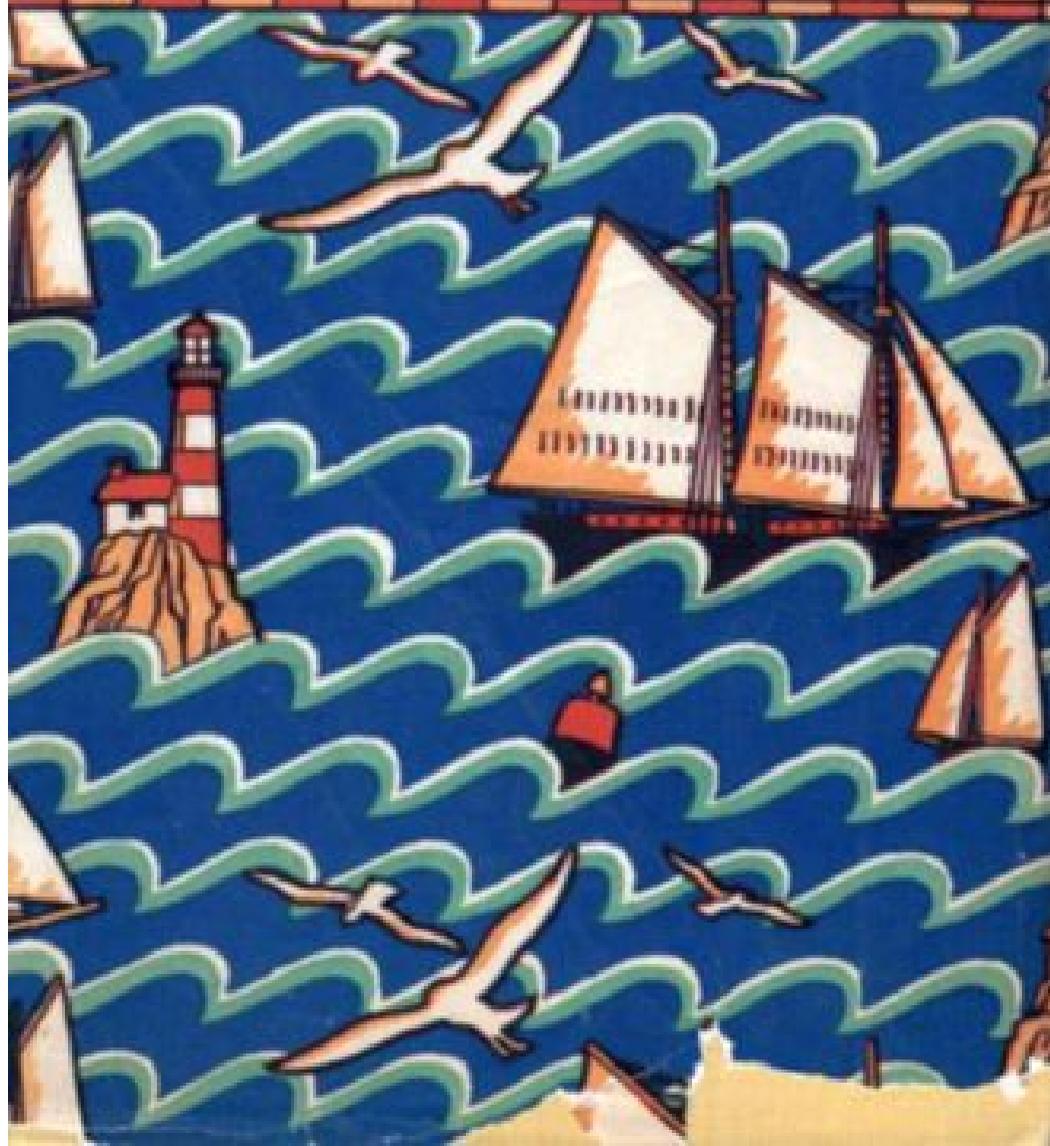


CAP'N SUE
by
Hulbert Footner



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Cap'n Sue

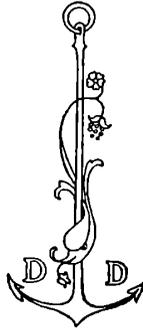
Hulbert Footner

By HULBERT FOOTNER

QUEEN OF CLUBS
A BACKWOODS PRINCESS
MADAME STOREY
ANTENNAE
THE SHANTY SLED
THE UNDER DOGS
THE WILD BIRD
OFFICER!
RAMSHACKLE HOUSE
THE DEAVES AFFAIR
THE OWL TAXI
THE SUBSTITUTE MILLIONAIRE
THIEVES' WIT
NEW RIVERS OF THE NORTH
THE SEALED VALLEY
JACK CHANTY

CAP'N SUE

BY
HULBERT FOOTNER



GARDEN CITY, NEW YORK
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FIRST EDITION

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I

THE "HIT-OR-MISS"

MINUS masts and sails, the hull of a Chesapeake Bay Canoe with its clipper bows and fine lines makes a dashing motor-boat. Such was the *Hit-or-Miss*. With an old one-lugger Globe in the stern, she could do her eight miles an hour; and to an observer she seemed to be moving twice as fast, so suggestive of speed were all her lines; the pointing bowsprit, the pronounced sheer, the beautifully-modelled stern, surmounted by a little rail. She was painted white. Nobody would ever think of painting a canoe other than white or pink down there. They do not build such beauties nowadays.

She was flinging herself into the teeth of a brisk north-west wind, that wind which washes earth and air like a strong cleaning fluid. The Pocomico River, two miles wide here, more like an estuary than a river, was as dark under the wind as sapphires flecked with white; the sky was turquoise, the distant shores emerald and agate. Indeed it was a jewelled world this morning, but the two good-looking young people aboard the *Hit-or-Miss* showed no exultation in it. Temp Wye stood up forward with one hand on the tiny steering-wheel, and his gaze fixed sternly ahead, though steering was a sinecure in those wide spaces; while Sue Rousby was astern, leaning back against the combing, staring down at the bilge under the whirling flywheel, and biting her crimson underlip.

The canoe belonged to Sue—or to her father, which was much the same thing. At any rate it was Sue who really kept the family going by freighting up and down river in the *Hit-or-Miss*. To the rivermen she was Cap'n Sue. On this particular morning she had collected a load of fish from the various fishermen in the neighbourhood, and had carried it to the fish house at Claggett's wharf where it would be iced and shipped to Baltimore. Temp Wye happened to be along simply because he had seen her getting ready to start from the river-field where he was ploughing, and had been tempted beyond his strength. Throwing the reins to a negro lad who would certainly spoil his morning's work, he had dashed downhill and jumped in just as Sue was giving the flywheel its first turn.

He had got no good from it. They had done nothing but quarrel. It seemed as if they were always quarrelling nowadays. The trouble this morning arose from the fact that Sue in the wind and the sunshine was so maddeningly pretty. Head, neck and arms were bare; her skin was tinted a

delicious biscuit colour by the sun, and brave flags of red were hoisted in her cheeks. She had a rag of red chiffon bound around her head to confine her short hair; but the ends of her brown curls fluttered adventurously, showing a hundred changes of light and shade. Whenever she raised her head, she screwed up her eyes a little to mitigate the dazzle, and her lips parted, revealing two perfect rows of creamy teeth.

The fresh morning beauty of her caused Temp to groan inwardly with the desire to seize her in his arms. That was why he turned his back and scowled along their course. At the same time Sue was wondering why he didn't seize her; that was why she bit her lip. One corner of her mouth curled a little scornfully at his timidity, as she considered it. What a wasted morning!

Temp was not timid but proud. When he became a man he had sworn to himself that he and the playmate of his childhood should not drift into one of the interminable, barren, hopeless "engagements" that were so common in that community. Either he would have the girl or he would not have her. And since marriage appeared to be entirely out of the question, he let her alone—at least as far as he was able. He could not stay away from her altogether. He knew that she was ready enough to love him back again, but he would not spoil her chances by taking advantage of it. The neighbourhood did not offer much; but he told himself she was pretty enough to attract suitors from afar. All this he had argued out in bitter solitude.

Sue did not understand his bitter pride because it went dead against the Southern Maryland tradition, which expects a spirited young man to kiss first and afterwards consider the consequences. Temp must have had a Puritan ancestor somewhere behind him; or what was more likely, his late father (also a Templeton Wye) had been such a complete exemplar of the gallant tradition that Temp the son had just naturally swung as far as possible in the other direction. As the result of a life of gallantry the elder Templeton had bequeathed to the younger a run-down farm burdened with a seven thousand dollar mortgage, and a querulous faded beauty, Temp's stepmother, to take care of.

The interest was four hundred and twenty dollars a year. In these days of big figures such a sum appears like a mere drop in the bucket, but to Temp it was the biggest fact in life. He had to sweat his heart out to earn it. He was further hampered by worn-out machinery which he could not renew, and by his inability to hire efficient labour. All he had to pit against these odds was his own youthful strength and determination. It was a nip-and-tuck struggle. When crops were good he gained a little; when Nature turned against him too, he had to borrow to meet his interest, and so fell back again.

The Rousbys lived on the next farm. Their situation was worse. Their mortgage was only to the tune of five thousand dollars; but the interest had not been paid in three years, nor was there the slightest chance of its ever being paid. Temp Wye was considered a good risk at the bank, because he was young and he would work; whereas old Sam Rousby was incurably shif'less. The Rousbys as a family were on the toboggan. It would only be a question of a short time now when they would be sold up and turned out of house and home. The thought was like gall and wormwood to Sue. Her bitterness was due to the fact that she knew her family was looked down upon by the rest of the County. The children had run wild since the death of their mother thirteen years before. The harum-scarum Rousbys they were called; and the worst was expected of them. Now they seemed to be about to justify this expectation. Cap'n Sue left the housework to her three younger sisters, while she worked up and down the river in all weathers to try to bring in enough to meet running expenses. Sam pottered about his farm in a futile fashion, disregarded by his children. Of the two boys, the elder, Johnny, was "wild," while Ed was still a schoolboy.

The motor-boat had come in sight of the two homesteads, each planted on its low rise, with a stretch of flat land between. Over the flat came a newly constructed branch of the State road ending at the wharf. Rousby's was a real old Maryland farm-house with overhanging eaves and a pair of mighty chimneys; the Wye house which Temp's father had built in the fancy style of the nineties, already looked more dilapidated than its ancient neighbour. Across the river from the two farms lay the village of Batcheller in Prince Edward's County. Here a man from Washington had lately erected a dancing pavilion to which the youth of both counties were accustomed to repair on Saturday nights.

Suddenly the *Hit-or-Miss*, determined to live up to her name, missed an explosion; recovered; missed again; coughed once or twice and stopped altogether. Temp ran back to the engine; Sue was already kneeling there.

"It's the carburettor," said Temp. "The mixture's wrong."

"Nothing of the sort!" said Sue, sharply. "I adjusted it before starting."

Temp smiled in an exasperating male fashion.

"It's the commutator," said Sue stiffly. "The points are foul."

"It's the carburettor," said Temp stubbornly. "I could tell by the sound."

"It's the commutator! I ought to know my own boat!"

Temp reached a hand towards the needle valve of the carburettor.

"Don't touch it!" cried Sue. "This is my boat!"

"As long as I am with you . . ." Temp began stiffly.

“I didn’t ask you to come!”

“Well, believe me, I won’t come again!” Temp said with extreme bitterness. “But as long as I am here, you might as well let me fix it for you. It’s a man’s place.”

Sue laughed scornfully. “What foolishness!” she said. “After I’ve driven this boat up and down the river every day for years. And got it going a hundred times when it stopped on me. Why don’t you add that women’s place is the home?”

“Well, it is!” said Temp stubbornly.

Sue laughed loud and long. “Wake up, Rip van Winkle!” she cried. “You’re still in the last century.”

“I wish I was!” said Temp darkly. “I would have liked it better when women didn’t try to make themselves like men!”

“Suits me!” said Sue flippantly. “I’d rather drive a motor-boat than a sewing machine! I wish to Heaven I was a man out and out!”

“Well, you’re not,” said Temp. “And your tomboy tricks only bring discredit on you!”

“With whom?” demanded Sue.

“You know what I mean!”

“With all the old cats in the county!” cried Sue. “I know what they say about me, and I don’t care. I’ve always done exactly what I pleased, and I mean to go on doing it, and if anybody doesn’t like it they can lump it!”

Temp had no retort to this. His face had become very pale; he gazed at her steadily, his heavy brows drawn down low and level over his grey eyes, his mouth tightly compressed. One would have said that he hated her with a deadly hatred, and so he did at that moment; but it was the sort of hatred which is only separated by a hair’s breadth from passionate love. Ah! how he desired to shake the exasperating creature until her teeth rattled, and then cover her face with kisses! Sue, glancing at his haughty, pale face out of the corners of her eyes, wondered at how handsome he had become of late. He seemed to her the handsomest man she had ever beheld, and it caused her breath to fail deliciously. But she taunted him still.

“It’s too bad you haven’t got the power to regulate us all according to your ideas!”

“This hasn’t got anything to do with the carburettor,” said Temp with a cold smile.

“It’s the commutator!” cried Sue in a rage.

Then it was Temp’s turn to laugh.

“Get back, you’re in my way,” cried Sue.

Temp turned on his heel, and walked away to the bow. Sue laughed at his dignified air. “Lord Baltimore!” she called after him. That was her name for Temp when he mounted his high horse. It always enraged him. He affected to take no notice of it now. Sue bent over the engine.

Whether it was carburettor or commutator will never be known, for at the first vigorous twist that Sue gave the flywheel in her ill-temper, the engine started, and never stopped again until it brought them to Rousby’s wharf. They exchanged not a word the whole way.

Temp jumped out, and giving the painter a half hitch around a snubbing post, walked stiffly away without a backward glance. Sue’s heart failed her for a moment. “Temp!” she said, but not very loud. He paid no attention. Then a renewed rage filled her breast. He would, would he! Then he should pay for it well. How bitterly she regretted having spoken, however softly.

At the shore end of the wharf, Temp turned to the left, Sue to the right. Sue’s anger died down. He hates me really and truly, she thought sadly. I wonder what makes me so hateful to him? Then with a sudden jerk up of her head: Well, I shan’t stop living even if Temp Wye does hate me!

She set to her work about the place with a sort of feverish energy. Apparently she was in the highest spirits, talking and laughing more than was her custom. But her sisters looked at her a little askance; they had a feeling that thunder was in the air. As for Sue, she felt that if she let up for a moment, she would be drowned in tears.

II

THE COVE

AT ten o'clock that night she was still in the grip of the demon of restlessness. She had come upstairs with the rest of the family, but had not gone to bed. When the house fell quiet, she stole downstairs again, and throwing a cape around her shoulders, went out of doors. Sue had a deep, instinctive sympathy with the night, and she often did this. She had never told anyone about it, fearing that such a fancy would be one more count against her with the unco' good. To-night the moon was shining.

The front yard of the Rousby house was on the side away from the river. It was bounded by an old-fashioned picket fence. Outside the fence ran the private road which served the farm. If you turned to the left it would bring you down a gentle slope to the new highway; if you turned to the right after passing between the farm buildings and descending the slope on that side, it ended on the shore of a cove which was entirely within the Rousby property. The old road and the wharf had been on this side; but when the new road was projected Sam Rousby had asked too much for the extra strip of land that was required; and the road had been moved off his property altogether. There was nothing left of the old wharf now. On the shore stood a ruinous building which had once housed a little country store.

It was to the right that Sue turned. Opening a gate, she passed through the farmyard, a place of mystery and beauty in the moonlight, through another gate and down a ruddy piece of road to the water's edge. The water was bordered by a strip of firm sand that made a good place to walk. Back of the sand grew the tall picturesque bushes that are called water-weeds locally. Seen against the moon their irregular tops looked like little carved ebony clouds.

There was not a breath of air stirring; not the merest whisper of a lap on the sand. But in the moonlight one could see lines along the water's edge, fairy breakers turning over without a sound. The surface of the cove was so smooth that it seemed to be powdered. Here and there sea-nettles had risen to the surface of the water, their glassy disks faintly reflecting the light like little moons. Across the river two miles away, the lights of Batcheller were strung along the shore. The village had lately put in an electric light plant. The lights were lovely.

Sue drew in great draughts of the delicious river air, and a feeling of peace descended on her breast. At such a moment of beauty one seemed to be able to survey life calmly; one could regard mortgages undismayed. There is no use, Sue said to herself; it is clear that Temp and I are not suited to each other. I must put him out of my mind. When he marries I will make friends with his wife.

Suddenly Sue became aware that there was a man standing against the inky background of the bushes. She stopped short, not in fear but in astonishment. This strip of beach could not be reached except through the Rousby property. Never before had her privacy been intruded upon. Then a wild hope sprang up in her heart.

“Temp!” she said, eagerly stepping forward.

He came out from the shadow. As soon as he moved Sue saw that it was not her friend. This man was a little taller, more graceful in action. He raised his hat.

“I beg your pardon,” he said in a soft, baritone voice. “I’m afraid I’m a trespasser here.”

“Ohh!” breathed Sue. She was just one great O of astonishment. For it was not the voice of anybody she knew; it was not a voice of that country at all. In its modulations; in its cultivated enunciation it suggested cities and far-off places. The ring of youth was in it. A young gentleman of the great world dropped down there on their lonely beach!—why, one might as easily have expected a visitor from the skies!

“Don’t be afraid,” he said entreatingly, alarmed by her stillness.

In reality Sue was no more afraid of him than if he had been another girl. Her out-of-door life, throwing her in with all kinds of men, had enabled her to conquer the instinctive fear of women. But she was paralysed with astonishment. “Who are you?” she murmured.

“My name is Earl Darrah,” he said. “I’m from New York. It needs such a lot of explanation.” He laughed lightly. “Let’s just pretend we’re spirits of the night.”

He kept his straw hat in his hand, and Sue could see that he had a graceful head with smoothly brushed dark hair that gleamed faintly in the moonlight. His face was merely an agreeable oval; but Sue knew by intuition that he was a handsome man. That was all very well, but it was his voice which made her breast thrill like harpstrings. The cultivated accents taken with the ring of youth and laughter suggested careless elegance, worldly distinction, beautiful living, everything for which the secret heart of a girl yearns. To have this voice strike upon her ears at a moment when her

heart was big and soft with the beauty of the night, overwhelmed her. Her keen, sure judgment of young men was in abeyance. This one laid a spell on her.

Suddenly recalled to the necessity of breaking the silence, she said breathlessly: "How did you get here?"

He laughed again. That agreeable laugh was his long suit. "Just strayed in from the road. Left my car out there. It was the moonlight shining on your beautiful old house that first attracted me.—At least, I suppose it is your house since you came from that direction."

"Yes," murmured Sue, so charmed by the voice, that she scarcely heard what it was saying.

"Then I wandered on," he continued, "through the farmyard and down here. I just wanted to get by myself in the moonlight."

"Me too," said Sue.

"But you were looking for somebody," he said teasingly. "You mentioned a name."

"That was the only person who could have been here," said Sue quickly. "I wasn't expecting to find him."

The young man laughed a little complacently. There was a silence, during which Sue imagined that she could hear the beating of her heart. Finally he murmured:

"What a lovely little bay!"

"Yes," said Sue, "now that the road goes down on the other side, nobody would suspect the existence of this deep cove."

"Is it deep?" he asked eagerly.

Sue, in a dream, never noticed the exigency of his tone. "Oh, yes," she said, "this is a much better landing than the other. They only had to build fifty feet here to deep water, while the new wharf is four hundred feet long. It was a saying among the old rivermen before there was any wharf at all, that in Rousby's cove a pungy could run her nose up on the beach and unload."

"So!" murmured the young man. He said louder: "The old road used to run down here, you say?"

"Yes," said Sue, "it came out by that building yonder which was the old store. The road is still there."

"And where does it go?" asked the young man.

"It joins the State road about a quarter of a mile back. But there are fences built across it now."

“What kind of fences?”

“Wire fences,” said Sue. Suddenly it occurred to her that this was a very odd conversation. “Why do you ask?” she said.

“Oh, just to keep you talking,” he said with his quick laugh. “I was afraid you’d run away.”

Sue turned at the words.

“There now, why did I mention it!” he said in quick dismay. “*Please* don’t go, night-spirit!”

She lingered yet a moment.

“How far is it down the river to Chesapeake Bay?”

“Thirty miles.”

“Difficult navigation, I suppose.”

“Yes, unless you know it. There are so many long bars. Only a few of the principal points are staked and lighted.”

“You speak as if you knew it.”

“Me!” said Sue. “Why, twice a week during the season I carry a load of strawberries down to Absolom’s Island to catch the direct steamboat. Besides hundreds of other trips. Nobody knows it better than me.”

“A pilot!” exclaimed the young man.

Sue turned again. “I must get back,” she said uneasily.

“Oh, please, *please* don’t go!” he begged.

“You said you wanted to be alone in the moonlight,” she retorted.

“But how could I know that anything like you would come down!” he said ardently.

“You don’t know anything about me,” said Sue quickly.

“I know all that I need to know.”

“The moon is kind to me. In the daylight you would shudder at me.”

“You can’t fool me that way,” he said. “The light is entangled in your hair; your voice is like hushed silver bells. You could not be anything but perfectly beautiful. I’d stake my life on it!”

How different from the silent, stubborn Temp! If Sue had been quite herself she would have heard the tone of practised gallantry in his voice, but she was still dreamy. Moonlight, and a tall figure of romance walking at her side, murmuring in his resonant voice! They passed through the first gate.

“You still haven’t told me how you came to be in this part of the world,” said Sue.

“I scarcely know myself,” he said lightly. “I’m just bumming around blindly in my car. The fact is I got so fed up with New York I couldn’t stand it another day. The endless round of dinners and dances and frivolous society girls disgusted me at last. I set off to find the simple life.”

Sue thrilled at this, though she was half conscious that it was hot air. She would never have admitted that. “But where are you going to sleep?” she asked.

“I suppose you couldn’t take me in?” he asked laughing.

“Mercy, no!” said Sue demurely. “I’m supposed to have gone to bed an hour ago. There’s a hotel at King’s Green seven miles up the road.”

“I’ll go there, then.”

They arrived at the yard gate. “Come on and see my car,” he pleaded. “It’s rather good-looking.”

Beyond the corner of the picket fence stood a great mulberry tree. Here the farm road forked and joined the State road running both ways. The car rested below, an extraordinarily long and rakish runabout, bearing a New York licence. The young man murmured the name of the most famous and expensive of all makes of cars.

“Ohh!” breathed Sue. “How beautiful! There’s never been one down here before!”

“Take a little spin up the road,” he pleaded.

Sue crushed down the temptation. “No, thanks,” she laughed. “Not with a night-spirit!”

“Please . . .” he began to plead.

Sue walked firmly back to the yard gate, and he had no choice but to follow. Sue put the gate between them.

“Can I come and call to-morrow?” he asked.

“Good gracious, no!” said Sue. “How would I explain you to my people?”

“Do I need so much explanation?” he grumbled.

“Rather! Night-spirit wouldn’t go down with my father.”

“Then meet me again down by the cove.”

“No! There wouldn’t be any magic in it if it was all pre-arranged.”

“But I *must* see you again. What can I do?”

“There will be a dance at the pavilion across the river to-morrow night,” said Sue. “All the boys and girls from this side leave their cars here and go

over on a scow. Get one of the boys I know to introduce you to me at the dance.”

“Oh, you darling!” he murmured, suddenly reaching for her over the gate. But Sue backed off.

“Good night,” she said over her shoulder, and ran into the house.

III

AT THE PAVILION

A FLAT-BOTTOMED scow with an engine in it served as an occasional ferry between Rousby's Point and the village of Batcheller. At nine o'clock on the following night it carried the Travis County crowd over to the pavilion. Sue went under escort of her brother Johnny. There were no lights aboard and the moon was obscured. Sue surveyed the various dark shapes sitting and standing about, wondering with a little thrill in her breast which might be her mysterious acquaintance. By a process of elimination she settled on a tall man standing silent near the bow.—But of course that figure might have been anybody. Very likely he had no intention of coming to a rube dance. Thus she prepared herself for a possible disappointment.

The dancing pavilion was built on top of a bathing establishment, and was open on all sides to the breezes of heaven. The floor was perfect; the orchestra, from Washington, first-rate. The place had brought a new pleasure into the lives of the young people of both counties, and on Saturday nights they turned out in force. Sue to herself might term it a rube affair, but at least the girls were as pretty as those to be found anywhere—and healthier than town girls.

Johnny Rousby, having danced the first dance with his sister, considered that he had done his duty, and went off about his own concerns. But Sue, deposited on the side lines, suffered from no lack of attention. As soon as it was perceived that the jealous Temp Wye was not standing guard over her to-night, the young men thronged about her, asking for dances. Sue saved out two dances. And how silly I shall look if nobody comes after them, she thought.

When she could, she discreetly overlooked the lines of stags outside the dancing floor. First she saw Temp Wye in the farthest corner, staring at her blackly, and biting his lip. The simpleton! she thought scornfully; to wear his heart on his sleeve like that! He's dying to make up; but if I did we would quarrel again in five minutes. He's too difficult. Better let it be a clean break. She would not admit to herself that the prospect of having a second string to her bow, or a second beau on her string, had anything to do with this decision.

