch him, this time he did not fall. He swayed drunkenly, and hobbled when he took a step, but such was his vitality and so strong the urge of his will, that life was already returning to his misused limbs.

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It was just then that pandemonium broke out on deck—a shot, a string of shots and a bedlam of howls and yells. Overhead was bedlam, too. The skipper's tune changed instantaneously. He had been singing out to Mister Lynch to “topsail haul,” and to the tradesmen to man the boat falls—but now he was screaming to the latter in a voice shaken with excitement—or panic—to regain their posts, to get into the roundhouse and “turn loose on 'em—pepper 'em! And, for God's sake, throw out the flares!”

Oh, the Great Eliminator was shocked most unpleasantly in that moment, I think—to discover, when his trusty mate was overboard, that his mutinous crew had firearms!

I looked to Newman for orders, for he was now in command of our forlorn hope. But he had his arm about the lady's shoulders, and was speaking urgently into her ear. My thought was of a place to hide. I ran towards the cabin alleyway. I had no intention of going out on that dangerous deck, my object was to see if the inner door to the sail-locker was unlocked. In the sail-locker, I thought, we could hide, the three of us, until the fight died down.

But my design was frustrated. Before I reached the sail-locker, the door to the deck, at the end of the alleyway, burst open, and the tradesman, Morton, pitched headlong over the base-board. He scrambled to his hands and knees and scuttled towards me. There was a whistling thud near my head. I leaped back into the cabin, out of range, so quickly I tripped and sat down hard upon the deck. For a shot fired after the fleeting Morton had just missed my skull.

Morton crawled into the saloon, and looked at me with a stupid wonder in his face. He was wounded; he nursed his shoulder, and there was a spreading stain upon his white shirt.

“They have guns—in the rigging,” says he. Then he grunted, and collapsed, unconscious.

The heavy roar of shotguns, for which my ear was cocked, did not come. There were two pistols in action overhead, and pistol shots rattled forward, and I could tell from the sounds that a free fight was raging somewhere on the main deck. But the heavier discharges did not come. For an instant I thought—aye, and hoped!—that the tradesmen had been cut off from the roundhouse.

Suddenly the saloon grew bright with a reflected glare. I was on my feet again, and I peered into the alleyway, looking out through the door Morton had opened. The roundhouse cut off any view of the main deck, but I could see that the whole deck, aye, the whole ship, was alight with a growing glare, a dazzling greenish-white light.



Then I knew what Captain Swope meant when he screamed for “flares.” Distress flares, signal flares, such as a ship in trouble might use. He had stocked the roundhouse with them.

Cunning, aye, deadly cunning. This was something Boston and Blackie had not dreamed of. A flare thrown on deck when the men came aft—and slaughter made easy for the defenders of the roundhouse!

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Something of this I spoke aloud to Newman. There was no answer, and I became conscious he was not behind me. I wheeled about. Newman, with the lady's assistance, was hobbling up the ladder to the deck above. I swore my amazement and dismay at what seemed to me madness, but I hurried after them, and emerged on the poop at their heels.

The night was banished by the strong light flaring forward. That was my impression when I leaped out on deck. When I turned forward, I saw the whole ship, clear to the foc'sle, bathed in that light. Not one, but a half dozen flares were burning at once; they had been thrown upon the deck both to port and starboard. Everything on the decks was brightly revealed, every ringbolt, the pins in the rails, deadeyes, sails, gear, aye, every rope in the rigging was boldly etched against the glowing background. With that one sweeping glance I took in the scene. High up in the main rigging, almost to the futtock shrouds, the figure of a man was revealed: he was blazing away in the direction of the poop with a revolver. On the deck, near the mainmast, the second mate was laying about him with a capstan bar, and a dozen men seemed boiling over each other in efforts to close with him. Other figures lay motionless upon the deck.

So much for what I saw forward; what concerned me that instant was what was right before my eyes. Captain Swope was leaning against the mizzen fife rail, screened by the mast from those forward, returning the fire of the man in the rigging—but no, even as I clapped eyes upon him, he shot, and I saw he aimed, not at the man in the rigging, but at the group fighting on the deck. At his second officer, no less! Aye, and I understood in a flash why I had not heard the shotguns; the tradesmen had not Swope's murderous intent towards Mister Lynch. and they held their fire because they could not rake the gang without hitting Lynch.