There were a number of strange men present, but she picked out her gallant by intuition. He was not looking at her at the moment, but appeared

to be trying to ingratiate himself with some of the Travis County boys. He was tall and slenderly graceful; that Sue knew already; his black hair was as sleek as a raven's wing. He had black eyes too, elongated in shape, and showing a wicked sparkle through their lashes. The corners of his mouth turned up in a provoking grin. Good Heavens! thought Sue; he's better looking than I expected. He's positively dangerous! However, this feeling of fear was not exactly unpleasant.

Three dances passed by, and Sue began to grow anxious. The fourth dance was the first that she was holding in reserve. However, during the pause between dances, a mild voice spoke at her elbow:

"Miss Rousby, may I introduce Mr. Darrah?"

The speaker was little Bowie Denton who would not ordinarily have had the assurance to approach Sue. His eye was bright and swimming now, his thin cheeks flushed. Sue thought no worse of him for it. For a fellow to take a drink or two was part of the tradition. She was glad to see though, that the dark young man showed no signs of it. He was very cool; cool, and smiling delightfully and wickedly.

"May I have a dance?" he murmured.

"The next one," said Sue carelessly.

"May I have a dance?" Bowie asked boldly.

"Sorry, Bowie, but I've promised all the rest," said Sue kindly. "But after the intermission you can break."

The music started.

"Sue, you darling!" murmured Darrah as they floated away. "You're even prettier than I thought!"

"You work too fast," said Sue. "My name is Miss Rousby."

"Oh, but nobody bothers about handles nowadays."

"We are old-fashioned down here."

He was not in the least abashed. "Oh, I've learned something about you," he said, laughing. "You're a wild duck in this barnyard."

He blandly continued to address her as Sue, and Sue having recorded her protest, let it go. He danced divinely; one could not quarrel with such a dancer. They had little to say to each other. Sue had to resist the impulse to close her eyes, and drift on the arm of that perfect leader. With the two counties looking on, that would have been too much even for Sue. Darrah by reason of his height, his good looks, his perfectly fitting clothes was a conspicuous object on the floor, and Sue knew that tongues were already busy.

When the music stopped they strolled up and down the platform that overhung the beach in front of the pavilion.

“Take my arm,” suggested Darrah.

“No, thanks,” said Sue.

“Everybody else is.”

“Yes, and everybody knows that I only met you ten minutes ago.”

“Will you dance all the rest with me?”

“Mercy, no! You can have one more, the sixth.”

“Is that all?”

“Well, I couldn’t deny everybody who asked me.”

“What can I do with myself all evening?”

“Get yourself introduced to some other girls.”

“No, thanks, I couldn’t go through with it. You don’t know what you’ve done to me!”

“Well, the sixth is the one before the intermission. We can have a nice long talk then.”

“You darling! You thought of that when you saved it for me!”

“Bless me, no! Nobody else asked me for it.”

Two stags leaned their elbows on the rail of the upper gallery, and looked down at the promenaders below.

“Who’s the long lad with Sue Rousby?” asked Tom Starrett.

“Name of Darrah,” answered Reed Bonniger. “I never saw him before to-night. Says he is from New York. All I know is, he totes damn good licker. Unlimited supply. Been passing it all evening.”

“Boot-legger?”

“Maybe. Didn’t offer to sell any. Anyhow, we couldn’t afford licker of that quality down here. He came to me to get me to introduce him to Sue. I accepted a drink off him, but of course I wouldn’t. What does he think we are? I noticed he only took a sip himself. He’s a cool hand whoever he is. After goin’ from one to another, he finally got little Bowie Denton all tanked up, and made him introduce him to Sue. It’s a rotten shame, but what you goin’ to do?”

“Sue doesn’t seem to object,” remarked Tom.

“Aah! just like a girl!” said Reed sorely. “It’s the New York clothes. Sue and Temp Wye have quarrelled, and I thought we’d all get a look-in. I asked

her for a dance and she said they were all gone. But later this Darrah fellow comes along and she gives him one right off the bat. Looks funny to me, this fellow from nowhere goin' round trying to bribe fellows to introduce him to Sue. Looks as if they had some sort of understandin' beforehand, and the introduction was only a bluff."

"Well, I'm glad I'm not in Temp Wye's shoes," said Tom. "He's mad about the girl."

During the intermission Darrah and Sue strolled up the road for a short distance, as did many another couple. Somehow they seemed to have made a great advance in intimacy, though they had only danced two dances. Sue, never strong for conventionality, found it harder and harder to keep up the bars.

"May I see you home?" asked Darrah, as they returned towards the pavilion.

"My brother will."

"He's got a girl of his own."

"Whoever brings a girl takes her home; that is our custom."

After a pause Darrah blurted out: "Listen, Sue. I like this country so well I telegraphed to my sister this morning to come down and spend a few days with me. She's as much fed up with New York society as I am. I'm expecting her on the bus Monday afternoon. Can I bring her around to call?"

"Well!" exclaimed the astonished Sue. "It's a bit unusual, but— Oh, well, all right. How long will she be down here?"

"Only a few days," said Darrah. "I'll have to drive her up to New York at the end of the week. There's a dance that we're both pledged to attend."

Another silence.

"Listen," said Darrah breathlessly. "Why not drive up to New York with us. Stay with my people. After a day or two the three of us will drive back again."

"Goodness!" said Sue. "But I don't even know your sister."

"You will soon."

"She may not like me."

"She's bound to. She's just like me—in character I mean, not looks. It would be such fun to take you to a New York dance, and to a show or two! Will you, Sue? Oh, say you will!"

"Wait a minute! Wait a minute!" said Sue. "You take my breath away!"

“Wouldn’t you like to see New York?” he urged.

Sue groaned inwardly. Would I like to see New York! she thought. But she was careful not to give anything away to this precipitate young man. “Let’s wait until your sister comes before we commit ourselves to anything,” she said with an offhand air. New York! New York! New York! was ringing in her head like a bell. Was it possible that the opportunity was really within her grasp? New York had always seemed as far away as heaven.

After the intermission the stags were permitted to break dances. Temp Wye remained outside the rail encircling the dance floor, watching with a jealous, bitter eye. Sue appeared to be getting a general rush to-night. Whenever she approached the line of stags, there was a concerted movement towards her. Many good-humoured disputes took place. Temp didn’t mind the county boys; they were always ready to yield him the first place with Sue; but the slick city man with his wicked, sparkling eyes and mocking mouth roused him to a fury of rage that put him beside himself. It was an understood thing that a fellow must be allowed to make a complete circuit of the floor before another broke his dance; and Temp watched how slowly and endlessly Darrah gyrated in the corners in order to prolong his turn with Sue.

“Home, Sweet Home” was played at midnight, and all the Travis County crowd thronged back on board the scow. They chugged slowly across the wide river. Up near the bow Sue sat demurely beside her young brother. Darrah manoeuvred himself into the seat alongside her; and they talked the whole way—but very discreetly so that all the world might hear. Temp Wye sneered, hearing the polite small talk that they exchanged. He stood near by with his hat pulled down over his eyes, watching them with a pose as still and deadly as a coiled snake. He was mad with jealousy.

When they landed on the other shore he kept the three in view. They turned off the State road, and sauntering up the little rise, lingered for a moment chatting at the Rousby gate. Temp hung alongside the side fence hidden in the shadows. The stripling Johnny Rousby had been drinking, and was in an impatient humour; Sue clung affectionately to his arm in the way that sisters have when another young man is to be kept at bay. Meanwhile the rest of the crowd scattered to their motor-cars, and set off pell-mell up the road.

Finally good nights were exchanged at the gate, and Sue and Johnny went in the house. As Darrah returned, whistling carelessly, Temp stepped out from the shadows. He had a very courtly air.

“I beg your pardon,” he said, lifting his hat, “may I have a few words with you?”

All the motor-cars had departed except Darrah’s rakish sport car, which rested in the State road a few yards ahead of the big tree. “Who are you?” asked the surprised Darrah.

“My name is Templeton Wye,” was the haughty answer.

“Well, that means nothing in my life,” retorted Darrah. “What do you want?”

“Let us go a little farther away,” said Temp. “Out of earshot.”

The astonished Darrah followed him down into the State road under the branches of the big tree.

“Well?” he said.

Still in the courtly style of an old-fashioned duellist, Temp said quietly: “I must ask you to cease all further attentions to the young lady you have just left.”

“What the hell . . . !” Darrah burst out, but not loudly. “What business is it of yours?”

“Let us just say that I have *made* it my business,” said Temp evenly. “My opinion is that you are not a fit person to associate with her, and I’m prepared to back it up.”

“What do you know about me?” demanded Darrah; the quickness with which it came out suggested a certain fear.

“Nothing,” said Temp. “I am prepared to receive your explanations. If I am mistaken in you I shall apologize.”

“To hell with you!” said Darrah roughly. “You talk like an actor! You mind your own business, and I’ll tend to mine!”

“I have made this my business,” said Temp quietly. “I just wanted to warn you.”

“Well, I don’t take your warning, see?” said Darrah truculently. “What then?”

“This!” cried Temp in quite a different voice. “Guard yourself!” His fist shot out. There was a dull crack as it collided with Darrah’s jaw, and the tall young man measured his length in the road. Temp groaned with relief as the blow went home. All the torments he had been enduring gave his fist driving power. He had only been afraid that Darrah would give him no show to punch him.

Darrah sprang up a little dazed, but fighting mad. They mixed it up. Some ineffective blows were exchanged. Neither young man spoke again.

Temp got another opening, and Darrah went down again. Darrah was game enough, but he had no show at all. While he had an advantage over Temp in reach, the young farmer's muscles were like steel springs; moreover Temp was inspired with a wholehearted, furious rage that made him irresistible. The elegant Darrah was incapable of such a tremendous feeling.

However, it was all over in a minute or two. Darrah's car was standing in the road a few feet ahead of the antagonists; a roadster with the top up. At the first sounds of an altercation between the two young men, a crafty face appeared in the little window in the back. Seeing that Darrah was likely to get the worst of it, a figure stole out of the car into the shadow of the big tree. Making a detour around by the shrubbery that lined the side fence of the Rousby yard, he came up behind Temp, and dropped without a sound in the tall weeds that lined the road. At the moment when Temp was waiting for Darrah to rise and defend himself, the third man rose again out of the grass, and raising his arm, brought down a blunt instrument on Temp's head. Temp dropped all of a piece without a sound in the road. His assailant seized hold of the shaken Darrah's arm, and hustled him towards the car.

"What the devil . . . !" muttered Darrah. "Have you croaked him? That would spoil everything!"

"Nah!" said the other. "Just a tap on the bean. He'll come to in a shake. Who is he?"

"A jealous lover," said Darrah with an exasperated laugh.

"Ain't he gummed the works anyhow?"

"No! He's not on to our game. It's just a personal matter. I'm not going to let a hick like that spoil it. He don't count."

They got in the car.

IV

IN NEW YORK

ON a morning a week later, shortly after sunrise, three young people settled themselves amidst much laughter in the high-powered roadster standing at Sue's gate. This early start was necessary since they meant to make three hundred miles that day. It seemed to be generally understood that Sue must sit in the middle. Sue herself would have preferred to put Ruby Darrah between her and the ardent Earl, but she made no objection. I mustn't be a prune, she told herself; for once I am going to have a perfectly lovely time, and nothing must interfere. New York! New York! New York! It is like a dream coming true!

During the past five days Ruby and Sue had become like sisters. Earl laughingly made believe to be jealous of the affection which had sprung up between the two. Ruby was a tall girl no less handsome than her brother, but in a totally different style. She was a true blonde with hair like spun gold, and gentian blue eyes. At first glance Sue had considered that there was a little too much display of permanent wave, rouge and lipstick; but she supposed all New York girls did it. She told herself that it was the make-up which gave Ruby's face rather a hard look in repose.

But Ruby's face was almost never in repose, and Sue had soon forgotten her first misgivings. Ruby's impulsive manner suggested that Sue was the one person in the world whom she wished to win for a friend; and of course the warm-hearted Sue could not resist that. And indeed Ruby with her experience of the great world—she knew London, Paris, Rome, was wonderful to the country girl, not to speak of the marvellous clothes that appeared as from a conjuror's hat, out of one suit-case. Sue's family had been less enthusiastic about Ruby, but Sue had put that down to jealousy. There had been loud-voiced opposition to this New York trip; but Sue had taken the bit in her teeth. After all she was the real head of the household; they were accustomed to having her run things.

Earl let the clutch in, and they slipped into rapid motion so smooth that it seemed to give the lie to the figure 45 which turned up on the speedometer. Sue relaxed with a sigh of content. It was the nearest thing to flying that she ever hoped to experience. How different from the family Ford! In less than ten minutes they had whisked through the county seat, and in no time at all it seemed, they were entering the suburbs of Baltimore. Here a motor-cycle

policeman warned them, but Earl was so good-humoured about it, and Ruby smiled so dazzlingly, the officer had not the heart to carry it any further. It's great to be rich! thought Sue.

They breakfasted in one splendid hotel in Baltimore; lunched at another in Philadelphia. As soon as the elegant roadster drew up at the door, the hotel servants began to smile and bow and run about. Sue had not believed that a journey could be carried through in such comfort. Between their stops everything was a delightful blur; they travelled too fast for her to take things in; but the motion was wildly exhilarating. Already at five o'clock they were passing through the towns and cities that surrounded New York, and Sue's heart beat fast in anticipation. At last they came out on the brow of a steep hill. At the bottom lay the broad river crowded with shipping; and on the other side rose the marvellous towers of Manhattan. Sue received the greatest thrill of her life.

They crossed the river on a ferry-boat. Sue was dizzied by the rushing, swarming traffic of the New York streets, so different from leisurely Baltimore. A dozen times a collision seemed to be unavoidable, and her heart leaped into her mouth, but always by a dexterous twist of the wheel or a pressure of his foot on the accelerator, Earl managed to avoid it. It was his practise always to shoot ahead instead of to hang back. The car answered like a live thing. Earl was as casual as a messenger boy stealing a ride. The traffic cops saluted him.

They drew up in front of an apartment house on Park Avenue, that seemed to Sue to tower to the sky. How wonderful it was to be rich! A man was waiting on the sidewalk to take the car to the garage. A servant in green livery with silver buttons and white gloves opened the door for them. The entrance hall was lined with rare marbles; and had rich rugs underfoot. There seemed to be a whole crowd of lackeys just to let them in. One whisked them aloft in an elevator. They were admitted above by a pretty maid in lace cap and apron; Sue had a momentary impression of a luxurious interior, and then became aware of an elderly pair hastening to meet her. Earl presented them as his uncle and aunt, Mr. and Mrs. Thalmann.

Sue received a momentary dash of cold water at the sight of this pair. They were too effusive. The man was fat and bald with a hard eye behind his heavy-rimmed glasses, and an oily smile. His wife was ridiculously overdressed and made up for her age. Down in Maryland they would have been called common and vulgar. But you cannot judge people by their looks, she told herself. She next found herself in the bedroom that she was to share with Ruby; the prettiest daintiest room she had ever beheld.

"Well, what do you think of it all?" asked Ruby, smiling.

“Oh, it’s too wonderful!” said Sue breathlessly. “I shall be dreaming of this for the rest of my life!”

Ruby averted her head from Sue, and a sneer flitted across her face. “Dreaming of it?” she said. “Why don’t you go out and get it?”

“I get it?” said Sue, opening her eyes wide.

“Anybody can get what they want,” said Ruby, “—if they want it hard enough.”

In another room in the luxurious apartment Earl was conferring with his “uncle.” When they were alone together there was little evidence of family affection between them. Mr. Thalmann lost his oily smile, and his face became completely hard. They talked in curt sentences as men engaged together in a dangerous enterprise.

“Where is Beetle?” asked the older man.

“I left him on the job down in Maryland. We are never seen together down there. He has bought one of the local schooners that they call pungies in Baltimore, and he’s now calling on the farmers up and down the river offering to buy the pulp wood that they cut for the paper mills. That will explain the appearance of the pungy in the river later. After she has landed her cargo she can collect the pulp wood, and sell it down in Norfolk. There’s no reason why she shouldn’t run half a dozen cargoes this season. An A1 road comes right down to the water’s edge.”

“Hm!” said Thalmann. “What is the general feeling of the population on the liquor question.”

“Wet,” said Earl.

“This girl you brought up,” said Thalmann, scowling; “she’s a nice sort of girl. She’s no good in our business.”

“I’ll undertake to initiate her,” said Earl.

“But what you want to bring her here for? There’s two dicks watching this place.”

“Watching here!” said Earl, startled.

“Sure!” said Thalmann. “I like to have ’em watch me. Then I know where they are. They can watch my movements, but they can’t watch what’s going on in my mind. But what’s to prevent them picking you up when you leave here, and following you back to your neck of the woods.”

“I’ll find a way to shake them,” said Earl, setting his jaw.

“Maybe you will,” said Thalmann. “But I can’t see what you wanted to bring the girl here for anyhow.”

“The time is short,” said Earl. “The *Cassandra* has already sailed from the other side. In two weeks she’ll be off the Capes. I couldn’t make quick enough headway with the girl just by calling on her evenings. I square myself with her by taking her for this trip. By the time we get back she’ll be ripe for our work.”

“What does Ruby think about it?” Thalmann asked with a hard smile.

“Ruby’s done her part all right,” said Earl indifferently. “I can’t help what she thinks about it.”

“Well, I don’t believe in playing on a woman’s feelings,” said Thalmann; “too damn dangerous. However, it’s up to you. All I’m interested in is getting the stuff. You’ve done good work up to now, but if there is any slip up——!” He made a gesture of dismissal. “You understand?”

“I get you,” said Earl sullenly. “I take the risk, and you take the lion’s share of the profits.”

“Ain’t you satisfied?” demanded Thalmann.

“Oh, sure!” said Earl bitterly. “You’ve got me where you want me.”

The rest of the evening passed for Sue in a glittering phantasmagoria. She understood from Ruby that they were going out to dinner.

“Nunkie likes to have people watch him while he eats,” Ruby remarked with a dry laugh.

Sue could scarcely recognize herself in the mirror when Ruby had finished making up her face and dressing her. The gown was of clinging pink georgette ending in hundreds of beaded tails which switched and sparkled with every move she made. “Lawka massy, can this be I?” murmured Sue. Beyond a vigorous brushing, Ruby would not allow the riotous brown curls to be touched; Sue might not have even a ribbon to confine them.

“Girls are spending hundreds at the hairdressers’ for that innocent kid effect,” said Ruby, “and then they don’t get it; while you have it for nothing.”

When they got ready to start, Sue perceived with surprise that the old lady was to be left at home. She looked wistful.

“Ma’s no ornament at a restaurant party,” Mr. Thalmann said callously.

Sue was a little shocked. She realized by this time that these were not the finely-bred people she had imagined. However, she supposed it took all kinds to make up New York society. They were certainly rich and important people. To tell the truth, Sue was whirled from one thing to another so fast, she could not think anything out. When they came out of a door the automobile (not Earl's roadster but a superbly appointed limousine) was always waiting to pick them up. In a few moments it would deposit them at another door, and Sue lost all sense of direction and place.

The restaurant was marvellous. Sue knew by intuition that it must be one of the most expensive places in New York. The courtesy of *maitre-d'hôtel*, hat-boys, captains, waiters was exquisite. Mr. Thalmann loved it. He settled the heavy-rimmed glasses on his nose, and looked around him as proud as Punch. He invited Sue to call him Uncle Sam, and Ruby sniggered. No doubt the food was perfection too, but Sue was too much excited to take note of what she was eating. It was Earl's whispering in her ear that thrilled her so.

"That dark woman in yellow is Katherine Moulton, the famous star. She is beginning to show her age. The young man with her plays a small part in her company. She's paying for the dinner. . . . This fellow coming in is Amadeo Lanza, principal baritone at the Metropolitan; that's Mrs. Schuyler Van Brocklin with him; leader of the old Knickerbocker set. . . . The old geezer over there with his shirt front puffed out is Thomas B. Cargill, the packing-house magnate; he's treating a party of chorus girls . . ."

"Those elegant girls in the chorus!" said Sue amazed. "I thought they were *débutantes*."

"What's the diff?" said Earl. "Here comes Marvin Loose the novelist. His last book sold three hundred thousand copies."

And so on. And so on. Oh, New York! New York!

From the restaurant they were transported as by magic to a theatre. What theatre it was Sue had no idea until she looked down at the programme somebody had thrust into her hand. There she read: The Follies. The Follies! Had she not been hearing about The Follies all her life. How wonderful! Somewhere she had read that it cost fifteen dollars a seat; and their seats were amongst the best in the house. The curtain went up. Parts of the show brought the blood to her cheeks; but fortunately the darkness of the house concealed that. She was determined not to take offence at anything. It will broaden my mind, she told herself.

After the show, entering a quiet door in a side street, they were carried aloft in an elevator, and after leaving their wraps, found themselves in a vast

ballroom, with its lavish decorations and sparkling electroliers, magnificent beyond anything Sue had ever seen. What ballroom or whose it was she never learned. She supposed it was in a hotel because there was no hostess visible. There was already a great throng present when they arrived. Sue perceived that the guests didn't appear to know each other very well. She met nobody outside her own little party. Well, New York was a strange place. At any rate the women's dresses were magnificent. They must be first-class people.

The music was the last word in sensuous melody, and Sue yielded herself to the guidance of Earl's arm with a sigh of content. Now she could safely close her eyes since nobody knew her. She danced most of the dances with Earl. As the night wore on many of the elegant persons present showed unmistakable signs of drunkenness. At the dances at home sometimes the boys got a little too much; but here the women were just as bad as the men. In spite of herself Sue was a little disgusted. Earl, who was watching her close, made a move to leave.

On the way home in the car, Ruby's manner was a little acid, but Sue good-naturedly ascribed it to over-fatigue. They had been on the go for nearly twenty-four hours. Mr. Thalmann got a little noisy in the car, and when Earl remonstrated with him he said:

“Who's got a better right to get drunk than me? Ain't I the source of their joy?”

Sue saw no point in this remark.

Such was her first day in New York.

V

AN INTERRUPTED BREAKFAST

SUE and Ruby occupied twin beds in the dainty bedroom. Next morning Sue was the first to awake. The sun was high in the sky. When she turned her head she was a little shocked by the sight of the face on the other pillow. Nobody could have called Ruby beautiful then. Why, she must be years older than Earl, thought Sue.

While Sue was looking at her Ruby opened her eyes. "What's the matter with you?" she said sharply.

"Why, nothing," said Sue, hastily averting her eyes.

Ruby sat up, and looked at herself in the mirror which faced the foot of her bed. Under her breath she muttered something that sounded suspiciously like a bad word; then she turned spitefully to Sue. "Well, you don't look like a daisy with the dew on it either," she said.

"Of course I don't!" said Sue. To herself she excused Ruby. She did too much yesterday. "A bath and breakfast will set us both up," she said aloud, springing out of bed. "I'm as hungry as a hunter!"

Ruby merely grunted, and buried her head in the pillow again.

Sue sought to charm away her ill-temper by acting the fool. "Look, Ruby! This is the way that girl sang her song last night." Striking an exaggerated attitude, she warbled:

"Only yeeoo; only yeeoo; darling I love you troo!"

"Ah, cut it out!" said Ruby crossly. "If there's anything I despise it's a person that makes believe to feel gay when they wake."

Sue finished her preparations in silence. Oh, well, one must take one's friends as one finds them, she told herself philosophically.

Ruby made no move to get up, and Sue sallied out of the room on her own account to look for breakfast. A corridor painted in the French style, and lined with mirrors and doors ran through the apartment. Sue was a little confused by the multitude of doors, but the sound of voices and the rattle of silverware on plates led her to the magnificent dining-room. The two men and the old lady were already at breakfast. Earl sprang up at Sue's entrance. Fatigue had made no marks on him; he had never looked handsomer. Sue's heart warmed to him because he was such a good sport.

"Where's Ruby?" he asked.

“Oh, Ruby’s done up,” said Sue, laughing. “Her batteries are damp. I couldn’t get a spark.”

Earl left the room, and while Sue ate her grape fruit, she could hear distant sounds of a quarrel between brother and sister. She thought nothing of it; she and her brothers and sisters frequently quarrelled noisily, and no harm done.

After breakfast Ruby still did not appear, and Earl and Sue explored the wonderful streets together—or rather, one street, Fifth Avenue, which was just around the corner, and which Sue never cared to leave. For more than a mile it was lined on both sides with the most seductive and expensive shops in the world; everything that could tempt the heart of woman was cunningly set forth in the windows. The roadway was full of shining motors; the pavements thronged with people who seemed to have been newly outfitted in the expensive shops. Sue groaned humorously at the sight of the exquisite slippers, the dresses, the hats in the windows.

“It’s sinful to tempt girls like that!”

There was one dress she could not tear herself away from, an oddly and skilfully draped rag of blue-green taffeta.

“Let me buy it for you,” whispered Earl in her ear.

“Not on your life!” said Sue firmly. “It’s not done in our set.”

“Look!” he said, pulling out a great roll of yellow-backed bills. “It’s burning a hole in my pocket.”

“That’s got nothing to do with me.”

“*Please, Sue!*”

She was deaf to his pleading.

In another shop out of her own savings she bought a crafty little hat that had Fifth Avenue in every line of it. A hat for each of her three sisters used up the rest of her money.

Later they got the rakish roadster, and crossing the East River by a far-flung bridge, travelled through endless suburbs and through the green country to a fashionable beach, which was like a bit of Fifth Avenue transported to the sea. The same sort of people paraded up and down, now in amazing sport clothes. They lunched in a delightful pavilion, and afterwards went for a dip.

Sue gasped a little when she unrolled the suit that was handed her in the bath-house. It was something of an ordeal to face the beach thus scantily clad. But she kept her head up, secure in the consciousness of having straight and shapely legs. When she saw the other bathing suits she felt

better; hers was modest by comparison. The dip was brief, because in this latitude the water was still cold; but it was delightful afterward to lie in the hot sand.

Towards the end of the afternoon Uncle Sam and Ruby joined them from town. Ruby was once more her beautiful and beautifully dressed self, and appeared to have regained her good humour; but Uncle Sam kept wiggling the heavy rimmed glasses with a worried air. He drew Earl to his side, and allowed the two girls to walk on ahead.

“Uncle Sam seems to have something on his mind,” said Sue.

“Some big business deal,” said Ruby carelessly. “He’s in hundreds of things.”

With a glance at the girls to make sure that they were out of earshot, Uncle Sam said to Earl: “I’ve just had a long telegram in code from Captain Redfield in New Orleans. Joe Sickel, my agent there, was raided by the Federal officers three days ago, and when the Captain arrived with his stuff there was nobody to take it off his hands. He had to go out and sell it in the open market. He telegraphed that he was sending me up a cheque and a statement by the supercargo of his ship, as he was afraid to trust it in the mail.”

“Gosh! these Britishers are honest,” said Earl cynically. “He could have got away with it easy.”

“But he couldn’t have done business with me again,” said Uncle Sam.

“If the money’s on the way what’s biting you?” asked Earl.

“The statement!” snapped Uncle Sam. “Damn it, what a piece of folly! That would be a nice piece of evidence if it fell into the hands of the dicks!”

“Is he sending it to the house?”

“No. Said he was afraid my house might be shadowed. Told me to be at a table on the Century Roof at twelve-thirty to-night, and it would be handed me in an envelope.”

“Well, that seems like a good enough plan.”

“But I got a couple of pair of flat feet on my trail.”

“They don’t know the supercargo. They wouldn’t venture to hold up a stranger who might approach your table.”

“Well, maybe not, maybe not.”

Uncle Sam appeared to regain his equanimity. He took them to a quiet little place that he knew, where they had gin rickeys. When they came out Earl marched on with Sue, leaving Uncle Sam and Ruby to follow. They strolled up and down the boardwalk trying their luck with the different games of chance. Sue won a hand-painted French doll with immensely elongated arms and legs that would tie in knots. Earl christened it Charlotte Greenwood.

“It’s lovely to go around with you,” Earl murmured in Sue’s ear. “You enjoy things.”

“You mean I’m a regular rube,” said Sue, drawing down the corners of her mouth teasingly. “I know I am from the way the women look at me.”

“Don’t you fool yourself, baby! It’s sheer envy. There isn’t one of them that wouldn’t give everything she’s got for a complexion like yours.”

Sue couldn’t help but observe that Ruby looked at her much the same way as the other women. I suppose she thinks I’m not fashionable enough for her precious brother! she thought.

Sue noticed as time went on that wherever they went, two men followed them. They were hard-faced men, but did not look like crooks since they were well dressed and had an air of conscious rectitude. But they bothered her. At length when the four of them sat down for awhile to watch the passing throng, she called Earl’s attention to these two.

“Don’t look right away. Those two men on the next bench but one. They have been following wherever we went.”

Earl favoured the men with a swift glance through his lashes. “Sure,” he said quickly, “that’s Uncle Sam’s body-guard.”

“Body-guard?” echoed Sue, opening her eyes. “What for?”

“A man as prominent as Uncle Sam has got to have one,” said Earl. “These dirty Bolsheviks have it in for the rich.”

“Mercy! what a wicked town!” breathed Sue.

They dined; lingered to dance a few numbers; and were back in town in time for the late performance upon a gaily-illuminated roof garden. Sue knew that this was the Century Roof, because she saw an immense electric sign as they entered from the street. There was a very smart vaudeville performance going on. They sat at a table and drank ginger ale. Uncle Sam grumbled and called it slops.

“I never carry anything on me,” he explained. “A man in my position can’t afford to.”

“Oh, well,” said Sue cheerfully, “some day that ridiculous law will be repealed.”

“No! No!” said Uncle Sam quickly. “I am all for prohibition. It’s inconvenient for a gentleman, but we must uphold it. It keeps the working-man out of the saloons.”

Sue thought this was rather inconsistent, but said no more.

A few tables away she saw that Uncle Sam’s body-guard was still on the job. The party was not brilliantly successful, because Uncle Sam was nervous again. He couldn’t leave his glasses alone. He paid no attention to the performance on the stage, but kept glancing down the room towards the entrance.

Suddenly he caught his breath sharply. Sue, following the direction of his glance, saw that a good-looking young man had just entered the dazzling glass-roofed hall, and was standing looking about him a little wonderingly, like one who was strange to such a place. He was wearing a double-breasted blue suit which gave him the look of a sailor. Looking from table to table, he caught sight of Uncle Sam, and came towards him briskly. Uncle Sam had a very strained expression. Earl and Ruby had their backs towards the approaching stranger.

It all happened in the quickness of a breath. Sue was looking at the young man, and saw the whole thing. As he approached their table he pulled an envelope from his pocket. His eyes were fixed on Uncle Sam. At that moment the two men who constituted the body-guard jumped up, and rushed towards the young man. He backed off a few steps to the wall which was lined all around with big windows open to the night. As the two men reached him, the young man tossed his envelope through the window. He was then seized by the two and hustled out of the place on the run.

Everybody in the vicinity jumped up excitedly. However, seeing that nothing more was going to happen, they sat down again. The performance on the stage was never interrupted. Earl and Ruby had risen with the rest, and they had seen the end of the affair. Uncle Sam was as white as a sheet.

“Damnation!” he muttered.

“They didn’t get the envelope,” said Earl quickly. “Ten to one it will never be found.”

Sue was thrilled through and through. It was wonderful to be mixed up in something like this. “Oh, what is it?” she cried. “I don’t understand. Was he a Bolshevik? He didn’t look dangerous. Your body-guard was certainly efficient.”

In the confusion nobody explained. They left the place quickly. Earl took the two girls home in a taxi, and Uncle Sam went off somewhere. In the taxi Earl told Sue all about the dangerous young radical whom they suspected of plotting against Uncle's Sam's life. As she turned into her bedroom for the night, Uncle Sam entered the front door of the apartment. His face was black.

At ten next morning the whole household was gathered around the breakfast table. The dining-room was a charming apartment with the morning sun streaming through three tall windows. The walls were painted in two shades of green. The sideboard bore an imposing display of silver.

Mrs. Thalmann was half hidden behind an immense silver coffee-pot. In the morning light her rouged cheeks looked ghastly; but she was a good-natured old woman, so timid that she glanced at her husband for approval every time she ventured to speak. Ruby was poking the food on her plate with an ill-tempered look, and Uncle Sam's face was still black. Earl, always a good sport, was chaffing with Sue, but even in him Sue felt a certain strain. Well, no wonder, she thought, if wicked men were abroad in the city, seeking the life of the head of the family.

The front door bell sounded. This was of frequent occurrence, and nobody paid any attention to it, except Mrs. Thalmann who dropped her coffee spoon with a clatter. But she was the sort of person who jumps at the slightest sound. The trim maid passed through the dining-room on her way to answer the bell.

Presently she returned, her eyes as big as saucers. She leaned against the wall for support. She was gasping for breath. "Oh, sir! Oh, sir . . . !" she gasped, and seemed unable to go on.

"Well, what is it?" barked Uncle Sam.

"Oh! . . . the . . . the Revenue agents!" she blurted out. "They want you!"

The old woman broke into a helpless moaning: "Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" Earl jumped up with an oath.

"Be quiet!" commanded the old man. "Do you want to bring them in here?"

"This innocent girl!" cried Earl with a dramatic gesture indicating Sue.

Ruby gave him a look of curious malevolence.

"Send her down the back stairs to Maisie's flat," said Uncle Sam.

"Come on!" cried Earl. "I'll take you."

“You stay here!” commanded Uncle Sam. “The members of my family are known. You don’t want to appear to run away.”

Seizing Sue’s hand, Earl pulled her out through the pantry and kitchen of the apartment. “Don’t be afraid!” he kept saying.

But Sue was not in the least afraid. Her conscience was clear. What a city! What a city! she was thinking. First last night, and then this morning! But it was exciting!

In the kitchen Earl opened a door giving on the service stairway. “Go down two flights and knock on the door that corresponds to this,” he said. “I’ll come and get you later.”

“But how do I know they’ll take me in?” said Sue.

“I’ll telephone,” said Earl.

VI

THE BANDITS?

SUE scampered down the service stairway, and knocked on the kitchen door of the apartment two flights below as she had been bidden. It was opened by a comfortable-looking cook, who surveyed her in some astonishment as well she might; strange young ladies were not accustomed to knock at the back door.

“Where did you come from?” she asked.

Sue pointed aloft, and then giggled at the absurdity of her own gesture. “Not from heaven,” she said; “but from upstairs.”

The cook never smiled. “What do you want?” she asked.

“May I see——” then Sue recollected that in the excitement she had failed to obtain the name of the people whose hospitality she was seeking; “may I see your mistress?”

The cook hesitated. Was a young lady to be left on the service stairway or asked into the kitchen? “Well, come in,” she said doubtfully.

She led Sue through kitchen and pantry into a dining-room which corresponded to the room upstairs, but was furnished with more feminine fripperies. In the big living-room beyond, they found the mistress of the establishment in the act of talking to Earl over the telephone. “I get you,” she said as they entered; and hanging up the receiver, rose to greet Sue with an ample smile.

“How are you, Sue,” she said as if she had known her all her life.

The cook, seeing that no explanations would be required, retired to the kitchen.

So this is Maisie! thought Sue—she never did learn the lady’s other name. She was a large blonde woman dressed in an elaborate and slightly soiled negligée; and somehow the name of Maisie exactly suited her. So did the expensive untidy apartment. In the sunny window hung a brass cage containing a canary; a handsome blue Persian cat sat on the hearthrug washing herself with an air of insolent indifference; a Pekinese spaniel yapped at Sue, and retreated under the flounce of the chintz-covered sofa.

“Sit down, dearie,” said Maisie. “No, not on the sofa or Pitti-Sing will nip your heels. Try that chair; you’ll find it comfy. I expect you’re all flustered by what happened upstairs. Will you have a drink?”

“Oh, no, thank you,” said Sue. “I am not in the least flustered.”

“Help yourself to a cigarette, then.”

“No, thank you. I don’t use them.”

“Well, you won’t mind if I indulge, will you? I have to do it for my nerves.”

There was a pause while she lighted up. All the frills and flounces and satin-covered pillows; the heavy smell of Turkish cigarettes and French perfumery; the general air of “everything goes” made Sue uncomfortable; but the fat and sloppy Maisie was so good-natured it was difficult to stand out against her.

“Ain’t it terrible,” she went on, “for the dicks—I mean the revenue agents to raid the private apartment of a gentleman like Mr. Thalmann. Why, he’s a director in the First National Bank, and Adams Express Company, and Western Union Telegraph, and goodness knows what all besides. One of the most prominent men in town!”

“How do they dare to do it?” asked Sue innocently.

“Well, I’ll tell you, dearie, the present head of the enforcement squad is a crook—you can ask anybody. He has hit on the scheme of levying tribute on the rich, see? they all have their private stocks, and are glad to pay something for protection. But Mr. Thalmann is too high-minded to submit to blackmail—I’m a very dear friend of the family and I know. Hence this raid. The Prohibition director expects to get a lot of publicity out of it, so that the people will think he’s doing something. But this time he’s pulled a bone. Of course Mr. Thalmann takes his drink when he goes out of an evening like any gentleman would, but he don’t keep nothin’ in the house. He feels very strongly about it. He’s all for prohibition, he is.”

“Yes, I’ve heard him say so,” said Sue politely.

“He’ll make it hot for that da—I mean crooked official. He’ll get him broke and I’m glad of it. Nobody is safe nowadays. Why, let me tell you, dearie . . .”

There was no end to Maisie’s anecdotes about the wickedness of enforcement agents. Sue got an earful. It never occurred to her to doubt the authenticity of Maisie’s stories. Revenue agents were not popular down in Maryland, either.

In half an hour or so Earl rang at the front door of the apartment, and Maisie herself admitted him. They exchanged a meaning glance unseen by Sue. Earl seemed to be quite easy in his mind again.

“They’ve gone,” he said. “Of course they didn’t find anything. They changed their tone then. But Uncle Sam would have none of their apologies. He’s going to make it hot for somebody. He’s gone to see his lawyer now.”

Sue and Earl returned to the Thalmann apartment. Nobody was visible. They amused themselves dancing in the big living-room to the strains of the Victrola until Uncle Sam returned. Sue thought it quite natural that Earl should run out into the hall to meet him. She would have been greatly astonished could she have heard what passed between them.

“Well?” said Earl anxiously.

“I’m out on ten thousand dollars bail,” said Uncle Sam. “They found the envelope outside the theatre; but my lawyer says they won’t be able to prove in court that it’s the same envelope the young fellow threw away. The dicks can’t get him to talk. Besides, my name was not on the envelope; they can’t bring it home to me. My lawyer’s got me out of worse holes than this.”

“That’s all to the good then,” said Earl.

“Sure, but if you don’t want your little game queered, you got to get that girl out of town quick. There’ll be a big spread in the afternoon papers. Keep all newspapers out of her hands for a couple of days.”

“I get you,” said Earl.

They came into the living-room all smiles. “What did I tell you?” said Earl to Sue. “Uncle Sam’s already got ’em on the run!”

“I should say so!” said the elder man, rubbing his hands together in seeming gratification. “And now that we’ve got this little matter out of the way, how shall we amuse ourselves, girls and boys?” He gave Earl a private glance as much as to say: This is your cue!

Earl said quickly: “Oh, the devil! Have we got to make another round of restaurants and shows and cabarets? I’m fed up. A day like this makes me long for the road again. I wish I was back in Maryland. Whenever you’ve had enough, Sue, just say the word.”

As he spoke, a sudden picture of her beautiful blue, river, her old home embowered in greenery, her brothers and sisters made Sue’s heart soft. These people had given her a wonderful time, but after all they were strange to her. “I’m ready any time,” she said.

“All right,” said Earl, “let’s go! We’ll lunch over in Jersey. I’ll go rouse up Ruby.”

Sue was a little taken aback. For certain, New Yorkers moved quickly. But every girl likes promptness in a young man. She started to thank Uncle Sam for the way he had entertained her.

Earl went unceremoniously into the girls' bedroom. Ruby was lying on her bed reading a novel. Glancing up to see who it was, she sullenly resumed her reading.

"I say, Rube," said Earl, "the boss says we've got to take the peach back to Maryland."

"Well, go ahead and take her," said Ruby indifferently.

"You're expected to come too," said Earl, staring.

"I may be expected to go, but I'm not going."

"What the hell . . ." began Earl.

"Well, what the hell!" snarled Ruby, raising herself on her elbow. Sue would have been more than ever astonished could she have seen her friend's furious face. "I've had enough, see? I'm not going to help you chase this girl. What do you think I am! Yah! The ignorant little jay! She makes me sick!"

"Chase nothing!" retorted Earl hotly. "You know perfectly well it's only in the way of business!"

"Aah! tell that to the marines!" said Ruby, with a hateful sneer.

"Oh, very well, stay there then," said Earl, turning on his heel.

He returned to the living-room with a look of concern. "Poor ole Ruby's down and out," he said. "A fierce neuralgia. She can't get up."

Sue looked dubious.

"But it'll be all right, anyhow," Earl said quickly. "We can drive right through to-night."

Ten minutes later they were ready. Ruby came out of her room full of apologies for her ill-temper. "My poor head!" she explained. Sue was quite willing to make up with her. Sue never harboured resentment. The old lady wept when Sue bade her good-bye. Uncle Sam was jocular and gallant. All kind people in their way, Sue thought.

Crossing on the ferry-boat, Sue happened to notice that she and Earl were the objects of an intent regard from two men in the car behind, a Hodge roadster. She thought she had rarely seen a more unpleasant-looking pair; he who drove was tall and cadaverous with sunken eyes and a mouth almost without lips, a mere slit in his face. The other was younger, dark and hairy with brutal features like a prize-fighter. Sue thought nothing about it then, and did not call Earl's attention to them.

When they stopped at a roadhouse near Metuchen for lunch, this pair came into the same place. Still there was nothing out of the way in that; for hundreds of cars on this road were travelling towards Philadelphia and

points farther south. When they went on, Earl had to keep his eyes front of course, but Sue occasionally glanced through the little window in the back. The grey roadster was always close behind. When they drove through Philadelphia it clung to their rear wheels through all the press of traffic.

After they had come out into the country again, Sue made Earl stop for a moment while she picked some wild roses in a hedge. When they stopped the grey car stopped, two hundred yards in the rear. Then Sue was sure.

“Earl, we are being followed,” she said.

“The deuce you say!” he answered lightly.

But he overdid the lightness. “You knew it all the time!” she said.

He pointed to the little mirror above his eyes.

“Why should anybody follow us?” said Sue.

“That’s the worst of driving an expensive car,” said Earl. “They spot you from afar.”

“Do you mean that they are planning to rob us?” asked Sue with a catch in her breath.

“Don’t you worry, baby,” said Earl. “No Hodge car could ever catch this speedster if I really let her out!”

VII

ESCAPE

A SHORT distance farther along, they came to a branch road heading West, and Earl turned into it. The grey car followed. This piece of road was evidently just opened; it was as smooth as ice and empty of traffic. At the corner lounged a motor-cycle policeman, stationed there evidently to discourage motorists who might be tempted to try out their cars on the new stretch of road. Earl passed him at a discreet rate of speed, and as soon as they had turned the first bend, pressed his toe on the accelerator.

The heavy car leaped ahead down the smooth grey ribbon of concrete. A deep, throaty roar rose from the engine. The speedometer dial crawled around and the figure 50 gave place to 55 to 60 to 70! Sue gasped. The objects alongside the road flew past in a blur. A Ford car seeing them approach from afar, drew close to the fence and stopped. Sue had a swift impression of goggling eyes, and they were gone. With one hand she clung to the door of the car; with the other to her hat. As for the grey car they quickly lost it; and did not see it again.

After a mad quarter of an hour the new road brought them into another north and south highway, and Earl was obliged to slow down somewhat. But the grey car never showed up. Satisfied that they had finally shaken it off, their spirits rose.

“Huh!” said Earl. “If they expect to make a success of the bandit trade they’ll have to get a better car! At that, I didn’t let this old boat out all the way. She could make eighty or ninety.”

“Seventy is fast enough for me!” said Sue ruefully. “The earth looked so hard! Suppose anything had broken!”

“We would never have known what struck us,” said Earl, laughing.

They detoured back, striking the main route southward again at Wilmington, Delaware, where they designed to have dinner at a great hotel, famous throughout the country-side. As they entered the splendid lobby they beheld the cadaverous man and his hairy companion seated in two of the luxurious arm-chairs, trying to look as if they were entirely unconscious of Earl and Sue. The high spirits of the young pair collapsed like pricked balloons.

“Damnation!” muttered Earl. “They guessed that we were coming here for dinner, and didn’t even follow us around!”

It did not improve Sue’s appetite to have the unpleasant-looking couple discussing steak and onions at the next table but one.

Upon the seventy-mile stretch separating Wilmington and Baltimore, Earl made no further attempt to give them the slip. He stuck to the main road, travelling fast. The grey car was never far behind. It became dark *en route*; and Sue learned to distinguish the headlights of that particular car from others that they passed. Much of the way was wild and solitary, the country covered with scrub timber, few cars on the road at this hour. Sue shivered at the thought of that ugly pair. Every now and then she would say:

“They’re still behind us.”

To which Earl would reply: “They’re safe there. Just let them try to come alongside once, and they’ll see!”

This went on for mile after mile. “How determined they are!” Sue exclaimed at last. “I never heard of bandits following their victims for two hundred miles!”

Earl looked at her sharply. “What else could they be?” he asked.

Sue shook her head. “It beats me!”

At ten o’clock they rolled into the streets of Baltimore.

Glancing at Sue in an experimental sort of way, Earl said: “We’d better stop all night here.”

“Not on your life!” said Sue promptly. “I sleep at home to-night.”

“Well, you needn’t bite off my head,” grumbled Earl.

After awhile he said: “Well, anyhow, we’d better make believe to stay all night; register at the leading hotel, put up the car, and go to our rooms. When these fellows are satisfied that we’re settled for the night they’ll give it up. Then we can go on.”

“I don’t like it,” said Sue, “but I suppose there’s no help for it.”

While Earl was registering, the two men out of the grey car entered the hotel, and stood next to him, awaiting their turn to sign the card. Good Heavens! thought Sue; they have the impudence to come into the best hotel! Scarcely a foot’s space separated the two parties; but of course they made believe to be entirely unaware of each other. The air was charged with electricity. Nobody could have said that Sue looked at the two men; but every detail of their appearance was etched on her brain. The younger man breathed heavily, as if he had adenoids; he had a large imitation pearl in his tie, which was held in a gold claw. Two fingers of the tall man’s right hand

were missing. She shivered with repulsion. It suggested that he had led a violent life.

When she and Earl were taken upstairs Sue discovered that they had been allotted communicating rooms with a bathroom between.

“A suite?” she said, running up her eyebrows very high indeed.

“Aah!” grumbled Earl, “I didn’t ask for it. They just gave it to us. It would have looked funny to refuse it.”

Sue stiffened.

“What do you get up on your high horse for?” he complained. “Aren’t we pals?”

“We are, in the open,” said Sue; “but when I am trapped I turn ugly.”

“Trapped!” he said reproachfully. “What a word to use! You know I think the world of you!”

“Then keep your distance,” said Sue.

“Sue,” he pleaded, coming still closer.

Sue calmly opened the door, and walked into the corridor.

“Come back! Come back!” he whispered in alarm. “I’ll behave.”

She returned to the room.

Later, Sue said: “Perhaps the coast is clear now. One of us ought to take a look. I’ll go down.” She did not quite trust Earl.

Earl sullenly agreed. The handsome young fellow was not accustomed to being kept at arm’s length, and it made him sore. Sue descended in the elevator, but at the ground floor she did not get out. For glancing sideways through the door, she saw the cadaverous man sunk in one of the big chairs, blowing cigar smoke towards the ceiling. She stepped quickly to the back of the car. The man had not seen her.

“I’ve forgotten something,” she said to the elevator boy. “I’ll have to go back again.”

When Sue reported what she had seen, Earl said: “Huh! only one of them, you say? They must mean to stand watch and watch all night.”

Sue opened her eyes. “Then they must suspect that we mean to slip out,” she said. “They must know something about us. These are no ordinary bandits.”

Earl shrugged. “Search me!” he said. “We’ll have to stay here all night.”

“No!” said Sue. “Let us watch our watcher. If he goes away even for a minute, we can slip out.”

“How can we watch him?”

“From the mezzanine floor. There’s a balcony overlooking the lobby.”

“We’ll have to sacrifice our suit-cases.”

“You can send the money back to the hotel, and have them forwarded.”

They went down together. On the mezzanine floor they discovered that by sitting at a distance back from the rail, they could glimpse the watcher on the floor below through the balustrade, without any possibility of being seen by him.

Time passed, and he never moved. When he finished his cigar he lit another. The hour was growing late; and there was no one upon the balcony but Earl and Sue. They felt uncomfortably conspicuous. The sense of being in a trap grew upon Sue, making her move her feet impatiently, and grit her teeth together. Occasionally a bell-boy passed along the balcony, giving them a curious glance. They couldn’t sit here much longer.

While Sue watched the man, Earl watched Sue. He put his hand over hers. “Aw, Sue, be nice to me,” he pleaded.

She jerked her hand away. “We appear to be in danger,” she said. “I’m in no humour for *that!*”

Late as it was, a distant sound of music came to Sue’s ears. Finally it gave her an idea. She hailed a passing boy.

“Where is that music coming from?” she asked.

He nodded towards the back of the building. “The ballroom, miss. It’s the ball of the Southern Maryland Association.”

Sue said to Earl under her breath: “Give me five dollars.”

Earl stared at her, but pulled out a bill as she commanded.

“Could you get us in where we could have a look?” Sue said, smiling sweetly at the boy. “We’re so tired doing nothing.”

The boy took a sidelong look at the greenback, and his eyes glistened. He looked about him cautiously. “Well, there’s no one around,” he said. “I might get you in through the service corridor. Come on.”

They followed him through a doorway at the rear, up some stairs, and along a corridor.

“What’s the big idea?” Earl whispered in Sue’s ear.

“We haven’t seen any of the dancers passing in or out through the lobby,” she replied. “There must be a separate entrance to the ballroom. Perhaps we can get out that way.”

“Well,” said Earl in reluctant admiration, “I must admit you’ve got a head on you!”

The boy paused by another door. "In here," he said. Earl pressed the bill into his hand, and he faded away.