The tradesman, Connolly, was crouched against the companion hatch; he was staring after Newman and the lady, mouth agape. He saw them directly they appeared on deck, which Swope did not. He raised his gun uncertainly, then lowered it, then raised it again, covering Newman's broad back—and by that time I was upon him, my clutch was upon his wrist, and my right fist impacted violently against his head. It was a knockout blow, at the base of the brain, and he slumped down, unconscious. I straightened up, with the gun in my hand.

It was at this instant that Captain Swope became aware of our presence. It was Newman, himself, who attracted his attention—aye, and the attention of the whole ship, as well.

For Newman had marched into the light. He stood now almost at the forward poop rail, with his arms raised above his head; and he sent his voice forward in a stentorian hail, a cry that was like a thunderclap.

“Stop fighting, lads! Stop it, I say! It is I—Newman! Stop fighting and go for'ard!”

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If ever a human face showed amazement and discomfiture, Swope's did. He had been so busy at his game of potting his officer he did not see Newman until the latter walked into his range of vision and sent forth his hail. He could have shot Newman then, and I could not have prevented, for he had his weapon leveled. But this sudden apparition seemed to paralyze him; he just lowered his arm, and stared.

It startled and paralyzed all hands. The struggle on the main deck ceased abruptly. It was the strangest thing I ever beheld, the way Newman's thunderous command seemed to turn to graven images the men on deck. They were frozen into grotesque attitudes, arms drawn back to strike, boots lifted to kick. Mister Lynch stood with his capstan bar poised, as though he were at bat in a baseball game. Every face was lifted to the giant figure standing there on the poop. I even saw in the brilliant light a white face framed in one of the portholes in the roundhouse.

Newman repeated his command. He did not beg or entreat; he commanded, and I don't think there was a sailor or stiff on the main deck who, after his first word, dreamed of disobeying him. Such was the big man's character superiority, such was the dominance his personality had acquired over our minds. I tell you, we of the foc'sle looked upon Newman as of different clay; it was not alone my hero-worship that magnified his stature, in all our eyes he was one of the great, a being apart from and above us.

And not only foc'sle eyes regarded him in this light. There were the tradesmen peering out of the roundhouse ports, with never a thought in their minds of disobeying his injunction. I had it from their own lips afterwards; it was not just surprise at the big fellow's sudden appearance that stayed their hands, it was the power of his personality. There was Mister Lynch, arrested by Newman's voice in mid-stroke, as it were. There was Swope, standing palsied and impotent, with a growing terror in his face.

"Go for'ard, lads! Go below! Come up here, Lynch! Not another blow, men—for'ard with you!"

The frozen figures on the deck came to life. There was a murmur, a shuffling of feet, and Lynch lowered his great club. But it was an obedient noise.

From one quarter came the single note of dissent. The man in the main rigging sang out. It was Boston's voice.

"Go aft, mates!" he shouted. "We've got them—we've won—don't listen to him!" Then he threw his voice at Newman. "Damn you, Big 'Un, you've spoiled the game!" A flash followed the oath, and a splinter flew from the deck at Newman's feet.

There was a flash from my gun as well. I fired without taking conscious aim; I swear, an invisible hand seemed to lift my arm, a finger not mine seemed to press the trigger—

and that greedy, murderous rascal in the rigging screamed, and loosed his hold. He struck the sheer pole in his descent, and bounced into the sea.

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The shots seemed to awaken Captain Swope from his surprise and terror. He had suddenly moved with catlike swiftness; when I lowered my eyes from the rigging, I saw he had left his refuge behind the mizzenmast and was standing in the open deck. Aye, there he stood in that light, which had reached its maximum, revealed to all eyes—and stamped upon his face was an expression of insane fury so terrible and deadly he seemed not a human being at all, but a mad beast crouched to spring. His lips were drawn back from his teeth, and a froth appeared upon his black beard. The crowd forward saw the demon unmasked in his face, even as I saw it, and from them arose a gasping “a-ah!” of horror.

The sound caused the lady, who was standing at Newman’s elbow, to turn around; or perhaps it was the feel of Swope’s burning eyes that spun her about so quickly. He was raising his arm, the arm that held the gun, not quickly but slowly and carefully. With a stab of horror I saw him aim, not at the man, but at the woman.

No outside power this time seemed to aid me. I shot. I should have hit the beast, he was not ten paces distant—but only a click answered when my hammer fell. My gun was empty. I threw up my arm, intending to hurl the weapon, and I think I cried out. Swope shot—and the lady threw up her hands and fell.