When they opened the door a wave of superheated air met their faces, and a burst of music and talk struck on their ears. To their relief the door admitted them to an obscure corner of the ballroom overhung by an encircling balcony. Elderly red-faced Marylanders of both sexes were standing about in front of the door grinning happily and wearing foolish paper caps. Thus their entrance passed quite unnoticed. Sue snatched up a pink paper cap that was lying on the floor, and stuck it on Earl's head. He was disguised then.

The music stopped, and more people pressed back under the balcony. Earl and Sue headed by instinct for the street side of the building, where they knew if there was a separate entrance, they would find it. Making their way slowly around by the wall, they felt hidden and safe in the dense crowd. They came at last to a doorway where a man was taking tickets, and outside to their joy, they saw a pair of elevators.

The ticket-taker was a jolly old fellow. "Leaving so soon?" he said with hospitable regret.

"Unfortunately, yes," said Sue, smiling at him. "We have to catch a train."

When the sweet fresh air of the street blew in their faces their hearts rebounded like rubber balls. They could have danced on the sidewalk, and shouted in their relief and triumph.

"Free! Free!" cried Sue. "We fooled 'em!"

"Ah!" said Earl, looking down at her sideways, "you're a *dandy* pal!"

They hastened around a corner, and down a hill to the garage where Earl had left the car. Fifteen minutes later they had left the last houses of the city behind, and were bowling towards Annapolis at high speed. Their hearts were as light as corks bobbing on the waves.

"You're not cross with me any more, are you?" asked Earl.

Sue looked at him aslant, with a dimple pressing into her cheek. In the light of the cowl lamp he was *very* good-looking; and after all he had behaved no worse than any man might. "I never was 'cross,'" she said; "I was only looking out for myself."

"But you do like me a little?" he pleaded.

"I love a life of adventure!" she parried. "I've had more thrills in the past forty-eight hours than in all my life before!"

"But prove to me that there's no hard feeling!"

“Bend your head down sideways, and I’ll whisper in your ear,” said Sue.

He did so; and instead of whispering, she kissed his cheek as lightly as the brush of rose leaves. “Let that satisfy you for awhile,” she said demurely.

They still had seventy-five miles to go; and the dawn was near when Sue stood under her sister’s window, and tossed pebbles up. They let her into the house softly, and Earl returned to the hotel at King’s Green.

VIII

THE UNLUCKY WIGHT

THE following day was the day when the fish were to be collected for the fish house. Sue donned the faded print dress as a matter of course, and tied the rag of red chiffon around her unruly brown curls. The lovely June weather persisted, and she set off on her rounds in the *Hit-or-Miss*, whistling like a boy.

Goodness! life is full of funny contrasts! she thought. What would my rich friends in New York think if they could see me now?

Down the blue river and back again she steered her graceful craft, a purely subconscious operation, while her mind went over and over the various happenings, novel, exciting and amusing, of that astonishing two days. Already it began to seem like a dream.

As she approached the home wharf on her return, she beheld Temp Wye waiting for her. Evidently he had seen her coming from the fields. Poor Temp in his faded overalls and shirt, his mud-grey ploughing boots did not cut much of a figure alongside the brilliant figures that were dancing through Sue's brain. His natural comeliness was further obscured, by an ugly, lowering look.

Oh, Lr'! thought Sue; here's ole thundercloud layin' for me. Now I'm in for it. Well, it takes two to make a quarrel. I just won't quarrel with him.

"Hello, Temp!" she cried gaily.

He nodded sombrely without speaking. Sue threw him her painter, and he tied it. She clambered out of her boat.

"May I speak to you a minute?" asked Temp stiffly.

"Sure!" said Sue, inelegantly. "Fire away."

She sat down on a mooring post, and Temp stood looking down at her morosely. "It's hard to begin," he said. "I know you hate me."

"You're foolish," said Sue quickly. "I like you fine. Haven't we played together all our lives? Oh, dear! why do we have to grow up? You quarrel with me so, you just make me feel what's the use?"

"We're going to quarrel now," said Temp gloomily. "You'll hate me for what I'm going to say."

"Then why say it?"

“I’ve got to. Your brothers are too young; and your father doesn’t notice what’s going on.”

In spite of Sue’s resolve not to quarrel, the colour instantly flamed into her cheeks. “What’s going on?” she repeated hotly. “What do you mean by that?”

“This man you’re going around with, this Darrah, he’s a crook!” cried Temp.

“What do you know about him?” demanded Sue.

“I know what my eyes tell me!”

Sue thought: That means he knows nothing! “Your eyes are green!” she retorted.

“Oh, don’t take it from me,” groaned Temp. “Ask anybody. They’re all talking about you and him. You’ll ruin yourself with everybody down here.”

“What do I care?” cried Sue with blazing cheeks. “Thank God! Travis County is not the world. To gossip is all these people are good for. They know nothing of the world. They’ve run to seed. They think that everybody outside their own little circle must be a crook!”

“If he’s not a crook what’s he hanging round here for?” demanded Temp.

“Why shouldn’t he come here? We can’t keep the world out of our county as much as ignorant fools like you would like to.”

“What’s his business?”

“He hasn’t any as far as I can see.”

“He’s got all kinds of money, hasn’t he?”

“He’s got plenty of one kind, if that’s what you mean!”

“Ha! Where does he get it?”

“I haven’t asked him,” said Sue cuttingly. “His people are wealthy.”

Temp partly broke down. “Sue, where have you been these past three days?” he groaned. “What have you been doing?”

She was much too angry to regard the ring of honest pain in his voice. “Do you think I will tell you after this?” she said scornfully.

“No, of course you won’t tell me! Oh, God! I’ve been in hell!”

“Do you doubt me?” she demanded proudly.

“No, I do not doubt you. I know you. But you might get led into things. He’s crooked, I tell you! . . . Oh, Sue! I love you!” he groaned. “Like a sister,” the poor lad hastily added.

“Funny time to tell me!” said Sue with curling lip. “Heaven help the woman you marry, Temp!”

“I shall never marry,” he muttered, hanging his head.

There was a silence. Sue only longed to get away.

Temp went on bitterly: “If things were only different, you would see . . . if I . . . if you . . . I am not naturally harsh and bad-tempered. But some things are too hard to bear! Oh, if I had half a chance I could be gay enough!”

“You’ve got as good a chance as anybody!” said the angry Sue.

He shook his tawny mane, and held his head up again. “Oh, well, leave me out of it,” he said harshly. “It’s my duty to open your eyes to this crook. If I can do that it doesn’t matter if you hate me.”

“Your duty!” sneered Sue. “You’re only jealous!”

“Sure, I’m jealous,” he said unexpectedly. “Jealous as hell! I couldn’t wish my worst enemy to suffer like me!” He struck his breast violently. “. . . But just the same,” he went on in a quieter voice, “the truth is the truth. . . . What were his people like? Were they the sort you would like to introduce to your relations?”

“Oh, you’re so ridiculous!” cried Sue with an exasperated laugh. “The world doesn’t centre in Travis County. New Yorkers of wealth and position! They would laugh at your pretensions!”

“Maybe,” said Temp doggedly; “but were they ladies and gentlemen?”

Sue looked Temp up and down in his faded overalls and shouted with laughter. “Not according to your cut!” she said.

“That’s all right,” said Temp, keeping his head up. “The girl had no breeding, for all her fine appearance.”

The sting of truth in this made Sue freshly angry. “You know nothing!” she cried hotly.

“And the fellow’s no gentleman, whatever the rest may be,” Temp persisted.

“Why isn’t he?” demanded Sue.

“A gentleman doesn’t use knuckle-dusters when he’s getting the worst of a fight,” said Temp.

“What do you mean?” cried Sue. “What are knuckle-dusters?”

But Temp set his jaw and refused to explain. To all her questions he merely answered grimly: “Ask *him*!”

Sue stamped her foot in a rage. “Oh, I hate you!” she cried. “You’re full of envy and jealousy. If those are gentlemanly qualities, I hope to be preserved from the breed! You know nothing against Mr. Darrah. It’s only your nasty imagination that has been at work! *I* know him now, and I know

all his family. He's a gentleman and a good sport. *I'm satisfied!*" Under the spur of rage, she made this stronger, of course, than she really meant. Having delivered herself, she jumped up to run home.

"Well, just ask your gentleman one question," Temp called after her bitterly, "and get an answer."

"What's that?" demanded Sue, stopping suddenly.

"Ask him why he and his partner Beetle Cullen make out that they're strangers down here."

Sue had seen Mr. Cullen, who had called upon her father to make him an offer for his pulp wood. "Is that part of the county gossip?" she asked with a curling lip.

"No," said Temp. "That's only known to me. I ferreted it out."

"I congratulate you on your ferreting!" said Sue sarcastically; and ran away to the house.

Temp looked after her, his stern young face tormented by a helpless exasperation. How maddening she was!—and how desirable! What could a man do with such a one! Then his face hardened, and his hands clenched. Useless to speak to her any more; it only made matters worse; but he'd get that slick, black-haired rascal if it was the last act of his life! He wouldn't confide in anybody, nor ask for help; it was his own personal affair, and he would carry it through alone. He went back to his work.

IX

EARL'S BUSINESS

AT eight o'clock that night the rakish runabout stopped in front of the Rousby gate. The jealous eyes of Temp Wye, watching from his house across the shallow valley, did not miss it. Earl Darrah had come to call on Sue in due form. He was presented to the family. Sam Rousby, the father, wagged his hand limply, made a few insignificant remarks and got out of the way. Sam interfered with his children as little as possible. An easy-going man, he was troubled by the secret consciousness that they all had stronger wills than his own, inherited from the mother's side.

Earl, with his New York style, abashed the whole family excepting Sue. The boys, Johnny aged twenty and Ed fifteen, grinned sheepishly, and stood first on one foot, then the other. Johnny registered a silent resolve to be hanging around outside when Earl left, on the chance that he might be carrying more of that good liquor on his hip. The girls, Virginia, Betty and Maggie, presented blank faces to Earl, and giggled at each other.

Sue took him into the parlour, and they sat down side by side on the little sofa with broken springs that was dedicated to courting. The door was left open for propriety's sake. At first they were a little constrained with each other. After the adventures of the past few days, the prim shabby little parlour seemed to put a damper on them. From the dining-room across the hall came the sound of sundry gigglings that they made believe not to hear. However, Earl was experienced with the ladies; he was not at a loss for long. He put his hand over Sue's.

She snatched her hand away. "Don't!"

"Aw, Sue," he pleaded, "you're not trapped now."

"I know," she said. "But I hate pawing."

"Don't you like me?"

"Yes," she said, with a sidelong look that intoxicated him. "But I'm not going to get mushy. If that's the kind you like you'd better . . ."

"You're the kind I like," he said quickly.

"I suppose when the time comes I'll go up with a bang," said Sue. "But I'm not looking for it. Men are nice"—another provoking look; "but I'm not hypnotized by them!"

"Yet a dozen times over I have heard you wish you were a man."

“Oh, that’s different. Men are free.”

“You’re a dandy!” said Earl warmly. “I wouldn’t want you to change. You’re an A1 pal, yet you resist me all the time. Keeps me on my toes!”

The downright Sue hated to have any uncertainty about a thing. She got up and closed the door. “Is this man Cullen who is going about buying up pulp wood, a friend of yours?” she asked.

Earl was startled; but he quickly hid it. “Who’s been gossiping to you?” he parried.

“It’s not a matter of common gossip,” said Sue. “Only one person suspects it.”

“Who is that?”

“I prefer not to say.”

“Oh, well, if there’s not going to be any confidence between us,” said Earl in an aggrieved tone, “what’s the use of my saying anything? If you’re going to listen to all the gossip that’s going round, I’m through! The people down here are like a pack of dogs; when a strange dog comes around they set up a general yowling on principle!”

By making this diversion Earl caused Sue to overlook for the moment that he had not answered her question. Sue, while perfectly ready to abuse the county people to one of them, was not going to let an outsider do it. “They are my people,” she said, sticking out her chin at him.

“You’re too big for this community. New York is your style.”

“What are knuckle-dusters?” asked Sue bluntly.

“Knuckle-dusters?” repeated Earl, staring. “I believe that’s an old-fashioned name for brass knuckles. It’s what you rap a man over the bean with, to lay him out.”

“Have you any?” demanded Sue.

“I? Gosh! no,” said Earl, with so perfect a look of surprise that Sue could not help but believe him.

“Well, have you been fighting?” she asked.

Again Earl avoided a direct answer. “Now I see it all!” he cried. “I know who’s been filling you up with stories against me. It’s your neighbour across the State road.”

Sue said nothing.

“That young fellow is poisoned with jealousy,” said Earl.

“How do you know he is?” asked Sue.

“The night after the dance when I left here, he attacked me in the road.”

“So that was the fight,” murmured Sue. “Did you hit him with anything except your fist?” she asked.

“If you’re going to believe everything that that . . .” Earl began.

“I’ve known Temp Wye ever since we were both babies,” said Sue. “I’m not excusing his faults; but lying is not amongst them. He’s incapable of lying.”

“It was not me that laid him out,” said Earl sullenly. “I could have handled him with my fists all right. A friend of mine who was waiting in the car, saw him attack me and thought I was in danger. He hit Wye before I could stop him. And it wasn’t brass knuckles, but . . . but just a stick that he picked up. I gave him hell for it.”

“And that was Cullen?” asked Sue.

Earl considered rapidly. She had to be told the truth some time. He wouldn’t have chosen for it to come out in this manner; still he had great faith in his powers of persuasion, which had never failed him yet. “Yes, that was Cullen,” he said.

Sue walked away to the window and stood gazing out at the front yard in the fading light. So Temp had been right—or nearly right after all. After the strenuous way she had defended Earl to him, she felt extremely foolish. How could she ever face Temp now? Strangely enough, her resentment was directed more against Temp than against Earl. It was intolerable to her that Temp should have been right.

“Why do you make a secret of your connection with Cullen?” she asked without turning around.

Earl had risen. He was watching Sue warily. “Cullen and I are engaged on private business,” he said.

“What is it?” asked Sue.

“When my schooner comes up the river to collect a load of pulp wood, she will land a cargo of French brandy somewhere.”

Sue whirled around. Her face was frozen in amazement. Her eyes gleamed enormous in the darkening room. For a moment she seemed unable to speak. “Good Lord!” she gasped. “. . . So *that’s* it!”

Earl gave a shrug of bravado. “Are you going to tell on me?” he said.

“It wouldn’t hurt you if I did,” said Sue. “Everybody down here is dead against prohibition.”

“But if I had an enemy . . .” suggested Earl.

“I’m not going to give you away,” said Sue proudly. “You knew that when you told me.”

She stood staring at him, as if she was still trying to get the amazing fact into her consciousness. Earl watched her warily. He was not displeased with the way she was taking it.

“Does your Uncle know?” Sue asked.

“No, indeed,” said Earl quickly. “Uncle Sam’s a banker and a millionaire. He’s dead set against that sort of thing. You heard him talk.”

Sue fell silent again.

“Do you blame me?” Earl presently asked.

She did not answer.

“Consider my position,” he went on. “Uncle Sam is as rich as Croesus, but he won’t give me a cent. Says a young fellow ought to make his own way. So I had the choice between spending my best years warming a chair in one of his offices, and striking out for myself. Well, I’m young, and my blood runs quick. Do you blame me for refusing to be an office slave? It isn’t the money that attracts me to this business; it’s the spice of adventure in it; the danger, the excitement; the good-fellowship amongst all who are engaged in it. Gee! the voyages into lonely coves; running the stuff ashore at night; speeding it away in trucks; outwitting the blundering revenue officers! That’s living!”

All this struck a responsive chord in Sue’s breast, as Earl intended that it should. “Oh, stop!” she said. “I don’t want to hear about it!”

“To be sure it’s breaking the law,” he went on; “but it injures nobody. That’s the way I look at it. It’s a bad law, and everybody feels that it ought to be broken. You can’t stop people from drinking by passing a law. Under prohibition they only drink the more. And what do they drink? Poison! Take the young fellows around here; take your brother Johnny. Isn’t he half sick most of the time from the rotten stuff he drinks? Well, I deal in nothing but first-class stuff; bonded and guaranteed by the governments on the other side. I am doing the people of this country a service by bringing it to them.”

“I wish you hadn’t told me!” muttered Sue.

“Why?”

“Never mind!”

Earl rubbed his upper lip to hide a smile.

“Where are you going to land it?” asked Sue.

“Oh, I couldn’t tell you that,” said Earl virtuously. “It wouldn’t be fair to my associate.”

“I wish I was a man!” cried Sue involuntarily. Earl laughed, and she bit her lip in vexation.

“You’re worth a dozen men!” said Earl warmly. “You’ve got the pluck and the gameness of a man, and all the charm of a woman! I think it’s fine, the life you lead on the river here. All the rivermen respect you even if the county dames do pull down their mouths. Gosh! I’d sooner have you in with me on this than any man I know!”

No answer from Sue.

“Look here,” said Earl, as if the idea had but that moment popped into his head; “come in with me on it, and we’ll land the stuff right here where the old wharf used to be. It’s an ideal place!”

Sue stared and caught her breath. “You’re . . . not in earnest!”

“I’m in dead earnest! . . . We could cut the wire fences, and the trucks could run right down to the water’s edge.”

“So that’s what you were doing down on the cove that night,” murmured Sue. “What a slick liar you are!”

“Of course I had to lie to you then,” said Earl. “If you were my partner I wouldn’t.”

“Oh, it’s nonsense!” cried Sue, coming to herself with a start. “Think of what my father would say!”

“He need never know! My trucks have special mufflers. You can’t hear them. As they went back we’d mend the fences behind them, and nobody would ever know.”

“No! No! No!” said Sue.

“This is going to be a profitable venture,” said Earl. “Fine French brandy at ten dollars a bottle. Your share would be five thousand clear.”

Sue gasped. Five thousand dollars! The thought of the mortgage, ever lying dormant in her mind, leaped up. To get rid of that hideous nightmare at one stroke! To rehabilitate her family in the eyes of the county and make all the croakers eat their words! It was like a lovely dream. With a violent gesture she put the temptation away from her.

“No! No! No!”

“And what fun it would be!” suggested Earl cunningly. “You could pilot the pungy up the river.”

“Oh, stop it!” cried Sue crossly. “You’re dreaming! Listen. I’m a woman. I’m tied hand and foot. I’m not afraid, because I know I could take care of myself. But I can’t take the risk of disgracing my family. We’re not thought much of, goodness knows. But that would be a bit too strong.”

“If there was any danger of that I wouldn’t have spoken of it,” urged Earl. “But our plans are absolutely watertight. Listen. Always before I had a

speedy power-boat. Well, there's something suspicious in the very look of a power-boat, and I've had many a chase, though I always gave them the slip in the end. This time I'm going to fool 'em altogether. I've bought one of the Bay schooners, pungies as they are called, a clumsy old hooker, carry lumber and brick up and down the Bay. No revenue agent would ever suspect *her* of rum-running. She's already purchased, and is on her way to Norfolk manned by my crew. In Norfolk she'll undergo some trifling repairs, just for a stall."

"And listen! The stuff's coming over on the steamship *Cassandra*, hidden under a general cargo. But we don't go near the *Cassandra* until after she's been passed by the port authorities, see? If she gets into trouble that'll be her lookout. The two vessels will be anchored in the Elizabeth River; and one dark night the pungy will drop alongside the *Cassandra*, take the stuff aboard, and sail up the Chesapeake. It can't go wrong. By Golly! I'll rechristen the pungy the *Four Sisters* after you and the girls."

He went on to explain his plans in detail. In Earl's eager and persuasive voice it all sounded as he said, absolutely watertight. Every possible contingency appeared to have been thought of. He was careful not to blurt things out awkwardly, but to let them come out as a matter of course. Everything was on his side; Sue's bold spirit; her longing for adventure; her love of ships; and her terrible need of that five thousand.

"Even if I am a girl I'm entitled to one big adventure," she groaned.

"Sure!" said Earl quickly. "We've all got to settle down soon enough. Think, when you're old, how fine it will be to have that voyage to remember! Sailing up the Chesapeake with a jolly crew, all lights out; creeping up the river here; showing a flash to the shore, and getting an answer back from the waiting trucks! We can lay the *Four Sisters* right alongside the beach here, and run the stuff ashore in a jiffy!"

As he spoke, Sue's fingers fairly itched for the spokes of the pungy's wheel. However, she had not abandoned prudence. "Sailing up the Chesapeake!" she said dryly. "You didn't mention that before. If you expect me to join at Norfolk it would mean that I'd have to be away a week or ten days. Ten days alone on a sailing vessel with a crew of men! What are you thinking of!"

"But you wouldn't be the only woman aboard," said Earl.

"What?"

"There is Ruby. Ruby is my pal, though she is my sister. She knows all about it, and she's been pestering the life out of me to take her. But I couldn't, of course, for the same reason that you mention; a lone woman.

But why shouldn't the two of you come? You can share the cabin. The rest of us bunk forward . . .”

“Oh, stop!” cried Sue violently. “You're like Satan on the Mount. It's a pipe dream. I forbid you to say another word about it!”

“Oh, all right,” said Earl with a seemingly downcast air. “. . . But you're not going to cast me off, are you?”

Sue shook her head. “No,” she said wistfully, “I shall want to hear how it comes out even if I can't be in on it.”

“And may I come to see you to-morrow night?”

“If you want to.”

X

SUE'S DECISION

AFTER supper on the following night, Sue was driving up her young turkeys from the cove, when she came unexpectedly upon her father seated on a block at the stable door with his face buried in his hands. He had not heard her coming. All the blood seemed to forsake her heart. It is a terrible thing to a child, even a grown child, to see the parents collapse.

“Oh, Dad! what’s the matter?” she gasped.

At the sound of her voice his head went lower still. “Go ’way! Go ’way!” he mumbled, ashamed to have her find him in so piteous a state.

She could see the bony shoulders shaking under his old shirt. Sue could hardly respect the footless old potterer who had made such a mess of his affairs; but the blood tie was not to be denied. Dropping to her knees in the dirt beside him, she passed a strong young arm around him. “Dad, it’s only me, Sue,” she whispered. “You needn’t to mind me. I won’t tell the others. What’s the matter, Dad?”

“It’s all over,” he mourned, still keeping his face covered. “All over!”

“What are you talking about?”

Thankful enough for her comfort, he lifted his head, but kept his face turned from her. “Mr. Stinnett, the bank president, was here to-day when you was down the river,” he said. “He went over the place. . . .”

“It isn’t his yet,” said Sue, looking fierce.

“He says he’s got to foreclose August first,” whined the old man. “The overdue interest has eaten up the bank’s margin of safety, he said. If I had kept the place up he could let it go another year, he said. But along of my barns falling down, and my land being poor, and me having no tobacco because I missed the season last year, he had to act at once. He talked real mean to me; said a man like me hadn’t no right to be in possession of good land.”

In her heart Sue knew the justice of this; but she was not going to admit it then. “What’s the matter with him!” she said indignantly. “He’s no farmer himself. He’s just the sort of fat toad sitting in his office doing nothing and waiting for other men to get into trouble!”

“He’ll sell us up!” wailed the old man. “We’re done for! We’re done for! Think of the disgrace!”

Sue gritted her teeth together. The disgrace meant far more to her than to this slack-twisted old man. But she set to work to comfort him. "Well, this is nothing new," she said. "We knew it a long time back. Why take on about it?"

"I've a good mind to make away with myself!" he said. "Then they'd see!"

Sue knew that there was little danger of this. "It may be a blessing in disguise," she said. "The Lord knows this isn't much of a life, scratching along in such miserable poverty. Let's chuck it all, and start afresh somewhere else."

"The Rousbys have lived on this point for two hundred years! I cannot bear it!"

"It's time they moved then."

"Where could we go?"

"We'll go to town and get jobs. There are seven of us. We'll make out all right."

"Who would give me a job in the city?"

Who indeed? thought Sue, looking at him. She hastened past the awkward question. "With so many of us chipping in it will be easy," she said. "Let's not wait until August first. Let's pack up right away, so everybody can see we went of our own free will."

"Won't be much packin'," said the old man. "I never told you before, but I had to give Goldstein a chattel mortgage on the furniture two years ago."

Sue's heart sank. "Then we'll board," she said quickly. "That will be better anyway, if we're all going to work."

"They say they charge ten dollars a week for board in the city," wailed the old man. "Where'll we find seventy dollars to pay the first week, let alone the following?"

Sue put on a brisk air to hide her utter blankness inside. "You just leave that to me," she said. "I'll manage for all of us. . . . Pull yourself together now, and lock up the bull or he'll do more damage before morning."

With a shamefaced air the old man got stiffly to his feet, and shuffled into the stable. He was greatly comforted.

Sue proceeded to put up her turkeys with two little lines drawn between her brows. In reality she had no illusions about the fate that awaited the scatter-brained Rousbys in the city. There was young Johnny with his fatal thirst, and Ed whose sole aim seemed to be to emulate Johnny in all things; there were the three girls, more or less flighty. No ballast. It never occurred

to Sue to pity herself at being saddled with such a family. She just took them as she found them, and did what she could. She was thinking of her brothers and sisters more than of the old man whose day was over. They were young; they were entitled to a fair show; and she was the nearest thing to a mother that they possessed. In the hundred yards that separated the farmyard from the house she made up her mind. They must be kept in the country, in the life that they knew.

As to the risk she herself was taking, Sue thought: There's going to be a smash-up anyhow. We've got to get out of the county if this fails. So what difference does it make?

A few minutes later Earl arrived looking as smart as paint. Out of the corners of her eyes Sue surveyed him approvingly. At that moment his look of wary assurance seemed like the highest of virtues. Here was a young man who wasn't going to let anybody come it over him; it was a kind of religion with him to keep his end up.

When Earl understood that the wind had changed since the night before his delight was boundless. His arms opened to embrace Sue on the spot. She side-stepped it.

"Hold on!" she said coolly. "I'm only agreeing to go into business with you. It isn't your bright eyes which have won me, but the chance of making five thousand dollars!"

Earl was not at all put out. "All right," he said, grinning. "I'll pay you down something in advance if you want."

Sue shook her head. "Not a cent until it's earned," she said.

They fell into talk of ways and means.

"I've got a friend in Virginia," said Sue. "Girl I went to school with. You wouldn't think from our present circumstances that I'd ever been away to school. But I had a year of it. I'll give out that I'm going to visit her."

"Good!" said Earl. "Here's a pointer. For the next few days if you were to mope around, and sort of act poorly, somebody would be sure to suggest that you needed a holiday. It would make it easier for you."

Sue smiled to herself. "I'll manage," she said. "Of course, whatever I do they are sure to guess that it had something to do with you."

"Not at all," said Earl. "I'll disappear to-morrow. Everybody will suppose you sent me away with a flea in my ear. You don't have to make a move for ten days yet. We won't write. In ten days I'll be forgotten."

"The dames in this county never forget!" said Sue, smiling.

“To the deuce with them!” said Earl. “Let them suspect what they please, they won’t *know* anything. The only one you’ve got to watch out for is that lad on the hill opposite. You must pull the wool over his eyes. Girls can do that little thing. Tell him you found out I was no good, and sent me to the rightabout. That would tickle him.”

“Oh, I couldn’t lie to Temp,” Sue said involuntarily. Her heart sank suddenly. This affair, of course, would absolutely and for ever finish her with Temp.

Earl scowled. “Why not?” he demanded. “What is he to you?”

“Nothing,” said Sue quickly. “I don’t mind lying to anybody else; but I *couldn’t* lie to a person who was unable to lie to me.”

“Seems like a pretty fine distinction,” said Earl, sneering.

“He won’t learn anything from me,” said Sue. “I’ll keep out of his way.”

There were many other details to be planned out. When Earl finally got up to go, Sue strolled out of the house with him. At the gate he held out his hand.

“At the Monticello Hotel, Norfolk, then, at eight o’clock in the morning on July 8th. Is it a go?”

Sue withheld her hand yet a moment. “I make one condition,” she said.

“What’s that?” he asked sharply.

“From the moment that I join you in Norfolk,” said Sue, “until our job is done, and we leave the pungy, you must agree to treat me just as if I were a man. No spooning either by look, word or touch!”

Earl was taken aback. She looked as if she meant it. “Are you afraid of me?” he grumbled.

Sue’s chin went up. “No, indeed! I can always take care of myself. But I want to enjoy myself. I don’t want to be quarrelling with you the whole time.”

“And after the voyage is over?”

“Oh, then you’ll have your chance with the field,” said Sue with a provoking glance.

“You’re right!” said Earl. “We mustn’t mix the two things. I promise.” It was a rule with Earl immediately to give any promise that was required of him. You could always think over later whether it was to your advantage to keep it.

She laid her hand in his to bind the bargain. Earl climbed into his car, and was gone with a wave of the hand.

XI

SUE SETS OUT

EVERYTHING seemed to turn out as Earl had foretold. The handsome young New Yorker was seen no more in Travis County, and it was supposed that Sue had quarrelled with him. Sue's reticence on the subject confirmed this view. Only Temp Wye dared not let himself believe that anything which so closely concerned his happiness could be true. One morning he marched up to Sue where she sat shelling peas on the back porch. First making sure that no one was in hearing, he said in his blunt way:

"Sue, has that fellow gone for good?"

"Temp," Sue said firmly, "after the way you behaved the other day I refuse to be cross-examined by you on that subject."

Temp never budged. "Do you expect to see him again?" he demanded.

"I refuse to answer you," said Sue.

"Has he written to you?"

"No!"

"Ha!" cried Temp. "Then you *do* expect to see him again. You couldn't answer no to that question!"

Sue, biting her lip in vexation, got up and marched into the house; and Temp went back to his work and to his bitter, jealous thoughts.

However, in other ways, luck favoured Sue. It happened that a letter came from Mary Buhannon, her friend in Norfolk. Sue mentioned that she had been invited for a visit, and Betty, the good-humoured sister, said:

"Why don't you go, Sue? It would be nice for you."

Sue demurred, and Betty, not really meaning it, persisted. Finally Sue said: "Well, maybe I will. I suppose you could get along all right for a week."

Later she made believe that she had written to Mary Buhannon accepting her invitation. To her father Sue intimated that Mr. Buhannon was a wealthy man, and she had heard his daughter mention that he dealt in farm mortgages. Perhaps she could get him to take over their mortgage.

Finally, on the afternoon of the seventh, Johnny made ready to drive her to King's Green in the family Ford to catch the bus for Annapolis. Sue

kissed them all good-bye with a special warmth. Her conscience hurt her to be deceiving them.

“Good-bye, Sue! Good-bye!” they cried. “Have a good time!”

Ah, the dears! thought Sue with a tight feeling in her throat. What would they say if they knew!

But as soon as she had boarded the bus in front of the wistaria-embowered porch of the old hotel at King’s Green, her spirits rose. How delightful it was to travel! All her responsibilities slipped off, and she felt as light as air. For the time being she was done with the old humdrum life; thrilling adventures lay before her. She enjoyed every moment of the long drive. The familiar country revealed new beauties to her. She was aware that she was looking her best in her trim tailored suit and the smart New York hat; for every man on board the bus under sixty-five was looking at her.

In Annapolis she changed to an electric car, and after another hour’s ride, arrived in Baltimore. It was five o’clock, she had an hour to spare before the Norfolk boat left, and she decided to save a taxi fare by walking to the wharf. She had not yet had enough of cities to have become accustomed to the noise and bustle in the streets. Everything amused her; the traffic, the shop windows, the market. She dawdled along, swinging her suitcase.

Seeing a businesslike little revolver in a window, Sue thought: if I’m bound on adventure I’d better have it; and she went in. The shop-keeper demurred at first, since she had no licence, but let her have it when she assured him she was leaving the state.

Sue was a very poor conspirator; it never occurred to her care-free heart that anybody might be taking a special interest in her movements. She failed to notice the sharp-faced young man in the W.B. & A. station, who glanced at her with gimlet eyes as she got off the car. He hastily consulted a notebook, and then followed her out of the station. When Sue got to the wharf and having bought her ticket and stateroom, boarded the steamboat, the young man hastened into a telephone booth.

Calling up a number, he asked for Mr. Strowlger. When he got his man he said: “This is Tinker talking; number nineteen, division two.”

“I get you,” returned the voice over the wire.

“You sent out a circular description of a certain girl that was wanted. I’ll read it to you.” He had the notebook in his hand. “About twenty years old; five feet four in height; weight about 120. Blue eyes set wide apart; curly brown hair cut short, rather wide, clean-cut mouth. Pronounced dimple in her left cheek; small brown mole under the right corner of her mouth. Clear

sun-tanned complexion; no make-up visible. When last seen was wearing a well-cut tailored suit of a dark blue material with fine white stripe, and a smart and expensive little hat made of silk braid, dark red in colour, and having a parrot embroidered in bright coloured silks on the front of the crown. Carried a cow-hide suit-case with the initials: S. A. R. . . . Is that girl still wanted, Mr. Strowlger?"

"You bet she is!" answered the voice over the wire.

"Well, I've just picked her up."

"You're sure?"

"Certain sure. Same girl, same hat, suit-case with same initials."

"Was the man with her?"

"She was alone."

"Where is she now?"

"She got off the 4.55 car from Annapolis. She walked down to the Light Street wharves and went on board the steamboat *Chesapeake* of the Old Bay Line. On the way she bought a pistol at Simpson's."

"You're sure she's going to leave on that boat?"

"She bought a ticket for Norfolk, and a stateroom."

"What time does the boat leave?"

"Six o'clock. You have twenty-five minutes."

"I'll be there. Look here, this is a good bit of work, Tinker. I shan't forget it."

"Thank you, sir."

Meanwhile Sue, having left her suit-case in the stateroom, was wandering around the decks of the *Chesapeake*, and through her handsome saloons. She was an infinitely bigger and finer vessel, of course, than the boats which came up the Pocomico River. Sue had a sense of travelling in great luxury. At six o'clock the deep mellow-toned whistle blew, and they began to back out of the slip and to turn around in the narrow basin. Following other passengers, Sue found her way to an upper deck and sat down for her dinner in the airy dining-room. She was so fortunate as to secure a seat by a window. What fun it was while one ate to look out upon Federal Hill, Fort McHenry and Curtis Bay moving past like a panorama.

Scarcely less interesting were her fellow-passengers. But as her eyes roved from individual to individual Sue received a nasty shock. Seated at a table three removes away she beheld the cadaverous man who had chased Earl and her all the way from New York to Baltimore in a Hodge car. With him he had his same dark, hairy companion. Sue's heart went down into her

boots. All her delight in the journey turned to ashes in her mouth. How on earth had they come here? She felt trapped on the steamboat.

At first she thought it must be an accident. They must be after somebody else now. How fervently she prayed that they might not remember her. To have left the dining-room would only have been to call herself to their attention. Her best chance was to sit quietly where she was until they had left. Ugh! when she noticed how clumsily the cadaverous man held his fork owing to the missing fingers, she shivered. The younger man gobbled his food. What a coarse brute he was!

As the moments passed, her woman's intuition told her, from the pointed way in which the men were ignoring her, that they *had* recognized her; and, moreover, that it was herself and none other who was the sole object of their interest. She was filled with dismay. What on earth will I do? she thought. I am all alone now. . . . Surely they would not dare to harm me on board this crowded vessel. To-morrow morning I will be with Earl and Ruby again.

Then her mind began to work. What do they want of me anyway? They must know that a girl like me never carries any great sum of money. And they can see that I'm not wearing valuable jewellery. They can't be robbers. What are they then? Suddenly the word rang through her brain like the stroke of a gong: *Detectives!* Of course! How foolish not to have thought of that in the beginning! Earl was only fooling me. Detectives on his trail in the beginning, and now in some way they have stumbled on me!

What shall I do? I have nobody to advise me now! If they follow me I will lead them directly back to Earl and Ruby. That mustn't happen. Then I can't go to Earl until I have shaken them off. A fat chance I have of doing that! They are old hands at this game, and I am a novice. Where can I go? I haven't money enough to carry me any farther than Norfolk!

Sue had not expected that her thrilling adventures would begin as soon as this, nor that they would take this form. There was nothing pleasurable in this excitement.

I must go to Mary's house, her thoughts resumed. While these men are watching her house, I could be telephoning to Earl from the inside, and they'd be none the wiser. Earl would tell me what to do then. But suppose Mary happened to be out when I called? Or the house might be closed up for the day? Or if these men happened to be watching when Mary and I met, they would know from her astonishment that something was wrong. Oh, if I could only send her a message! I ought to have gone by train.

This was as far as she had got when she left the dining-room. As she walked down the long saloon of the steamboat, she came upon a little sign

on the wall that was like a direct answer to her wish. It read:

*This vessel is at all times in communication
with the shore by radio.
Messages may be sent to all points
at reasonable rates.
Apply at office on hurricane deck.*

As she climbed the stairway to the hurricane deck, Sue perceived that the cadaverous man was watching her from below. She thought: If he's a bona-fide detective he would have the right to make the operator show him the message I sent. I must be careful how I word it.

After much chewing of the pencil in the little radio office, she evolved the following:

"I am on the steamboat *Chesapeake*. On my way south. I can stay over with you for a couple of hours to-morrow if convenient.

“SUE.”

The good-natured operator pointed out that she might cross out the first sentence, since the message would show on the face of it that it had been sent from the *Chesapeake*.

This done, Sue, in order to convince the men watching her that her mind was quite at ease, sat down in the lower saloon to listen to the music of the ship's orchestra. After awhile a woman sitting next to her got up and moved away; and to Sue's dismay, the dark young man slipped into the vacated seat. He was much worse looking close to. His black hair grew low on his forehead, and far forward on his temples, giving him the look of an animal. The backs of his hands were covered with coarse black hair. He was evidently a stupid clod; his efforts to look ingratiating were comical.

Good Heavens! thought Sue. He's getting ready to speak to me. Should I do the outraged virtue act, and walk away; or should I let him speak to me?

From beside her a hoarse voice said in that buttery tone that all pretty women know: "Travelling alone, miss?"

Sue had decided that the sporting thing to do was to talk to him. In so doing she might get some clue to the mysterious business of this pair. "Yes," she said agreeably.

"So'm I," he said.

Liar! thought Sue. "Are you?" she said politely.

“Makes the evening seem long, don’t it, when you’re travellin’ alone?” he next ventured.

“Well, I enjoy the music,” said Sue.

“Oh, sure,” he rumbled. “I’m a bear for music myself. I got one of them electrical attachments to my Victrola, and when I’m home it never stops.”

“Is that so?” said Sue.

“But, at that, music ain’t the same as companionship,” he went on. He leered at Sue in a way that he intended to be perfectly killing; it made her shudder internally. “Music sounds twice as good when you got companionship.”

“I hadn’t noticed that,” said Sue dryly.

“Got friends in Norfolk?” he asked.

“Yes,” said Sue, “but I’m only stopping there a few hours. I’m on my way farther south.”

“Where to?”

“To . . . to . . .” Sue realized in dismay that her geography was too sketchy to furnish her instanter with the name of a town that might be reached from Norfolk.

“Wilmington, N.C.?” he asked.

Sue snatched at it gratefully. “Yes, Wilmington.”

“Who yeh know in Wilmington?”

She guessed that it must be a fairly large place. “I’m going to stay with my grandmother, Mrs. George Blake.”

“That so? Who yeh know in Norfolk?”

“Miss Mary Buhannon. I went to school with her.”

Thus he clumsily fished for information. Indignation began to rise in Sue. What kind of a fool does he think I am? she thought. He became amorous, too; and Sue’s palm itched with the desire to box his ears.

“My name’s Croker,” he said, “Joe Croker. What’s yours?”

“Sue Johnson.”

“Yes, it is! What’s the R for on your suit-case?”

“Oh, what’s in a name?” said Sue.

“You’re right! Whatever your name is you look good to me. Let’s go out on deck. It’s nice out there.”

“I like to listen to the music,” Sue objected.

“You can hear it all right out on deck. The windows is open.”

Sue merely shook her head.

Like all stupid people, when he was balked, he turned ugly. "Are you trying to make out you're the kind of girl that never falls for a fellow?" he sneered.

"Depends on the fellow," said Sue. It was unwise; but she couldn't help herself.

"Aah!" he snarled. However, he presently succeeded in covering his ill-temper. "A fellow I know is in Norfolk now," he went on, with his little eyes fixed cunningly on Sue's face. "Goes by the name of Earl Darrah."

"That so?" said Sue, mimicking him.

"Ever heard o' him?"

Sue shook her head carelessly. "Why do you say 'goes by the name of'?" she asked.

"Oh, he's a fly kid," said Croker, leering. "He's got plenty of names. Me and him's been on many a job together."

"That so?" said Sue.

"Surest thing you know. I seen him once with a girl that looked like you. That's why I ast yeh."

Sue affected to show no interest in the matter.

"Say, you needn't be afraid to let on to me," he went on in a hoarse whisper. "I'm a regular fellow, I am."

"I can see that," said Sue dryly. She thought: If this goes on I shall certainly smack his face. She rose. "Well, I'm going to bed now," she said carelessly.

"Thought you wanted to hear the music!" he sneered.

"Good night," said Sue.

He flushed darkly. "Say, you think you're pretty smart, don't yeh?" he growled. "Well, you may be; but you ain't as smart as me, see?"

Sue looked at him in astonishment, and laughed suddenly. The creature actually believed it! "Well, I'm in a bad way then!" she said.

"Aaah!" he growled, at a loss for a come-back.

Sue walked away down the long saloon, without looking back. I handled that very badly, she thought; but that thick-headed chimpanzee was more than flesh and blood could stand.

XII

HIDE AND SEEK

NEXT morning when the *Chesapeake* docked at Norfolk, early as it was, Sue beheld the trim smart figure of Mary Buhannon waiting at the shore end of the gangplank. A warm feeling of gratitude welled up in her breast. Good old Mary! she would stand by her! How comforting it was to find a friend; and *such* a friend; for Mary looked what she was, the daughter of one of Norfolk's leading citizens. Sue could not have asked for anything better calculated to put off the suspicions of a pair of inquisitive detectives.

Running down the gangplank, Sue cast herself into her friend's arms. Out of the tail of her eye she observed that Croker was close behind her. Among the kisses and cries of joy, she managed to whisper into Mary's ear:

"Do not show any surprise at my coming."

Mary gave a little gasp at this mysterious request; nevertheless she quickly played up to it. "I'm sorry you can only stay such a little while," she said; "but we'll make the best of it."

As soon as they were safe in the Buhannon car, she said: "What's up?"

Sue groaned inwardly at the necessity of lying again. "Oh, nothing much," she said lightly. "There was a man on the boat who pestered me. He was just behind me when I spoke. I was afraid I'd have him all day in the train, so I wirelessed you that I'd stop over."

"Do you mean to say you were going to pass through Norfolk without seeing me?" said Mary reproachfully.

Sue had her lie all ready. Her conscience smote her; but what could she do? "I didn't know myself until yesterday that I was coming," she said, laughing. "A while back I applied for the job of companion to an old lady in Wilmington, N. C. Yesterday she wrote asking me to come down for an interview."

Mary was satisfied with this very natural explanation, and the two girls plunged into the gossip of old schoolmates. No one could have suspected that Sue had anything else on her mind. Gee! what an accomplished deceiver I am becoming! she thought. As she entered the handsome Buhannon residence, she saw a taxicab drive past, and a cadaverous face appear for a moment at the window. It bore a puzzled look. I had you there, old man! thought Sue.

As they entered the house Sue spotted the telephone in the lower hall. Her grand problem now was, how to use it without being overheard by any of the Buhannon family. It transpired that the only one in the house was Mary's mother. Mary took Sue up to the other lady's bedroom, and the three of them sat there chatting. Sue said, as with a sudden recollection:

"Oh, there's a man I know stopping at the Monticello Hotel here. May I call him up?"

"Certainly!" said Mary. "I'll show you where the 'phone is."

"Oh, don't bother," said Sue. "I saw it. Back in a moment." And she ran downstairs.

Getting her number, she spoke into the transmitter in a low tone: "Page, Mr. Earl Darrah, please. I'll hold the wire." After a few minutes' wait, with great relief she heard Earl's cool voice. "Earl, this is Sue," she said. She briefly explained what had happened.

A profane exclamation escaped Earl. "What a rotten piece of luck! How in the world did they pick you up?"

"I don't know," said Sue. "They were on the boat when I saw them. The younger man scraped acquaintance with me, later."

"That's Croker," said Earl, "a bonehead! What did you tell him?"

"Told him I was on my way to Wilmington, N. C. And now I'll have to go there, or make believe to go, because I told my friend the same thing, and naturally she'll expect to see me off at the station. And I haven't money enough for a ticket."

"I'll take care of that part," said Earl. "Call at the general delivery window of the post office here any time to-day and ask for a letter."

"But what shall I do about Wilmington?"

"I suppose those fellows are watching the house where you are?"

"There isn't a doubt of it. They passed by a few minutes ago in a taxi."

"I can't lay down exact instructions for you," said Earl, "because I can't foresee what chances you'll have during the day. I leave it to you to shake that pair any way you can. Buy your ticket for Wilmington, and a berth on the sleeper to-night. The best thing to do, would be to trick the dicks into taking that train, while you remained in Norfolk. But if you can't get away with that, if you're obliged to take the train yourself, make believe to go to bed, and slip off the train at the first stop, which is Suffolk. I'll be waiting at Suffolk with the car. If you're not on the train, I'll hustle right back to Norfolk, and pick you up at the Y.W.C.A. at midnight. Got that?"

Sue repeated it after him.

When she returned upstairs, Mary Buhannon said with a smile: “Well, is he coming around?”

“No,” said Sue. “As luck would have it, he’s tied up for the day.”

Later, Mary drove Sue around in the car to show her Norfolk. Sue observed that the two detectives were never far behind. They had hired a touring car with the top down. Fortunately Mary did not get on to them. Sue went to the post office and got her money. Afterwards she allowed them all to see her buying a ticket for Wilmington and a berth. Surely that ought to convince the detectives! she thought. However, they continued to stick to her like brothers.

The train left at ten o’clock. At five minutes before the hour, Sue and Mary were still chatting at the train gates. Sue’s nerves felt somewhat frazzled as a result of her attempts to outwit the detectives, and at the same time keep Mary in ignorance of what was happening. At that moment the two men were waiting just outside the gates. Sue lingered on from moment to moment in the hope that they might board the train; but not a bit of it! It was evident that they suspected her of some design to give them the slip at the last moment.

At two minutes to ten the gateman said: “You’d better get aboard, miss, if you’re going.”

Sue had been able to think of no expedient whereby she might evade both Mary and the detectives, so there was no help for it. Giving Mary a kiss, she sedately crossed the platform, affecting to take no notice of the detectives, and giving up her berth check to the Pullman conductor who stood by the rear end of the train, she mounted the steps. The detectives were immediately behind her; and as she turned into the car, she heard one of them say to the conductor:

“Give us a section to Wilmington.”

Sue thought: It will take him half a minute to issue the check. If there was only some way I could get off the train without their seeing me! She hastened through the car, and on the front vestibule found, as luck would have it, that the door opposite the station platform had been opened to allow a car cleaner to sweep out some dirt. A local train was lying on the next track. Like a flash Sue sprang across from step to step, and walked back through the rear car of the local.

She got off at the back platform, but alas! at the same moment, the two detectives jumped off the forward end of the same car. The open vestibule door of the Pullman had told its tale to them. Sue’s heart went down. . . .

I've spoiled everything! she thought; I'm staying in Norfolk, but they're staying too!

She hastened around the rear end of the local train. The express was just starting to pull out. Yielding to a sudden impulse, Sue made a run for it, and the conductor, who was in the act of closing the door, leaned out and hauled her aboard. Sue darted inside the car. The door slammed. The two detectives ran into view around the end of the local, shouting and waving their hands. The conductor wagged his hand from side to side in a good-natured gesture of denial. The train rapidly gained speed. Sue had the gratification of leaving the detectives stamping and cursing on the platform.

An hour later she got off at Suffolk. Outside in the dark street Earl, bareheaded, was waiting in the rakish runabout, handsome and debonair as ever, a broad smile revealing his fine teeth.

"I didn't go inside," he explained, "because I thought possibly a pair of enraged dicks might get off the train instead of you."

"No," said Sue, coolly, as she climbed in beside him; "I caused them to miss the train."

"You darling!" he murmured, leaning towards her; "you're as clever as you are pretty! Turn your face up!"

Sue put her hand up between them. "You forget your promise," she said.

"Oh, hell!" grumbled Earl, "you looked so good it drove it clean out of my head!"

"Where's Ruby?" asked Sue.

"She couldn't come," said Earl.

Sue supposed that he meant couldn't come to Suffolk, and let it go at that.

XIII

A TRAITOR

EARL and Sue bowled smoothly along a hard surfaced road to the accompaniment of a deep purr from the engine. They were making better time than the railway train. The brilliant headlights picked up the flying objects alongside the road in fantastic effects of light and shadow like stage lighting, and the cool night wind sang in their ears. Sue's heart was light again; this was like the Adventure she had dreamed of. She now had an opportunity to tell Earl in detail of her experiences with the two detectives. She christened them the Buzzard and the Chimpanzee.

"The Buzzard's name is Strowlger," said Earl, laughing; "otherwise known as Three-Fingered Jake. Last fall I ran a cargo at Penn Grove under his very nose. He was nearly broke on account of it. Consequently he has it in for me. His sole object in life is to land me in Atlanta."

"Atlanta!" gasped Sue. It was the first time she had realized that Penitentiary was the price of failure in their enterprise. She hastily put the ugly thought away.

"It doubles the risk, their following you down here," Earl went on; "but I've been in lots tighter holes than this."

"What do you suppose they'll do now?" asked Sue.

"Well, I figure that your determination to get that train—you couldn't have played a neater trick, baby! will convince them that the rendezvous is to be somewhere south of here; somewhere along the shores of Albemarle or Pimlico Sound."

"Don't call me Baby," said Sue. "It's silly under the circumstances."

"Well, partner, then," amended Earl, grinning. "They'll waste a day or two before they find out their mistake. When they get hold of the Pullman conductor on your train, he will tell them, of course, that you got off at Suffolk, and that will suggest to them that Norfolk was the place after all. But they won't be sure of anything, see? And even when they get back to Norfolk, they'll never suppose that we're lying right out in front of the town. They'll waste their time snooping around the out-of-the-way coves and creeks. I know how the minds of those babies work!"

"You'll have to leave the car somewhere in Norfolk," said Sue. "Won't that betray us?"

Earl shook his head. "I have a good friend who keeps a garage there. It's wonderful what friends you can make by handing out a little good liquor! He'll never give the car away. If they did find it, it's got a Virginia licence now."