You must understand, this all happened in a brief instant of time. Aye, it was but a short moment since we stepped out on deck. What happened after that shot must be measured by seconds.

For the lady was still falling, and my hand was still reaching behind me to gather energy for a throw, when Newman bore down upon his enemy. I had not seen him turn around even, and there he was at arm’s grips with the captain. There was another flash from Swope’s revolver, in Newman’s very face. It was a miss, for Newman’s hands—helpless lumps of flesh but a few moments before—closed upon Swope’s neck. I saw Newman’s face. It was a terrible face, the face of an enraged and smiting god. The great scar stood out like a dark line painted upon his forehead.

He lifted Swope from his feet with that throat grip. He whirled him like a flail, and smashed him down upon the deck, and let him go. And there Yankee Swope lay, sprawled, and still, his head bent back at a fatal angle. A broken neck, as a glance at the lolling head would inform; and, as we discovered later, a broken back as well. It was death that Newman’s bare hands dealt in that furious second.

Newman did not waste so much as a glance at the work of his hands. He had turned to the lady, with a cry in his throat, a low cry of pain and grief—which changed at once to a shout of gladness. For the lady was stirring, getting to her feet, or trying to.

Newman gathered her slight form into his great arms. I heard him exclaim, "Where, Mary? Did it—" And she answered, dazedly, "I am all right—not hit." He took a step towards me, towards the companion. The swelling murmur from the deck arrested him.

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He walked to the break of the poop, with the woman in his arms. She seemed like a child held to his breast. He spoke to the men below in a hushed, solemn voice.

"It is ended," he said. "Swope is dead."

As he stood there, the flares commenced to go out. One by one they guttered and extinguished, and the black night swept down like a falling curtain.

Five bells chimed in the cabin.

CHAPTER XXIII

It was the end, even as Newman said. The end of the mutiny, the end of hate and dissension in that ship, the end, for us, of Newman, himself, and the lady. Peace came to the *Golden Bough* that night, for the first time, I suppose, in her bitter, blood-stained history. A peace that was bought with suffering and death, as we discovered when we reckoned the cost of the night's work.

Swope was dead—for which there was a prayer of thanks in every man's heart. Fitzgibbon was gone, and the Nigger. Boston was dead at my hand; his partner, Blackie, lay stark in the scuppers, as did also the stiff named Green, each with a bashed in skull, the handiwork of Mister Lynch.

Such was the death list for that night's work. It was no heavier I think—though of much different complexion—than the list Captain Swope had planned.

As for wounded—God's truth, the *Golden Bough* was manned by a crew of cripples for weeks after. Lynch had wrought terribly, there on the main deck—broken pates, broken fingers, a cracked wrist, a broken foot, and three men wounded, though not seriously, by Swope's and Connolly's shots. Such were the foc'sle's lighter casualties. Aft, the list was shorter. Morton had a bullet wound in the shoulder; it would lay him up for the rest of the passage, but was not dangerous. Connolly had a lump behind his ear. Lynch was bruised a bit, and his clothes were slashed to ribbons, otherwise he had escaped scathless.

The lady was not really hurt at all. Swope's bullet plowed through her mass of hair, creasing her so lightly the skin was unbroken, though the impact knocked her down.

I was almost the only man on the ship who bore no marks of that fight, though I was a sight from the beating, and Lynch—or perhaps it was Newman—made me bo'sun of the deck in the labor of bringing order out of chaos. I rallied the unhurt and lightly hurt, and we carried the worse injured into the cabin, where the lady and Newman attended them. I opened the barricaded galley, and freed the frightened Chinamen, Wong and the cook and the cabin boy, and Holy Joe, the parson. As I learned afterwards, Holy

Joe, when he learned of the intended mutiny, threatened, in vain attempt to stop it, to go aft and blow the plot. Blackie and Boston wanted to kill him for the threat, but the squareheads would not have it so, and he was shut up in the galley with the Chinamen.

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By Lynch's order, we launched the dinghy, and, with me at the tiller and two lordly tradesmen at the oars, set out in humane but hopeless quest for the mate and the Nigger. I cruised about for nigh an hour, and came back empty-handed. We had not really expected to find them, or trace of them. Fitzgibbon had been stabbed, and it was known, also, that he did not know how to swim; and as for the Nigger, "I plugged him as he jumped," said Lynch.

When we got back, Lynch had me muster the available hands, and we launched the longboat. All the rest of the night, Wong and his two under-servants cargood that craft with stores of every kind.

One other man had lost his mess number in that ship, we discovered, as the night wore on. The traitor. We found not hide or hair of Cockney; he was gone from the ship, leaving no trace. At least, no trace I could discover. But when I looked for him, I became conscious of a new attitude towards me on the part of my shipmates. I had been their mate, in a way their leader and champion. Now, by virtue of Lynch's word—and Newman's—I was their boss. I was no longer one of them. Aye, and sailorlike they showed it by their reserve. They said truthfully enough they did not know what had become of Cockney—and they kept their guesses to themselves. But my own guess was as good, and as true. Boston and Blackie had attended to Cockney. I could imagine how. A knife across the windpipe and a boost over the side; without doubt some such fate was Cockney's.

Mister Lynch made no effort to put the ship on her course. We left the yards as they were, and drifted all the rest of the night. I, and the unwounded tradesmen, kept the deck; in the cabin, the lady and Newman labored, and conferred with Lynch and Holy Joe. Aye, Holy Joe, as well as myself, was lifted to higher estate by that night's happenings. He lived aft, even as I, the rest of the voyage, and was doctor of bodies as well as souls.

Near dawn, they called me into the cabin, and put dead man's shoes upon my feet, so to speak.

"Shreve, it is my duty to take the ship into port," says Lynch. "What will be the outcome of tonight's work, I do not know. But I do not fear. My testimony, and that of the sailmakers and carpenters, to say nothing of your story, and the stories of the other men forward, will be more than sufficient to convince any court of justice. There will be no jailing because of to-night's trouble—you may tell the men that."

"Yes, sir," I replied. Aye, it was good news to take forward to the poor shaking wretches in the foc'sle.

"You understand, I am captain for the remainder of the passage," Lynch went on. "And I have decided to appoint you chief mate. Connolly will be second mate."

Aye, that was it. Jack Shreve, chief mate of the *Golden Bough*! “I have decided,” says Lynch—but I knew the decision belonged to Newman and the lady, who were smiling at me across the table.

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"And you understand—they are leaving in the longboat," added Lynch.

I looked at my friend, and the lady, and my new honor was bitter and worthless in my mouth.

"Take me with you," I urged.

"To share an outlaw's career? No, lad—we must go alone," said Newman. I remember he added to Lynch, "If this boy proves the friend to you he was to me, you will be a lucky man, Captain."

The sky was just graying with the coming day when the two left the ship. But before they went over the side, there took place in the growing light on the deck before the cabin a scene as strange and solemn as any I have seen since. Holy Joe married them, there on the deck—and in the scuppers, behind the lady's back, covered up with a spare sail, lay the ship's dead, Yankee Swope among them. Aye, the parson tied the knot, for this life and next, as he said, and I was best man, and Captain Lynch gave away the bride.

"Roy Waldon, do you take this woman—" that was the way the parson put it, standing there before them, with his one good hand holding the Book, peering up into Newman's face through his puffed, blackened eyes. A minister in dungaree! "Mary Swope, do you take this man—" that was how he put it. And though the lady's face was wan and haggard, yet there was a glory in it beyond power to describe.

And then they cast off from the ship, those two who were now one. Newman stepped the mast, and drew aft the sheet, and the little craft caught the breeze and scudded away from us. We lined the rail, lame men and well men, and cheered our farewell. I wept.

A long time we watched them. The sun leaped up from the sea, and the longboat seemed to sail into its golden heart; and after the sun had risen above it, the boat was visible for a long time as a dwindling, ever dwindling speck. I moved up onto the poop, the longer to see. So did Lynch. Side by side, we watched the speck dip over the rim of the sea.

Lynch sighed, and walked away. I heard him exclaim, and turned to observe him picking up something from the deck. He held it out to me, in the palm of his hand.

It was a little wisp of hair, the lady's hair, a relic of the battle. Lynch stared at it—then he looked out over the sea, into the path of the sun. Aye, and there was that in his eyes which opened mine. I began at last to understand Bucko Lynch—"Captain" Lynch as he was to remain to the end of his days. I knew from that look in his eyes why no parson would now ever say to him, "Do you take this woman?"

Slowly, Lynch put the little wisp of hair into his waistcoat pocket. He drew a deep breath, and shrugged his shoulders; then he hailed me with seamanly brusqueness.

“Lively, now, Mister—we’ll put the ship on her course!”

“Yes, Captain,” I answered. And the “Mister” roared his first command along those decks.