"Where are we going now?" asked Sue.

"Aboard the pungy. Everything is going fine. The *Cassandra* has made a quick trip, and is already within wireless distance of the Capes. She'll be in to-morrow. If we have luck we may be able to sail north with our cargo to-morrow night; then the Buzzard and the Chimpanzee can search Norfolk for us and welcome!"

At midnight, having put up the car, Earl and Sue were making their way towards an unfrequented part of the river-front of Norfolk. After leaving the main streets they met not a soul; but the tall board fences, the yawning gateways, the dilapidated sheds, suggested scores of lurking places; and Sue was thankful to have the tall figure of Earl at her side. There are certain adventures which a woman may not face with equanimity.

The sky was overclouded; and not a breath of air stirred. Between the buildings they glimpsed the wide river with the riding lights of the vessels at anchor. Every light was twinned by its reflection in the unseen water. Earl pointed out where the *Four Sisters* lay.

"Only she's called the *Ed. R. Green* now," he explained. "We'll have a christening after we set sail. There are twenty pungies just like her out there," he went on with a chuckle. "We couldn't lie in a safer or a more public place. Her papers are all in order, too; The *Ed. R. Green* bound light for the Severn River to bring out a load of pulp wood."

Above the long sheds of the steamboat lines, they came to a huddle of private wharves, more or less dilapidated. Passing through a coal yard, they came out on one of these old wharves, underfoot the splintery planks were greasy with coal dust. Warned by Earl to watch out for holes, Sue picked her way gingerly. Seated on the stringpiece of the wharf they made out the silhouette of a man outlined against the faint sheen of the water.

"That you, Brant?" said Earl softly.

"Right, boss," came the answer.

He rose. It was too dark for Sue to see his face, but she was sensible of a stocky figure, with an extraordinary width of shoulder.

"Where's your partner?" asked Earl sharply.

"Dunno, boss." The rumbling bass voice carried out the suggestion of enormous physical strength. Sue felt as if she were upon the threshold of a

new existence. "Got tired of waitin'," the voice went on; "and went lookin' for fun. Wouldn't listen to what *I* said."

"Damn!" said Earl. "What'll we do now? We can't leave him ashore!"

"There's a speakeasy up the street," suggested the man.

"Well, go look for him," said Earl. "We'll wait here."

The man disappeared in the darkness. Earl remained beside Sue, biting his fingers, and muttering under his breath. His agitation seemed excessive to the girl.

"Is it so serious?" she asked.

"Serious!" repeated Earl ill-temperedly. "Don't you realize that until we leave here we are at the mercy of this scum? Any one of them could sell us out to the revenue officers."

Sue shivered. How different this was from what she had pictured!

However, within a few minutes, voices were heard returning. Or rather one voice, and that a drunken one; the replies of the bass voice were inaudible.

Earl swore afresh. "He'll have the police down on us!" he muttered.

Two figures materialized out of the darkness, one staggering slightly. The deep-voiced man said:

"Here he is, boss. I had a time, gettin' him to come!"

The drunken man started to argue incoherently.

"Shut your head!" commanded Earl. "Into the boat with you!"

The man drew himself up. "You go to hell!" he said truculently.

"What's this?" said Earl.

"I ain't agoin'," he said. "Leastways I ain't agoin' 'ceptin' on my own terms, see? And that's triple pay, see? You dam' well gotta come acrost, fella! I ain't in business for my healt'! Don't fergit I on'y gotta walk a half a mile to earn a thousand berries fer nottin'! I know I . . ."

He got no further. Sue heard the impact of fist on flesh, and the drunken man simply catapulted head first over the stringpiece and down into the water below with a mighty splash. He of the broad shoulders had hit him. With a gasp of horror, Sue looked over the way he had gone. She saw a flat-bottomed skiff lying close under the wharf. Brant hustled down a wharf ladder into the skiff and Earl followed him. When the other man rose to the surface, splashing, they seized hold of him, and dragged him in. Sue heard the deep voice rumble:

"If you let a peep out of you, I'll brain yeh with an oar, see?"

Earl spoke up peremptorily: "Come down, Sue!"

Sue mechanically went down the ladder, and seated herself in the stern of the skiff. They pushed off from the wharf, and Brant began to row towards midstream with short quick strokes. Earl was in the bow, the half-drowned man lay huddled and gasping in the bottom of the boat between Sue and the oarsman. Sue drew her legs up on the seat to avoid touching him. She was dazed with horror. Had she ever thought about it she must have realized that such explosions of violence were inseparable from lawless enterprises like theirs. She had not thought about it, and now, when it was too late to turn back, she was learning.

In a few minutes they bumped softly against the side of the punga. Earl climbed aboard, and drew Sue up beside him. Late as it was, there were several men lounging about the deck, and Sue was aware that they were peering at her through the darkness.

Earl said to them: "Keesing's been overboard. Help Brant to get him aboard."

Taking Sue's arm, he led her to the stern of the vessel. Descending half a dozen steps, and ducking their heads, they entered a small confined space. Earl struck a match, and lit a kerosene lamp hanging from the roof. They looked at each other. Both were very pale. Sue was aware that some sort of change had taken place in Earl.

"You mustn't let a thing like that upset you," he said with a forced smile.

Sue was gradually recovering her forces. She thought: Too late to turn back! Whatever happens now you must show no weakness. Smiling, she said: "I shan't. But it was a pretty abrupt initiation."

Earl shrugged.

Sue looked about at her future home. It was better than she expected of a punga; the whole freshly painted and varnished; a new piece of linoleum on the deck. It had a snug look with its berths tucked under the deck on either side; the pair of low windows under each side of the raised roof. There were drawers under the berths, a folding table in the middle of the cabin, a sort of sideboard against the forward bulkhead. But there was no sign of any other occupant.

"Where's Ruby?" she asked.

Earl, with a wary look, handed her a telegram. She read: "Sorry. Missed train. Arrive Norfolk to-morrow afternoon.—RUBY."

Sue looked at him. It was perfectly evident that the telegram was faked. Ruby would not come to-morrow or any other day. What was more, Earl

was not even troubling to hide the fact that he was lying. That was the change in him. Now that she was aboard, he thought he had her! A chill struck to Sue's breast. What have I let myself in for? she thought; and the bottom seemed to drop out of everything. Then her natural courage came back with a rush. "I can take care of myself! He cannot harm me if I am not afraid!"

She made no comment on Ruby. Walking to the door of the cabin, and examining it, she said: "There is no lock on this door."

"Cabin doors are never locked except on the outside when the skipper goes ashore," said Earl, watching her warily.

Still Sue said nothing. She thought: I shan't sleep here more than one night without having the door fastened.

Earl said: "I must leave you now, but I'll be back after awhile to see if you want anything."

Something prompted Sue to ask quickly: "Where are you going?"

"There'll be a meeting to decide what to do with Keesing," he said.

"Do you mean," said Sue, staring, "that you will punish him?"

"Why sure!" said Earl with a hard look. "Why not?"

"What *can* you do with him?" she demanded.

Earl shrugged. "The majority will decide," he said.

Horror gripped Sue. "Do you mean . . . do you mean . . . ?" she faltered. But she could not name the dreadful thing.

"We can't have a traitor running loose," said Earl.

"He was drunk!"

"That doesn't matter to us. Drunk or sober if the thought of betraying the gang is in his mind, we've got to take our measures."

"I'll go with you," said Sue suddenly.

"Oh, no!" protested Earl. He was sincere enough in saying that.

"You said that I was to be a member of the crew. It was on that understanding that I came."

"Sure, but . . ."

"Then I ought to be made known to them. What concerns them concerns me!"

"I never expected to have you associate with them," said Earl. "They're not fit. You can deal with them through me."

"No, thank you!" cried Sue. "That was not my idea at all! Not fit! You told me they were jolly good fellows! Anyhow, I shipped on this vessel as

one of the crew to work with them as one of them. I know men. I know how to make them accept me as one of themselves. I have no intention of playing the part of the boss' sweetheart in their eyes. Let us have that understood right away."

"Oh, well," grumbled Earl; "I merely wished to spare you."

"Let's go," said Sue.

"You won't like it!"

"I daresay I won't. But I'm going!"

XIV

THE IMPROMPTU TRIAL

THE crew was gathered in the empty hold of the vessel. The hatch was off, and Sue followed Earl down a temporary ladder. The scene was lighted by a single lantern hanging from a deck beam, which cast a sickly light on the circle of men sitting and lying about on the bottom of the vessel. The dark walls seemed to swallow the feeble rays of the lantern; forward and aft the hold retreated into sooty blackness. A smell of bilge water filled the air.

The prisoner was tied in an upright position to the foot of the foremast, and was gagged as well. Sue was revolted by the unnecessary brutality. They could just as well have let him lie on the floor. He was a miserable sight; his saturated clothes clung to his meagre limbs; his face was of a mean ugliness; water still dripped slowly from the points of his plastered black hair, making little runnels down his face and neck. On shore drink had given him a momentary truculence which had been quenched by his immersion. Yet he was piteously young; not more than twenty-two. The gag had the effect of lending to his wild eyes a frightful eloquence.

Six men constituted themselves his judges, not counting Earl. It was only by degrees that Sue was able to pick out individuals. Looking at them in the mass, the word that Earl had used suggested itself to her: scum! They looked as if they had been picked up here and there, the very fag ends of city streets; they showed nothing in common. Their clothes which had been cheap and flash in the beginning now showed the bald shoddy. There was a negro among them. Only the skipper, a bald-pated lantern-jawed man with a heavy red moustache, had anything the look of a sailor. Sue recognized "Beetle" Cullen. Wearing a soiled and wrinkled suit, and with a week's growth of stubble, he bore small resemblance to the natty travelling man who had put up at the King's Green hotel.

At the entrance of Sue, a heavy constraint fell upon the men. After a hard stare at her, they turned away their heads, and spat self-consciously. It was clear they agreed with Earl that a woman had no place in such a scene. Sue perceived what they were thinking of, and determined to make them acknowledge her right to be there.

"Well, what's doing?" demanded Earl.

Sundry growls were heard, but no direct answer.

A man who was seated on a box near the foot of the ladder, yielded it to Sue. Earl leaned against the ladder, with one foot on the lowest round, and crossed his arms. The slick-haired, fashion-plate young gentleman made a strange contrast to the others. He repeated his question.

“Aah!” muttered Brant in his hoarse growl: “we can’t argy this matter with a woman present.”

Brant with his spreading shoulders and legs like thick columns was the best physical specimen of them all. Pure brute though he was, there was a quality of genuineness in him that Sue could respect. At least with a man like Brant you knew where you were. He had a head that expressed all the strength, the cholera and the pathetic stupidity of a bull.

“Miss Smith wishes to be considered as one of us,” said Earl.

“I am to be called Sue,” she put in crisply.

More muttered objections were heard. There was an awkward pause. The lantern flickered, and weird shadows jumped up and down in that dark hole. The scene was like a painting, almost blackened out by time. How far away to Sue seemed the elegant dinner-table of the Buhannons at which she had dined that night; and the luxurious limousine which had carried her to the station!

Finally a voice blurted out—Sue could not identify the speaker: “Well, woman or no woman, it’s got to be decided!”

This broke the tension. Brant, who was standing up forward to the right of the foremast, drove his fist into his palm. “I say he’s got to be bumped off!” he cried. “With my own ears I heard him threaten to sell us out! Well, are all us fellows goin’ to risk a term in Atlanta for a dirty, no-count swab like him? To hell with him! Let him be dropped overboard. He’d never be missed!”

Sue shivered. The eyes of the prisoner were fastened on her face with a look of frantic appeal. She hastily turned her head away. Her eyes travelled around the circle, looking for some sign of mercy.

Across from Brant there was a young fellow lying on the floor, supporting himself on one elbow. He spoke up. “It isn’t a matter of life and death,” he drawled. “I for one don’t want to have the snitch on my conscience.”

Sue’s breast warmed towards the speaker. She scanned him curiously. He, too, was young. Though his clothes were the worst of the lot—his coat was buttoned up, and pinned across at the neck to hide the absence of a shirt beneath; there was something about him that distinguished him from the others, a fineness of line, a certain grace of feature, albeit his expression was

cynical and reckless. There was an educated quality in his voice that he could not hide. What has brought him to this! thought Sue.

“What else can we do with him?” demanded Brant.

“Keep him tied up until we set sail,” drawled the young man. “He can’t do any harm then.”

“Yeah,” sneered Beetle Cullen, “and every time he’s fed, he’s got to be untied, ain’t he? and then tied up again. Too damn much trouble, I say. Besides, we can’t be watching him every minute. He’s bound to escape.”

Sue looked at this one with horror. He had evidently earned the name of “Beetle” from his curious penthouse brows. Having started with this strong feature, Nature had grown weary and let the rest peter out. He was a human weed if ever there was one.

“Right!” cried Brant, striking his palm again. “Let him be tied up to a spare anchor and dropped overboard to the crabs!”

A murmur of approval greeted this proposal. The prisoner twisted in an agonized way against the mast, and groaned under his gag.

Sue rose from her box. “Can I speak?” she asked coolly. Nobody answered her, and she went on: “I shipped on board this vessel as a pilot, and I expect to take the same chances as the rest of you. If I do say so, I’m as good a sailor as any man aboard. Forget that I’m a woman. We’re all in the same boat.”

She paused to give any man who might wish to challenge her a chance; but none spoke up.

“Now look here,” Sue went on: “Brant wants to put this fellow out of the way in order to secure the safety of the rest of us. That’s natural enough. But here’s something he hasn’t thought of. Maybe there’s another member of this crew who’s got a yellow streak in him.” She paused to look around the circle. “If so, what a chance you are giving him! We wouldn’t be safe even after the cargo was run, and the money divided. He could blackmail us all out of our shares. It wouldn’t be a charge of rum-running then, but of murder! Can you all trust each other well enough to risk it?”

They scowled uneasily, and muttered. The young man on the prisoner’s left sat up straight. He forgot his drawl.

“She’s dead right!” he cried. “You have heard a bit of wisdom, men!”

“Put it to the vote!” growled Brant.

“Sure! Vote on it!” they cried.

“I’ll vote first,” said Brant; “and I say overboard with him!”

The young man came next. “I say keep him tied up in the hold,” he said.

The prisoner followed the vote around the circle with his agonized, eloquent gaze; now despairing; now taking a little hope. The little man who had given up his box to Sue kept jumping up and down in his excitement. He was evidently the wag of the ship.

“One to one!” he cried. “Are you gonna let the prisoner vote? He’s the party most concerned!”

“Shut up, Chick,” growled Brant. “This is serious.”

Beetle Cullen sat next to the young man. “I say overboard with him,” he sneered.

“That’s two to one for the crabs!” cried Chick.

The red mustachioed skipper came next. “Overboard,” he said.

“Three to one!”

Earl, who came next, glanced into Sue’s face. “I say let him live,” he said.

“Three to two!” cried Chick.

“I say let him live,” said Sue.

“Three to three!” cried Chick, half beside himself with excitement. “An even chance for Keesing! But I say to the crabs with him, and that makes it four to three!”

The negro came next and last. All eyes were fixed on his grinning face, the prisoner’s eyes fairly starting out of his head. The negro in his embarrassment started to laugh witlessly. He seemed unable to speak. Finally he got it out.

“To the crabs!”

“Five to three!” yelled Chick. “The crabs win!” Leaping into the centre of the circle, he began a sort of dance. The prisoner’s body sagged suddenly in its bonds.

Sue rose, and began to climb the ladder; Earl followed.

On deck he whispered: “Better go to your cabin. You don’t want to see the rest of this.”

Sue appeared to acquiesce. In reality she was white hot with a determination to save the man. She descended into her cabin, and closed the door. Overhead, Earl’s footsteps passed up forward. Sue’s intent glance travelled around the little cabin, searching for some means of accomplishing her purpose. The little sideboard suggested that meals had been eaten there. She flew to it, and pulling open a drawer discovered amongst other table ware, a carving knife. She thrust it up her sleeve with a sigh of satisfaction.

She returned to the deck. Nobody was in sight. She sat down demurely on the after end of the cabin trunk, nursing the hidden carver. Presently the men began to appear out of the main hatch. She judged their movements by hearing rather than by sight, for it was intensely dark. Keesing was hauled and shoved up the ladder. His hands were bound behind him, but his feet were now free. Somebody gave him a shove and he fell in a sitting position on the other end of the trunk from where Sue was. The skipper remained to keep watch over him, while the others went up forward to fetch the anchor. Sue never caught sight of Earl during this time. She learned later that he had gone up into the bow of the vessel to avoid the scene.

A low-voiced altercation arose among the men up in the bow, and the skipper left his man for a moment. That gave Sue her chance. She slid along the cabin trunk as softly as a shadow, and whispered in the man's ear:

“Can you swim?”

He nodded eagerly.

Sue was already sawing frantically at the ropes which bound his wrists. His arms came free.

“Hold the ends of the rope,” she whispered, and slid back to her former seat.

The men came back half carrying, half dragging the anchor.

“Stand up, you dirty traitor!” a voice said brutally. “If you believe in praying, pray!”

Keesing stood up. “You can go plumb to hell!” he cried shrilly. Springing upon the low gunwale, he was overboard before a hand could be put out. He went in feet foremost with a clean, solid splash like a stone. Sue slyly dropped the knife overboard.

For the fraction of a second there was complete silence on board. The men looked over the gunwale stupidly. Then a confused chorus of cries and imprecations broke from them. Earl came running along the deck.

“For God's sake, be quiet!” he cried sharply. “Do you want every vessel hereabouts to send a boat over?”

“There he is!” cried an excited voice.

“He's got to rise three times!” said another.

“The boat!” rumbled Brant.

Several of them tumbled into the skiff noisily, and pushed away.

“Where you see him, Chick?” demanded Brant.

“There!”

“No, it was that way,” said another voice.

The skiff was swallowed up in the darkness. The instinct of caution returned to them, and they lowered their voices. Sue listened with strained ears, but heard no sounds to indicate that they had found the man. In quarter of an hour they returned to the pungy, a disgruntled lot.

“His hands were tied, weren’t they?” demanded Earl.

“Sure!” said the skipper.

“Then what’s the matter with you? He’s food for the crabs, all right. A case of suicide. It was the best thing that could have happened.”

As this view reached them, they began to laugh and make coarse jokes again.

An anxious voice was raised. “He’ll come to the surface in a couple days. If they find him with his hands tied there’ll be an investigation!”

“Aah! nobody in Norfolk knows Smut Keesing!”

There was a satisfied murmur of agreement.

“Turn in, you fellows,” said Earl.

They disappeared up forward.

With a thankful heart Sue descended into her cabin. At any rate a murder had been averted! She flung herself on her berth fully dressed. She had no expectation of sleeping. Suppose that man had reached the shore or had gained another vessel, were they not now in danger of betrayal? Still, anything was better than to have assisted even passively at a murder! Surely after she had saved his life, Keesing could not turn about and ruin her! Human nature could not be so base!

There was her own situation to consider. So far as she knew the skiff was still lying alongside, tied to the pungy’s rail, her oars lying in the bottom. Prudence urged Sue to make her escape while she could. No doubt the Buhannons would lend her the money to pay her fare home. But every bit of pride in Sue revolted against such an inglorious end to her adventure. How could she tell the Buhannons of her predicament? In any case some hint of her escapade would be sure to leak out, and she would have to endure all the humiliation without any of the reward. On the other hand she was not afraid; she could take care of herself. But there was her family to consider. How could she risk disgracing them?

The struggle was bitter. It brought her at last to the point of rising from her berth and softly opening the cabin door. She stuck her head above the roof, and looked forward. Amidships a tall figure was slowly pacing the deck. Sue quickly withdrew her head. Well, that’s settled for me! she

thought. It appears that I'm a prisoner on board. I've got to see it through now!

She lay down on her berth again, and in spite of all, Nature exacted her due. She fell asleep at last with one hand upon the little pistol under her pillow.

XV

MARKING TIME

ALL next day the *Ed. R. Green* lay at anchor in the Elizabeth River, while the crew loafed on deck in the sun; sleeping, playing cards, or doing nothing whatever. Apparently fights were of common occurrence amongst the rough characters manning the coastwise sailing vessels, and the racket aboard the pungy had attracted no attention. The men themselves were betraying not the slightest concern over the fact that one of their mess had, as they thought, found a watery grave the night before. A few coarse jokes were cracked, and Smut Keesing was put out of their minds forever. As on all such craft there could be no real discipline. Neither Ole Bierstedt nor Earl Darrah had complete authority over the mob. Every man aboard considered himself as good as any other.

Sue sat on the top step of her companionway, surveying the anchorage. She had put on a faded old dress that she had brought for the purpose; and had pulled a man's cap down over her head. Thus clad she gave a good imitation of a tough coasting girl. Earl sat on the cabin trunk, with his back to her, but within talking distance. He too, had changed his clothes, and roughed up the too slick hair. It made a startling change in his appearance. Sue wondered if all men were savages beneath their smooth exteriors. Earl had not the physique to keep his rough crew in check by the threat of force. The source of his power was more subtle; they were willing to accept him as the boss because, in their phrase, he "had money."

Early in the morning Beetle Cullen, shaved and dressed up in his best, had rowed himself ashore in the skiff. From the conversation among the men, Sue gathered that Beetle acted as a spy for the organization. Apparently Beetle played both ends of the game. On shore he passed as a revenue agent, consorting with other agents and with the Norfolk police. The other men had a tremendous opinion of Beetle's cleverness. They divided their time between watching for his return and looking down river for the *Cassandra*.

Earl was still undertaking to act as barrier between Sue and the rest of the crew; but with little success. One by one Sue was becoming acquainted with the ship's company. Now that she had donned old clothes they were no longer in awe of her. Her matter-of-fact air forced them to accept her as one of themselves. Any man, however rough and ignorant, has an instinctive

recognition of strength of character. Sue had made good with them. After all she found them no different from the rough men in the oyster fishery at home.

Talk between Earl and Sue had not flourished this morning. Sue, determined to give him no lead, had resolutely kept her mouth shut; and Earl was thoroughly disconcerted by the silence and the coolness in which she had received everything that had happened. He had never had a woman like this to deal with.

Earl was called away from his guard over Sue by Ole Bierstedt who wanted him to look at the throat of the main gaff, which Ole said needed to be replaced. Earl was averse to allowing anyone to go ashore for it. He had no sooner moved away than the young man who lacked a shirt came mooching aft with his hands in his pockets. He was called New York on board: Sue never learned his right name. He sat down on the low rail facing her.

“Can I talk to you?” he asked with a grin. He had long, curled lashes that lent his glance a very attractive quality.

“Why, sure!” said Sue.

She studied him curiously. She thought: If he were properly dressed and shaved he’d be quite good-looking. He was of the slim, dark, devil-may-care type that is always attractive to women. In him Sue apprehended the genuine recklessness that she once thought she had perceived in Earl. But the truly reckless ones never “make money.” He excited a feeling of maternal pity in the girl, he was so clearly headed straight for the devil; and there was nothing anybody could do about it—except to be friendly towards him.

His next remark was unexpected. “What time is it?”

Sue ducked her head under the companion cover to look at the cabin clock. “Five minutes to eleven.”

“Thanks. Will you smoke?” He offered a crumpled packet of cigarettes.

“No, thanks,” said Sue. “I don’t use them.”

He lit a match with his thumb nail; held it to his cigarette with his head cocked slightly on one side, and flipped it over his shoulder. All his movements were unconsciously graceful; yet his face was already hollowed and lined with hard living. The reckless ones do not age prettily.

“Say,” he said, “ever since Beetle told us we were going to have a woman pilot there’s been a pretty how-de-do aboard this hooker.”

“I suppose it is unusual,” said Sue, smiling.

“Unusual! It’s unprecedented! Almost caused a mutiny.”

“I hope the men realize by this time that I won’t bite!”

“Oh, they weren’t afraid of your biting them,” said New York, with a chuckle. “They were afraid you’d make them wash the decks and put on collars of a Sunday.”

Sue glanced along the deck. “It wouldn’t be any the worse for a washing,” she remarked.

“There now, I’ve gone and done it!” he said ruefully. “Why did I put it into your head!”

“I wouldn’t have to ask anybody else to do it,” said Sue. “I’d get a broom and pail for myself.”

“That’s the surest way to make us do it. We’d have to take the broom away from you out of shame. . . . It’s just what Brant said,” he went on, laughing; he mimicked the hoarse, rumbling voice. “‘I don’t know how she’s gonna make us do it, fellas, but mark my words, she’ll find an underhanded way. Trust a woman to get the best of us men!’”

Sue laughed. She liked this young man. He treated her in the same offhanded manner that she was prepared to use towards him. He was amusing; and in his long-lashed eyes lurked a look of pain that wrung her heart.

He rattled on. Earl was watching them with a scowl. After a bit, somebody raised a cry that the *Cassandra* was in sight; and Earl fetched his binoculars, which were lying on the forward end of the trunk. The instant he turned his glance away New York’s face lost its wary look, and his face warmed.

“Look here,” he said, lowering his voice, “that was out of sight the way you spoke up for that poor devil last night! I’ve never seen a man do a pluckier thing, let alone a woman!”

“You spoke up for him first,” said Sue.

“Oh, I don’t count,” he said. “I hope we can chin together sometimes—without a listener,” he added swiftly.

“Sure,” said Sue.

Earl was watching again. “What’s the time?” asked New York, raising his voice.

Sue ducked her head to look. “Two minutes to eleven.”

“Exactly?”

“Exactly! Why are you so particular?”

“Well, you see I haven’t a watch, and I don’t want those guys to put anything over on me. You see, Brant bet me that I didn’t have nerve enough

to come aft and talk to you for three minutes.”

“Oh,” said Sue, taken aback. “I thought you came out of friendliness.”

“I did! I did!” he said. “But you see it took a bit of nerve. I couldn’t work myself up to it by myself. . . . The boss’s girl. . . .”

“I’m glad you said that,” said Sue quickly. “I want it understood there’s nothing in it, see? And there’s not going to be!”

Their eyes met for a moment, and the man saw that she was telling the truth. “Thanks for telling me,” he muttered, looking away. “You can leave it to me that there’ll be no mistake about it for’ard.”

“There’s something you can do for me if you will,” said Sue swiftly and softly.

He looked his question.

“Get me two of the heavy screw eyes that are used about the ship. The eye must be big enough to pass a broom handle through. Also a brace and bit to start the holes for them.”

“I get you,” said New York. “Some time during the day I’ll slip them inside the cabin.”

Earl started to return, and New York rose slowly. “So long,” he drawled, strolling forward. Earl gave him a poisonous look as he passed, but New York looked away across the river, and whistled between his teeth.

When Earl rejoined Sue there was a silence, then he said: “Sue, that kid’s a bad one; he’s utterly bad!”

“I daresay,” said Sue coolly; “but on board here I have to take everybody as I find them.”

Earl paused. The fact that Sue was ready to admit New York was a bad egg, took the wind out of his sails. Finally he said in an aggrieved voice: “Well, you don’t have to encourage him!”

“I’m not going to encourage him,” said Sue undisturbed. “I mean to be shipmates with everybody alike.”

At this moment somebody again cried out that the *Cassandra* was entering the river; and Earl let the matter drop. This time the news proved to be true. Amongst the shipping downstream they made out the rusty old tramp slowly ascending the river with an official tug clinging to her side. They identified her by the blue and white stripe around her funnel. Later her name, painted in big white letters along her side, could be read through the glasses.

She was not an impressive sight, the ugly old tramp, cut down almost to the water’s edge at the hatches, with a disproportionately high superstructure

amidships. Out of the superstructure rose a tall, thin funnel. Her sides were stained by the sea, and her superstructure sadly in want of white paint. Nevertheless the eyes of the men aboard the *Ed. R. Green* gleamed at the sight of her.

“Our meal ticket!” said Chick.

Like the great children they were, they flung themselves down on deck under cover of the bulwarks, and peeped over the top at the approaching ship, like pirates awaiting their prey. Only Sue sat in the companionway, calmly sewing up the rents in an old sweater.

About three furlongs below the *Ed. R. Green* the *Cassandra* let go her anchor with a roar of chain. She slowly swung around until she presented her broadside to them, then swung back; the tug still clung to her; though they could see nothing, the men kept their eyes fixed on her. On board the steamship a search was taking place, upon the result of which all their hopes depended. An hour passed and there was no change. The men’s hopes saw-sawed up and down.

“Aah!” growled Brant; “they must be trouble aboard, or they’d ’a’ passed her before this.”

“Nah!” said a hopeful one. “If they was any trouble they’d send ashore to report it, wouldn’t they?”

“’S all right!” cried Chick, who had borrowed the glasses; “I kin see th’ old man smokin’ his pipe up in th’ wheelhouse as cool as you please!”

“How yeh know it’s th’ old man?” demanded another voice. “Maybe it’s the Customs Inspector takin’ charge.”

“Everything’s quiet on board,” said Earl. “If there was any trouble we’d see some signs of it.”

They ate their dinner up on deck, so as not to miss anything. It was not until mid-afternoon that the tug, with a farewell toot, cast off, and headed for the shore.

“She’s passed!” cried Chick.

“How yeh know that?” asked Brant. “Mebbe they’s takin’ th’ old man ashore under arrest.”

“Aah! they would s’lute ’em, would they, if they’d caught ’em with lickin’ aboard?”

The discussion continued to rage until somebody aboard the *Cassandra* hung a red blanket over the upper rail as if to air. “It’s all right, fellows!” cried Earl. “That’s the agreed signal. She’s passed!”

There was quiet rejoicing on the *Ed. R. Green*.

Shortly after this Beetle Cullen was seen rowing out from the shore. When he climbed aboard the puny, all rigged out in his neat store clothes and straw katy like a travelling salesman or a dick, it was seen that he was wearing a sour look.

“What’s the matter?” asked Earl quickly.

“Matter enough,” snarled Beetle, as they all gathered around to listen. “Strowlger and Croker, the New York dicks, are back in Norfolk.”

“Already?” said Earl, scowling. “Did you see them?”

“Nah!” said Beetle, “I kep’ out of their way. But I heard all they were doing.”

“Well?”

“They’ve requisitioned an eagle boat from Newport News. She’s loading supplies to-day, and will be over here to-morrow morning for them.”

Earl swore savagely. “Then we’ll have to load our cargo to-night, and beat it,” he said.

“’S too risky,” objected Beetle. “They always keep an eye on a ship when she first comes in.”

“It would be riskier if we waited until the eagle boat was snooping around,” returned Earl. “By to-morrow morning we’ll be twenty-five miles up the Bay if we have luck.”

“What good is twenty-five miles start to this old hooker,” grumbled Beetle. “The eagle boat can make loops around her.”

“They don’t know we’ve got a hooker,” said Earl. “I chose her on purpose. They’ll be looking for a power-boat.”

Beetle shrugged, unconvinced. “Well, what do you want me to do?” he asked ill-temperedly.

“Go back to the city,” said Earl. “All we’ve got to look out for to-night is the harbour police. Let a tip be given in the right quarter that a rich cargo is going to be run down at Sewell’s Point at midnight. That will take the police launch out of the way. Then get in touch with Captain Pinner of the *Cassandra*, and tell him to be ready for us at eleven to-night. . . .”

“Too early!” objected Beetle.

“That’s exactly the reason,” said Earl. “Between ten and eleven there will still be motor-boats moving up and down the river, and when we start our kicker it won’t be noticed. What’s more, we’ll have the tide the whole way. . . . Tell Captain Pinner we’ll hook on to him on the starboard side.”

“Anything else?”

“Yes. Don’t you come back on board. Stick around town and keep your eyes and ears open. If your friends the revenue officers show any disposition to visit the *Cassandra* to-night, show us two flashlights side by side from Brown’s wharf. It will take us something less than three hours to load. From one-thirty on, watch for a signal from the *Cassandra*. When you see a lantern carried along the deck, come aboard us. That’s all.”

With a nod, Beetle went back over the side.

XVI

LOADING UP

DURING the rest of the day the principal concern of everybody aboard the *Ed. R. Green* was with the weather. What kind of a night was it going to be? Hearty satisfaction was expressed when the clear sky began to thicken. Before it was dark a grey curtain overspread the whole, and at nine o'clock the first drops spattered into the water. Before long a heavy summer rain was falling, which bade fair to last for hours. Though they were faced by a night of the greatest discomfort, the miserably clad men who could not muster a suit of oilskins or a raincoat amongst them, clapped each other on the back in glee. For the rain was like a curtain blurring all objects; and the soft swish of its fall into the water deadened other sounds. Ruby did not come aboard, of course. There was no mention of her between Earl and Sue. Earl was disconcerted by Sue's obstinate silence.

At half-past ten that night they quietly lowered the end of their anchor chain into the water, and let it go. They were provided with plenty of spare chain and anchors for such emergencies. The *Ed. R. Green* began to drift slowly downstream. The "kicker," i.e., a small motor-boat, was lashed to the stern with her nose out of the water; but they did not intend to start the engine until it was necessary to manœuvre alongside the *Cassandra*. Below them for a space the river was clear.

No light showed aboard the *Ed. R. Green*. The grey curtain of rain surrounded them. They guided themselves by the masthead light on the *Cassandra*. She was the only steamer in that part of the river, and they could not mistake her. The crew of the pungy crouched about the deck, with old sacks or spare articles of clothing about their shoulders to keep the rain out. Though urged to do so by Earl, Sue refused to go below. She sat on the cabin trunk letting the summer rain fall on her. Earl stood near, biting his fingers in impatience.

Half an hour later, having drifted below the *Cassandra*, Ole Bierstedt jumped into the kicker, and started the engine. Brant was at the wheel of the pungy. In a few minutes they bumped softly against the iron side of the ship, fending themselves off with cushions of hemp. The engine was shut off. Without a word being spoken, ropes came sailing down from the deck overhead, and were made fast. The *Ed. R. Green* was hidden from the town side of the river by the greater bulk of the *Cassandra*. Even had the night

been clear, nothing would have showed of the pungy but the tops of her two masts.

All was ready aboard the *Cassandra*. No sooner were they made fast than an iron door opened mysteriously in the steamship's side, and men began to step aboard the pungy. The first was the skipper, who consulted with Earl in low tones. Their arrangements were quickly made. The six men of the *Ed. R. Green*, together with twenty-five or more from the *Cassandra*, formed a line extending out of the steamship's hold and across the deck of the pungy to the main hatch. Within a minute or two a continuous stream of boxes was issuing from the steamship, passed from hand to hand with scarcely a sound. The last man in the line was Brant, who kneeled beside the hatch combing, and dropped the boxes as he received them, into the waiting arms of the men who had been told off to stow them in the hold.

Earl walked up and down in front of the line, exhorting the men to be quiet. The kneeling Brant put the same thing more succinctly.

"If any of youse guys drops a case," he growled, "I'll brain him myself!"

There were no accidents. Minute after minute passed, and the endless chain of boxes, all exactly alike, issued out of the hole in the *Cassandra's* side, and disappeared into the hole in the *Ed. R. Green's* deck. No sound was to be heard except the soft smack of palms against wood as each man received the case dropped by the man ahead. In the dark the pine cases were more conspicuous than the men who passed them, and to Sue the stream of boxes looked like an interminable pale serpent uncoiling from the hold of the steamship, undulating across their deck, and burying itself below.

A skiff put off from the *Cassandra* as an outpost to scout up and down the river for prowling revenue officers. High overhead Sue occasionally saw the head of the skipper as he paced the bridge, keeping a lookout all around, and especially for a warning signal from the shore.

Every fifteen minutes there was a rest. Sue, casting about for something to do that would help, brewed a big pot of coffee on the galley stove, and served it out to the drenched men. They seemed to take it as a matter of course; but that little act of kindness was to serve her in good stead later.

There was but little talk aboard the pungy. Brant counted the cases softly as he dropped them to the next man. The irrepressible Chick was heard to say:

"Ten dollars a bottle! Twenty-four bottles to the case! Figure it out for yourself, my buckos!"

Earl angrily bade him to be silent.

Finally the heads of the men working in the main hold appeared above the deck. A few minutes later that hold was rap full. There only remained the after-hold, a much smaller matter. Earl sent word aboard the *Cassandra* to show the signal that would bring Beetle off from the shore.

It was not yet two o'clock when the last case came aboard. The tide was running out strong. No time was wasted in farewells. The skipper shook hands with Earl, stepped back on his own vessel, and the iron door was softly closed. All lines were cast off but one, which they still hung on to, while they waited for Beetle. Beetle appeared out of the darkness, attached his skiff to the hanging falls, and was hauled out of the water. The last line was cast off, and they drifted clear.

Ole Bierstedt was in the kicker again. They did not wish to start the engine unless there appeared to be danger of fouling an anchored vessel. Brant was at the wheel, and Earl stood beside him. Sue was sitting on the cabin trunk. Beetle came aft and joined them. The loud-voiced, self-assertive Beetle had for him a subdued air.

“All right ashore?” asked Earl.

“Sure!” he muttered.

Everybody else on board was now in the highest spirits. Notwithstanding the rain, New York and Chick did a silent dance amidships, while the others stood about, going through the motions of clapping time. Earl's voice lost its anxious note.

“Well, the worst is over!” he said.

Beetle was very silent.

Brant rumbled in an insinuating tone: “Say, Boss, ain't you goin' to give us a little to celebrate with? We're wet to the skin!”

“Sure,” said Earl. “There was a special case put out for the crew. You can have a bottle out of it to-night, but not a drop more till we're clear of danger.”

“How'll I git mine if I'm at the wheel?”

“I've got dry clothes below; I'll take the wheel,” said Sue.

It did not become necessary for them to start the engine. They drifted downstream like a ghost ship. A moderate breeze was blowing from the south-east, and in the mouth of the river they let the kicker back on a line, hoisted sails, and headed across Hampton Roads without lights. They chuckled upon catching sight of the green light of the police launch creeping back towards Norfolk along shore.

Leaving Sue at the wheel, Brant went forward to join his mates steaming their wet clothes around the galley fire. They had been warned not to turn in yet. Little danger of that while the bottle lasted. Earl and Beetle remained with Sue.

Sue at the wheel was where she had wished to be. She began to feel like herself again. They were not moving very fast, but everything was drawing well. It gave her a fine sense of power to feel the big vessel answer to her touch upon the wheel. This was something like the voyage she had dreamed of, and she shook off the heavy depression that had troubled her all day.

And then Beetle dropped his thunderbolt.

“Say, Earl,” he muttered, “I didn’t want them mutts to know; you never can tell how they’ll take a thing; Smut Keesing’s alive.”

“Impossible!” gasped Earl.

“Impossible!” mimicked Beetle in an exasperated voice. “Ain’t I tellin’ you I see him? . . . It was on the main street: Smut was panhandlin’ along the street. He’d been drinkin’. I a’most run into him before I seen him. Same old rat-faced Smut, with his black hair hangin’ in his eyes, and his clothes dried on him in wrinkles! Made me feel fair sick. First-off I t’ought I had a what’s-this, a hallucination. But when he seen me and beat it, I knew he wasn’t no hallucination. He ducked into the Seamen’s Y.M.C.A. I couldn’t follow him there. What’d been the use?”

“How in hell did he get ashore!”

“Aah! what’s the good tryin’ to figure how he did it? He did it all right. Worked his hands free somehow, and swam it.”

“Has he blabbed on us?”

“He wouldn’t be panhandling, would he? He’s waiting till he thinks we got our cargo.”

“Well, we got our cargo, and we’re under sail,” said Earl. “Let him blab, and be damned to him! He don’t know the landing-place.”

“Yeah,” said Beetle scornfully; “but it’s a hell of a long sail to the Pocomico River, and a fat chance we have of making it if Smut connects up with those New York dicks and their eagle boat.”

Earl swore helplessly. The two walked off up forward. Once more Sue bitterly regretted her folly. Human nature was capable of any baseness it appeared; and the price of an adventurous life was disgrace.

XVII

THE HI-JACKERS

LUCK, which had served them so well during the loading of the cargo, failed them in Hampton Roads. At dawn in a moderate breeze, the throat of the main gaff split, and the mainsail had to be lowered. They made temporary repairs on deck; but after half an hour it went again. When a second attempt to repair it proved fruitless, they gave it up. Under foresail and jib alone the pungy would scarcely answer to her helm. It was too rough out in the Bay to use the kicker. Had the wind been against them they must have blown back to the mouth of the river. As it was, partly sailing, partly drifting, they crawled through the water for hour after hour, still in full sight of the Roads.

Earl walked the deck, biting his fingers. Sue quietly resigned herself to the worst. Every moment she looked to see the grey nose of the eagle boat poke into view around Old Point Comfort. The crew, knowing nothing of the escape of Keesing, were still fairly cheerful. During the day the name *Ed. R. Green* was painted out wherever it appeared on board, and *Four Sisters* substituted. But if they were overhauled while the paint was still wet, this would not do them much good.

Towards the end of the afternoon they made the mouth of an insignificant river a few miles to the north of Old Point. Ascending it for a short distance under impulse of the kicker, they opened up a village which supported a small shipyard. Here a new spar was ordered. But there was not sufficient time to fit it before dark, and they had to remain all night. They were not above twenty miles from Norfolk as the crow flies. For the moment they were safe enough, since no revenue officer would think of looking for them so near at hand; but Earl chafed bitterly at the delay.

They had dropped anchor in a charming cove, protected on the East by one of the crescent-shaped spits of sand, characteristic of those waters. On the other side clustered a sleepy village, embowered in trees. It had the look of a happy place forgotten by the world. Earl and Captain Ole carried the damaged spar ashore in the kicker. Everybody else was forbidden to land; and Beetle was given the job of seeing that the order was obeyed. There was some grumbling, but no open defiance.

Sue took advantage of Earl's absence to fix the door of her cabin as she desired. New York had found for her the screw eyes and the brace and bit. It

was a double door opening outward; she had therefore to screw one of the rings into each leaf of the door. When the broom handle was passed through both rings and the ends caught against the door-frame, it was as good as any lock. Of course a door can always be smashed in. That, however, is a different matter. If any smashing should be attempted, Sue was confident that she would find friends aboard.

Earl and Captain Ole presently returned on board; and the whole ship's company supped on deck. After the rain, evening stole on the cove with such a quiet loveliness as almost to bring tears to the eyes. The hardest character on board was affected by it. While it was still bright in the west, lights began to shine out amongst the village trees.

"Huh!" rumbled Brant, wiping his brow on a grimy bandanna handkerchief. "A man might do worse than end his days here!"

Sue, having had but little sleep in thirty-six hours, went below as soon as it became dark. She slipped the broom handle into place with a dry smile, for she suspected that somebody was due to receive an unpleasant surprise that night. Then she went to bed.

Weary as she was, her subconsciousness was on the alert, for at the first sound of a footstep on the deck overhead, she awoke all of a piece. She recognized Earl's long stalk. He was not taking any care to walk softly. He tried the door, and Sue sat up in bed with her cheeks flaming in anger. He dares to try the door without knocking! she thought. But she made no sound. He gave a harder yank to the door; and Sue pictured to herself the smothered curses that were distorting his face. A silence succeeded. She waited breathlessly. Would he demand admittance, or would he smash in the door?

He did neither. After a considerable pause, he stalked back overhead the way he had come. Sue pictured to herself the way New York would look at him when he returned to the fo'c'sle where they all slept. She smiled to herself in the same dry manner. The first round is in my favour, she thought, and lay down to sleep again.

In the morning when she went on deck Earl glanced at her furtively. Rage had left its marks on his pale face. Sue's face was perfectly bland. The invariable rule of conduct that she had adopted for herself was: Never let anything on! Later she saw him glance viciously at the rings in the door; the broom she had hidden under her mattress. Neither of them made any reference to what had happened. The incident left Sue with an increased confidence in herself. My will is stronger than his, she thought; why should I fear him?

At eight o'clock they were under way again, with a new spar rigged. At sun up half a gale had come down from the north-west, and the pungy flew out of the little river with a bone in her teeth. But alas! upon rounding the outer point and resuming their course up the Bay, they found the gale dead ahead, and increasing every hour. It had already kicked up a big choppy sea which smacked the pungy under the port bow, sending sheets of spray clear over her. It was a glorious sight in the sunshine; the sky swept clean of every cobweb; but the crew of the *Four Sisters* had little appreciation of its beauty. The pungy was no hand at sailing close to the wind. They were at a cruel disadvantage against a power-boat.

Earl and Captain Ole stood watching the spars and the rigging anxiously. If anything gave now!

"It's too vallyble a cargo to put in an old hooker like this," volunteered Ole.

"Well, it's no good telling me that now," snarled Earl.

"We might just as well lie in harbour till it blows itself out," said Ole, "for all we'll gain."

"We'll keep going," said Earl shortly.

Back and forth across the Bay they beat in long, ten mile tacks, sailing twenty miles to make perhaps three or four. The outward bound tonnage, schooners, pungies, bug-eyes and an occasional steamer swept past them, borne on the shoulders of the great wind. They saw no grey painted eagle boat bound either way.

"Looks as if Smut Keesing and the New York dicks had not connected," Earl muttered to Beetle. "Maybe Smut drunk himself blind and forgot us."

"I dunno," said Beetle. "Maybe she went up the Bay while we was in the cove."

At first it seemed as if all northbound sailing craft had sought shelter from the big blow; later they discovered another pungy far to the eastward, endlessly tacking back and forth like themselves. Captain Ole was at the wheel.

"H'm!" he said to Sue, "what the hell is she out for? We got a good reason for buckin' it. Looks as if she must have a reason, too."

He never ceased to watch the other pungy. On a beat to windward it is hard to judge the respective sailing qualities of two ships. Sometimes the other pungy appeared to be ahead of them, sometimes astern. But as the day wore on it became apparent that she could sail closer to the wind. She was gradually overhauling them. Finally in mid-afternoon she crossed their

bows, and there could be no further doubt. A faint cheer came down the wind to them. Her name could now be read through the glasses: *Esmeralda*.

“H’m!” said Ole. “She was lyin’ in the Elizabeth River with her crew paid off, waiting for a charter. She got a crew awful quick. They’re crowdin’ the deck.”

After having crossed their bows, the *Esmeralda* appeared to ease off the wind a little. And sure enough an hour later on another tack, the *Four Sisters* crossed *her* bows. The crew of the *Four Sisters* duly sent a cheer down the wind; but Ole shook his head.

“I don’t like it! I don’t like it!” he muttered. “They could sail clean away from us if they wanted. They’s showin’ too much interest in us for my comfort.”

“Better tell Earl,” suggested Sue.

“Yeah, and have him jump down my throat,” said Ole. “He can go to hell!”

Later Ole announced that the wind would go down with the sun; and they might as well find a harbour before dark. In the morning it would blow again from the same quarter, he said. Earl agreeing, shortly before sunset they sought the mouth of another of the innumerable rivers that fall into Chesapeake Bay on the westerly side. Three or four miles up the river at the end of a straight reach, they could see a biggish town on the south bank, but there was no use going as far as that out of their way, when immediately inside a curving spit of sand lay a perfect natural harbour. The chart gave it ten fathoms, and they sailed in without hesitation, dropping anchor about two hundred yards from the shore.

It was another lovely spot, but more solitary than their first anchorage. For half the way around, the cove was surrounded by pleasant fields with a thin screen of trees along the edge of the bank, and a yellow beach below. On the eastward side the sand spit separated them from the bay, so wide here that the farther shore was invisible. Only one house was in view; a comfortable Virginia farmstead near the edge of the bank. The farmer and his family could be seen rocking on the porch after the day’s work. A short distance beyond the sand spit a lighthouse rose out of the water on stiltlike legs like a gigantic spider. After the uproar of wind and water all day, the peace of the place was enchanting.

They hauled down jib and foresail, and left the mainsail standing according to custom. Quarter of an hour after they had dropped anchor the *Esmeralda* came in from the Bay, and seeing them lying so snug, followed them into the cove, and anchored no more than four hundred feet away. The

moment they saw her close, every man on board the *Four Sisters* was struck by something sinister in the look of this craft. There were at least fifteen men on deck instead of the half dozen that might ordinarily be expected; a tatterdemalion crew, clad in all kinds of ill-assorted garments. Moreover, they were betraying an extraordinary interest in the *Four Sisters*; all lined up on deck, grinning and pointing at her; clapping each other on the back.

Earl's face became pinched with anxiety as he looked. He stuck his head into the fo'c'sle companionway to call Beetle, who was asleep below. "Come up here and take a look at this outfit."

Sue, full of her own anxieties, approached them to hear what was said.

Beetle's anxious glance ran along the deck of the *Esmeralda*. Suddenly his face became convulsed. "Oh, my God!" he gasped; "there's Baldy Figeroa standing by the wheel! . . . And there's Red Cregan. . . . And Gimpty Leonard . . . !"

The merriment aboard the *Esmeralda* seemed to increase, as if they had perceived that they were recognized, and rejoiced in it.

"Who are they, revenue officers?" asked Sue fearfully.

"Revenue officers be damned!" groaned Beetle. "Hi-jackers! And they outnumber us more than two to one!" He looked as if he were ready to cast himself overboard.

Suddenly a sort of smothered yell was heard from Chick. "Gee! fellows, there's Smut Keesing! Look! Look! Aft the foremast, leaning against the boom!"

"Keesing . . . Keesing . . . !" travelled along the deck in a sort of dreadful whisper.

"So *that* was Smut's game!" muttered Earl with concentrated bitterness. "He was after a bigger stake than a government reward! He has brought down Baldy Figeroa's gang on us!"

XVIII

TEMP'S FORTUNE

TEMP WYE was cultivating corn. All day he had been plodding up and down the endless rows under the broiling July sun. He was unaware of the sun, though; the fire which scorched him was internal. Following the cultivator was a purely mechanical operation not sufficient to distract him from his painful thoughts. He kept his head down for the most part; a deep double furrow was etched between his handsome sullen brows.

A sense of his helpless poverty hung on him like heavy chains. The bony old horse reminded him of it; the much-mended cultivator; the run-down field which had borne too many crops of corn without proper refertilization. And when he raised his head he saw on top of the slope the ridiculous ornate house that his father had built twenty-five years before, which was like a public advertisement of his poverty. For it had never been painted since the first time; one of the chimneys had been wrecked by a squall and the porch was visibly rotting away from the main structure. Temp had neither the time nor the money to effect the necessary repairs. And here he was doing a negro's work behind the cultivator, because he couldn't afford to hire a negro.

The thought of Sue Rousby was like an ache in his breast. For a week now he had not seen her; and since in his bitterness of spirit he shut himself up in his room when he was not actually working, he had heard no word of her. He would not allow his stepmother to retail the neighbourhood gossip in his hearing; though his ears were hungry for news of Sue. And all the time her house was in plain view across the State road a quarter of a mile away.

He now felt that he had about reached the limit of his endurance. He *must* see her. I could go over there and borrow a file, he thought; she wouldn't know that I came after her. But the stubborn part of him instantly replied: That's only weakness! You've got to face this thing out once and for all. Why prolong the agony?

In the midst of these bitter thoughts the farm bell rang out. Looking up quickly, Temp saw his stepmother standing beside the bell-post. She waved her apron, and beckoned to him excitedly. At the end of the row he tied his horse to the fence, and ran up to the house. Mrs. Wye was waiting for him on the porch.

"You're wanted on the telephone," she said breathlessly.

Temp stared at her angrily. "And did you bring me running up . . ." he began.

She stopped him with a feeble gesture. "Your Uncle John George Corbauld is dead!" she said. She dropped into a chair, and rocked back and forth, fanning herself with her apron. The tears started to her eyes. The Corbaulds were no kin to her; but she was a weak woman, easily infected by emotion.

Her announcement caused Temp no emotion except an increased feeling of irritation. Uncle John George Corbauld was nothing to him. This only meant a general family fuss, which Temp hated above all things. However, he swallowed the curse that rose to his lips.

"You're to call up Lawyer Camalier," said Mrs. Wye. "He's at your uncle's house now."

Temp turned into the hall. Over the 'phone the lawyer's brisk voice showed no symptoms of the funeral whine, for which Temp was grateful. "That you, Temp?" he said. "I suppose your mother has told you. Can you come right over here?"

"I suppose I can, if it's necessary," said Temp sulkily.

"I should say that it was necessary," remarked the lawyer dryly.

A few minutes later Temp rode up the State road on his horse Monte. He refused to exhibit his dilapidated Ford before the eyes of his well-to-do relations. In Monte he still possessed a fairly good horse, and he knew that he looked his best on horseback. His breeches and leggings were the most gentlemanly garments that he possessed.

Uncle John George Corbauld was related to half the families in the county. In addition to Temp he had eighteen nephews and nieces, and Temp supposed that they would all be there with their tongues out, not to speak of their fathers and mothers. Whatever disposition might be made of the property, Temp was very sure that he would not share in it, because he alone of all the nephews and nieces had refused to pay court to the bachelor uncle. They had rarely seen each other. Temp had a sneaking fondness for the eccentric old man; but the way the others sucked up to him simply made him sick.

His house stood in what was almost the geographical centre of the county. From the upper windows you could see the Bay on one side and the river on the other. It was a big, ugly frame house dating from the old gentleman's rise to prosperity thirty years before; and it was surrounded by a parallelogram of tall, ugly poplar trees foreign to that country. There was nothing ugly, however, about the rich and lovingly tended tobacco fields that

stretched down to the shore of St. Barnabas' Creek. John George Corbauld was a famous tobacco grower.

When Temp tied his horse to the ornamental wire fence, he was surprised to see no sign of relatives. Lawyer Camalier was in the adjoining field, rallying the demoralized negroes. Even though the master lay dead, tobacco must be cultivated, he said. He presently joined Temp on the house porch. The withered, keen-faced little man made no pretence that this was anything but a matter of business; and Temp respected him for it.

"Where are all the others?" asked Temp.

"Humph!" said the lawyer. "I didn't feel that it was necessary to send for them yet. They'll be along."

"When did it happen?" asked Temp, since one must say something.

"Not an hour and a half ago. He dropped in the tobacco field as if he had been struck with a hammer. Heart. There was nothing for the doctor to do but send for Abby Souter to lay him out. She's in there with him. You can see him later."

Temp experienced no desire to look upon his uncle.

"Come in here," said the lawyer, leading the way into a big sitting-room which contained scarcely any furniture. For thirty years the old man had lived in his big house in perfect discomfort, waited on by a crew of slatternly negroes. "Read that," said the lawyer, putting an envelope which had been opened into Temp's hands.

Temp uncomfortably turned it over and over. "Read it!" said the lawyer. "It's his will. He drew it up himself two years ago without consulting anybody. Handed it to me sealed, to be kept in my safe. Read what he wrote on the outside."

Temp read, in his uncle's old-fashioned, cramped hand: "Last Will of John George Corbauld. To be opened by Peter Camalier or his successor upon Receiving News of My Death."

"Now read what's inside."

Temp drew out a sheet of common note-paper torn in half. He read:

"This is the Last Will and Testament of me, John George Corbauld of St. Barnabas, P.O. Travis County, Maryland. Being of Sound Mind and in the full Possession of my Senses, I hereby Devise and Bequeath to my nephew Templeton Wye, who has more Gumption than all the rest of the Tribe put Together, all the Property, Real and Personal of any Nature Whatsoever of which I may die Possessed. And I hereby Appoint the said Templeton Wye

and my friend Peter Camalier of King's Green to act as my Executors without Bond.

“JOHN GEORGE CORBAULD.

“In the presence of:

“DANIEL WHITE

“BETSY WHITE.”

“Is this a good will?” gasped Temp.

“Unconventional,” said the lawyer, “but perfectly sound. No one could possibly mistake his meaning.”

“Has it got to be published?” asked Temp, frowning.

“Probated? Oh, surely!”

“It'll make a dickens of a row in the family!” said Temp.

“H'm! Is that all you've got to say, my lad!”

Temp suddenly flung up his head. “My God!” he gasped. “Then all this . . . all this is mine!” He looked through the window at the brown tobacco fields, starred with the little green plants.

“Yes, and more too,” said Lawyer Camalier. “He has securities to the value of thirty thousand dollars in his strong box, besides mortgages on three fine farms and money in the bank.”

Temp leaned against the wall. His staring face was as white as the plaster. “Oh, God!” he faltered, “this makes such a difference to me!”

“Why, of course it does!” said the lawyer, laughing heartily.

Temp suddenly caught his wrist in a grip of steel. “Could I go now?” he demanded with blazing eyes. “Is there anything for me to do here? Could I go for an hour or so and come back again?”

“Why . . . why, I suppose so,” said the wondering lawyer.

“See you later!” shouted Temp, rushing from the house. He flung himself on his horse and galloped away in a cloud of dust.

Half an hour later he pulled up the sweating Monte at the Rousby gate. Running up the path, he pounded on the door. It was opened by Betty, the good-natured sister.

“Where's Sue?” he shouted.

“Why, Temp! what's the matter?” stammered the bewildered girl. “Why, didn't you know? Sue's gone away.”

Temp looked at her with death in his face. “Gone away?” he echoed. “Where?”

“To Norfolk to stay with Mary Buhannon. How is it you didn’t hear? She’s been talking about it for a week. Johnny took her to the two-o’clock bus at King’s Green.”

“Oh, all right,” he said in a curious, flat voice, and turned away.

“What’s the matter, Temp?” implored the soft-hearted Betty.

“Oh, nothing,” said Temp, over his shoulder. “Uncle John George Corbauld is dead.” He got on his horse.

Betty looked after him wonderingly. How strangely he was taking it!

Temp was tied by the heels until after the funeral. There was no possibility of his escaping that. Internally, he chafed like a madman, but nobody could have guessed that from his set, white face. Ceaselessly he sought to reassure himself; gone to stay with her old schoolmate in Norfolk; what could be more natural? But night and day a horrible misgiving tortured him; had it anything to do with that damned scoundrel Darrah? He could not telegraph to Sue, because telegrams had to be shouted over the party wires to Annapolis.

He went through the ordeal of the funeral as well as he could, receiving the hypocritical condolences with a grave bow and a masklike face. His manner was too stately for nowadays. The disappointed relatives sneered behind his back. “Unfeeling!” they said. Temp had taken his measures beforehand. In his pocket he had five hundred dollars borrowed from Lawyer Camalier, and a hired automobile was waiting for him at the churchyard gate. The instant the funeral party dispersed, he flung himself into it, and was whirled away to Baltimore. This gave rise to a fresh storm of gossip. “It has turned the lad’s head!” they said.

In Baltimore he missed the Norfolk boat, and was obliged to take a roundabout route by rail, with several changes of cars. He did not arrive in Norfolk until the following afternoon. He spent a couple of hours more in buying an outfit for himself, the best the city afforded. He rang at the door of the Buhannon house at last, with his heart in his mouth. An instinct told him that his errand was useless.

The door was opened by Mary herself in the friendly southern style.

“Is Miss Rousby stopping here?” he asked with a dry tongue.

Mary opened her eyes wide. “Why, no!” she exclaimed. “She took the sleeper to Wilmington, N.C., night before last! . . . How did you know she had been here—it was so unexpected! . . . You must be the young man she called up when she was here!”

Temp felt as if he had received a mortal wound. Each sentence of Mary's had conveyed a separate stab. But he would have died sooner than expose Sue to her friend. "Yes . . . yes . . . I'm the one she called up," he stuttered. "I . . . I didn't understand that she was only to be here for the day."

Mary felt that there was something more here than appeared on the surface. "I'm so sorry," she said vaguely.

"Oh, it's not of the least consequence," Temp heard himself saying. "I'm sorry to have troubled you. Good afternoon!" He went blindly from the door.

Wilmington, N.C.! He hastened to the railway station. He knew that this chase was useless; but he could not stop. He learned that the next train did not leave until ten o'clock. It carried a sleeper to Wilmington. He had six more dreadful hours to put in. They passed in a lethargy of pain.

When he finally got away on the train, he took note of the Pullman conductor on board. He thought: If that man goes down one night, and returns the next, Sue must have travelled on his train. Later, he made an opportunity to engage him in talk. At Temp's first question a broad grin overspread the conductor's face.

"You mean the girl in the red hat with the parrot on it! The pretty boot-legger! Sure, I ain't likely to forget her in a hurry!"

"What do you mean?" demanded Temp, staring.

"The revenue officers have already been asking me about her. You oughta seen the way she give them the slip in the Norfolk station. Prettiest thing I ever see! Of course, I didn't know she was a boot-legger then." He proceeded to give a highly-coloured version of the incident.

"Did she go through to Wilmington?" asked Temp, in a strangled voice.

"Nah! That was just a stall. She beat it off the train at Suffolk, the first stop."

Having got him started, Temp could not stop the man. The pretty boot-legger had arrested his imagination. For nearly an hour Temp was forced to listen to his admiring comments on Sue. Behind his composed face the young man was suffering the torments of the damned.

"Are you a revenue officer yourself?" the conductor inquired.

"No," said Temp stiffly. "Merely a friend."

He left the train at Suffolk. It appeared to be a fairly large town; but at that hour there was little sign of life around the station. The ticket-office was closed. However, there was still a man on duty in the baggage-room; and Temp supposed that he must have been there when the same train arrived two nights before. His question produced the same sort of answering grin.

“The girl in the red hat? Sure! Darn pretty girl! You ain’t the first to be asking for her, fella. She attracted my attention because there was nobody to meet her, it being so late and all; so I followed her through the station.”

“Where did she go?” asked Temp.

“First-off she didn’t know which way to go. Then she seen a car waitin’ in the street a little way down, and she went over there. The fella was waitin’ for her all right. Hopped out and raised his hat. She got in and they drove away.”

“What sort of looking fellow?”

“I couldn’t see very good, being so dark and all. A tall fellow, and dressed elegant. It was a peach of a high-powered car.”

“Which way did they go?”

“The car was heading east. I presoom they returned to Norfolk. She was just makin’ a little circular tour to throw off the dicks.”

Temp thanked the man and walked away. He wondered dully if all men had to suffer in their time as he was suffering. He had a curious feeling of being detached from himself—of looking on at this fellow who was going mad with rage and grief—while he walked around with a quiet face.

He returned to Norfolk. There he lost all trace of Sue. After having spent a fruitless day wandering about the streets, he took a train for New York with the object of picking up a line on Darrah there.

XIX

OUT OF THE FRYING-PAN . . .

A FEELING of blank despair settled on the crew of the *Four Sisters*. They stared helplessly at the grinning hi-jackers not four hundred feet away. Every moment they expected to see the boats of the *Esmeralda* lowered, and that ragamuffin crew tumbling in. What could their half a dozen do against so many?

But no such move was made. The *Esmeralda's* men contented themselves with grinning and pointing, slapping each other on the back.

"Why in hell don't they attack?" muttered Earl. "They've got us right."

Beetle pointed to the farmer's family watching the two pungies from the porch of their house on the bank. "They've got a telephone," he said. "I can see the poles. Baldy Figeroa is waiting until dark."

Earl roused himself. "Then by God! we won't wait for him!" he said. "We'd be safe all night, lying in front of the town."

"How can we get away with them watching?" whined Beetle.

Earl gathered his men around him. "Listen, you fellows; you want to be loafin' around the deck, just as if we hadn't got on to anything. We must act sudden. If we can keep just a couple of hundred feet start of those — we'll be safe; for they won't dare shoot. Ole, you take the nigger and go down in the forepeak. Slip the anchor chain. There's still wind enough to blow us out of the cove."

"Chick and New York will stand by the jib halliards," he went on. "As soon as the chain goes, hoist her quick. Never mind the foresail. The mainsail's all ready. Brant, you watch the main sheet. Sue will take the helm. Beetle and I will stand by the kicker, ready to lower away as soon as the sails fill. When Ole comes up from below, he'll jump in the kicker and drop astern."

It was all carried through as Earl ordered. As soon as their purpose was perceived on the *Esmeralda*, a roar broke from that disorderly crew, and they, too, sprang to work. But the *Four Sisters* had the advantage of the surprise. Moreover, they on the *Esmeralda* were not prepared to slip their anchor; perhaps they had no spare one; they were obliged to take the time to hoist it in. The *Four Sisters* gained several hundred yards before the other

pungy came after her, likewise propelled by her kicker. Out in the channel the sails were only an impediment; and on both vessels they were run down.

Then began a strange race up the river. Neither clumsy craft, under the push of her little motor-boat astern, could make more than about four miles an hour. But there was just as much tension in that crawling, tortoise-like race, as in a race between flyers; more tension, because where both were so slow, it was impossible to tell which was gaining. On board the *Esmeralda* men could be seen jumping up and down in their impatience; aboard the *Four Sisters* they bit their fingers and groaned at the slowness of their passage. Apparently the kicker of the *Four Sisters* had the more power; for the *Esmeralda*, notwithstanding she rode light, made no perceptible gain.

As soon as this was understood on board the pursuing vessel, they abruptly changed their tactics. Running aft, as many of them jumped into the kicker as it would hold. Casting off, they left the pungy drifting in the river, and came after the *Four Sisters* unimpeded. The motor-boat was crowded from gunwale to gunwale. The men were armed with clubs, lengths of iron pipe, blackjacks, and weapons of that sort.

Beetle with a groan, dived below, and reappeared with a revolver. Earl snatched it out of his hand, and flung it overboard. "No shooting!" he said with an oath. Neither pursued nor pursuers could afford to call attention to their quarrel by the sound of firearms.

The pursuing motor-boat overhauled them hand over hand, of course. As they approached him, Ole Bierstedt scrambled aboard the *Four Sisters* out of the kicker, leaving the engine running. The pursuers yelled derisively. It appeared to be all up with Earl Darrah and his crew. But there are still slips betwixt the cup and the lip. As the pursuing motor-boat came abreast of the empty kicker, too many men leaned over to seize her gunwale. The overladen boat wallowed and shipped water. They flung themselves to the other side then, whereat she rolled to port and took more water. Their engine stopped, and the *Four Sisters* drew away. A cheer went up from her deck.

"I hope they drown! I hope they drown! I hope they drown!" yelled little Chick, jumping up and down on the deck.

But they did not drown. Some of them jumped overboard, and swam back to the pungy. The men left on board the parent vessel lowered a skiff and came to the rescue of their mates. The motor-boat still floated, and they applied themselves to the job of bailing her out. All this time the *Four Sisters* was busily making a getaway.

Shortly afterwards they dropped anchor as close as they dared in front of the town. It appeared to be a place of some importance; the terminus of a

branch railway and well furnished with electric lights. The hi-jackers would scarcely venture to make an attack there. For the time being the *Four Sisters* was safe. An hour later another puny which they judged must be the *Esmeralda* came in in the dark and anchored close by. The gang aboard her was now very quiet.

When Sue descended to her cabin that night, upon pulling the doors to, she discovered that the screw eyes had been removed. For a moment panic gripped her; then she stiffened. All right, she thought; there's got to be a show-down some time; it might as well be to-night. Without lighting the cabin lamp, she sat quietly down on her berth to await developments. It was not easy to wait. She kept up her courage by repeating to herself: He can't hurt me if I am not afraid!

After awhile when all was quiet aboard the puny, Earl came stalking along the deck as on the night before. He pulled the door open with his devilish assurance, and came down the companion ladder. "Sue!" he whispered cajolingly in the dark. "Sue . . . !"

"Light the lamp," said Sue calmly.

"Ah, I don't need any light!" he murmured.

Sue, guessing that he was feeling for her in the dark, quietly crossed to the other side of the cabin, keeping the table between them.

"Sue . . . where are you?" he said.

"Light the lamp," said Sue again. "I want to talk to you."

The pleasant quality in her voice deceived him. He struck a match and leaned over the table to apply it to the wick of the lamp. In the light of the little flame Sue had a glimpse of his dark face all lighted up by a grin of devilish anticipation.

"Sue, you're a darling!" he murmured.

But when the dazzle of the flame was out of his eyes, he found himself looking into the muzzle of Sue's little gun. She was holding it as steady as a rock.

A ghastly change took place in Earl's face. He staggered back. "Sue, for God's sake put that thing down! . . . put it down!" he stammered.

"You get out of here!" said Sue.

"Aw, Sue . . ." he began.

"Get out!" repeated Sue, raising her voice just a trifle. "I mean business!"

He saw that she did. He backed away to the companion ladder, his horrified eyes fixed on the gun, his mouth hanging open slackly. It was a tremendous come down from his grinning confidence of a moment before. He went up the ladder crab fashion, his eyes goggling at her. Sue followed him to the foot of the ladder.

“Bring back the screws,” she said quietly, “and screw them into the doors. If you don’t, I shall go to the crew for protection.”

A sort of groan of chagrin escaped Earl; no other sound. He went away along the deck. Presently he came back; and he did indeed sit down on the deck, and put the screws back into the little doors, Sue watching him from below. A delicious sense of triumph stole through her. Had she not tamed the boss of them all? Men are not so much! she said to herself.

They exchanged no speech. When Earl had finished his job he returned to the fo’c’sle. Sue pulled the doors to, slipped the broomstick through the rings, and went to bed.

Next morning when they first met, Earl was surrounded by others, and his smooth look betrayed no consciousness of what had happened. But later, when he and Sue were alone together on the after part of the deck, he showed her a sheepish, cajoling face, and murmured:

“Aw, Sue, don’t be too hard on a fellow! A man is only a man!”

“So I see,” said Sue dryly.

“I see now that I was mistaken in you, Sue. Will you let bygones be bygones?”

“Surely!” said Sue, calmly.

Inwardly, she exulted. Here was a great change in the insolent devil who had walked into her room at night without so much as by your leave. The taming of the young boss was well under way. As soon as Earl began to sue for her favour, the girl’s anger against him cooled down. She remembered that he had showed up well in the sudden emergency the evening before. To be sure he had lied to her and tricked her into coming aboard; but a woman does not hold such sins too strongly against a man, when he commits them for the purpose of winning herself. Especially when she has succeeded in defeating his tricks.

As regards the *Esmeralda*, the situation was unchanged this morning. There she lay, a couple of hundred yards away, her too-numerous crew scowling at them from her deck. On board the *Four Sisters* they held a council to decide as to their next move. If they went out the hi-jackers would certainly follow them. If they stayed where they were, they would not get their cargo run; moreover, there was always the chance that the eagle boat

might pick them up. While they were still discussing this alternative, a cry was raised on deck that an eagle boat was coming up the river. Running up, they found that it was only too true. Still, there were many eagle boats. They watched with straining eyes until they were able to read her number. 147! The worst had happened!

There were glum faces aboard the *Four Sisters* then. For a moment Earl appeared to be ready to give up. "We're trapped in here," he said bitterly to Sue. "You had better beat it to the shore while you can."

But Sue shook her head. "Not yet! if the Buzzard and the Chimpanzee have not been in touch with Keesing, they do not know that we are aboard a pungy. There are a dozen pungies lying here. As soon as they begin to search, it will be time enough to talk of giving up."

The eagle boat dropped her anchor about a furlong off shore. Earl and Sue, who were the only persons aboard the *Four Sisters* known to the revenue officers, descended into the cabin, that they might not be recognized through glasses. Through the little windows in the trunk they watched to see what would happen. They observed that the arrival of the eagle boat threw the crew of the *Esmeralda* into a state of consternation no less than their own. The crowd on her deck vanished below.

A few minutes later a skiff put off from the *Esmeralda* with two men aboard. Figeroa, the swarthy bald Spaniard, was not one of them. To the astonishment of the watchers it headed directly for the eagle boat.

"What can be their game now?" said Sue.

"To sell us out!" said Earl bitterly.

"But they couldn't collect a reward big enough to satisfy a gang such as they have!"

One of the men went aboard the eagle boat, remained a few minutes; then the two returned to their own vessel. Immediately afterwards the eagle boat started hauling in her anchor again. She put about and headed down the river at full speed.

Sue and Earl looked at each other. "Now it's clear enough!" said the latter grimly. "Figeroa has caused the eagle boat to be sent away on a wild-goose chase so she won't interfere with *him!*"

XX

UNDER SAIL

TRUE to Ole Bierstedt's prediction, the north-west wind blew with undiminished vigour to-day. Shortly after the eagle boat had gone, the *Four Sisters* hauled up her anchor, and, under the impetus of the blow flew down the river like a yacht. The *Esmeralda* promptly followed suit. When they got out into the Bay the eagle boat was still in view, heading north. From the course she was taking, it was evident that her errand lay somewhere along the westerly shore.

"Let us sail clear across the Bay, then," said Earl to Ole. "We can make our way up the eastern shore, until we are opposite our river."

Of their two enemies they were in more dread of the revenue officers. To be captured by them meant a prison term; to meet the hi-jackers only a fight. With the eagle boat out of the way therefore, their spirits began to rise. Ole looked at the pursuing *Esmeralda* and spat overboard.

"These nor'westers gen'ally blows all night the second night," he said. "If she on'y holds until after dark we can shake 'em easy. And if the wind falls we got the kicker. We proved that they can't catch us with the kicker.

"Couldn't they lay aboard us while we were under way?" asked Earl.

"They could," admitted Ole; "but not in a wind like this. It's a risky stunt."

This day was largely a repetition of the day before. The sun shone dazzlingly; the wind sang in the rigging; the waves smacked the pungy's bows. In three hours they fetched the eastern shore, in this part no more than a vast low bank separating bay and ocean; but fertile enough, dotted with farmhouses and villages. Thereafter they sailed on shorter tacks, never out of sight of the land.

The *Esmeralda* followed them close. It amused her skipper to prove the superiority of his craft by crossing their bows occasionally. Then he would pay off, and let them creep ahead again. On such occasions they would get a close view of the strange unsailorly crew that crowded her decks; some wearing Derby hats; some wearing straws; some wearing none. Their faces were villainous.

Chief amongst them was the figure of Luis Figueroa, a mountain of flesh, clad in a white shirt rolled up over his swarthy arms, and open to reveal his

bull neck, and a pair of voluminous flapping pantaloons. His bald head shone in the sun; his naked face had the fat impassiveness of a Chinese idol. Sue shuddered at him. For the most part he stood by the mainmast, holding to the shrouds and watching the other pungy. Evidently Smut Keesing was high in his favour. They were generally together; and one of Figeroa's enormous arms was to be seen lying across Smut's skinny shoulders.

On board the *Four Sisters* they had more confidence in their vessel to-day. Everything held, and it would have been pleasant enough had it not been for the ever-present menace of the other pungy. Even so, they could not be cast down all the time. Men must talk and laugh, though danger looms in sight. The very presence of danger stimulated a sort of devil-may-care gaiety. Sue herself shared in the fatalism of these reckless men. As she put it to herself: What must be, must be. There's no use worrying.

Except for Ole and Brant, who spelled each other at the wheel, and the negro, Clipper, who cooked the food, there was little to do on board, and Sue had plenty of opportunity to further her plan of making friends with the men. It was surprising the way the roughest character among them responded to decent treatment.

Take Ole Bierstedt, the red-headed, lantern-jawed skipper, who wrinkled up his face when he steered, revealing a row of hideously blackened teeth, clutching a filthy pipe; for years Ole and his old hooker had been at the disposal of every lawless enterprise on Chesapeake Bay. He had been oyster pirate, fish dynamiter, rum-runner and hi-jacker, and he looked it. Yet he had his soft side too. Under Sue's friendly questioning it came out. It appeared that his wife had long been dead; but he had a daughter of high school age who was the apple of his eye.

"Oh, no, I never go to visit with her like," he said, with a quaint shocked look. "I just send the money to my sister who keeps her. I wouldn't want to queer her social life, see? Why, she goes with the swellest girls in the village; the daughter of the storekeeper, the daughter of the newspaper editor, and the daughter of the hotel-keeper; them's her friends. They don't know who her father is. Sometimes when I can make it I hang around the store, sort of, on the chance of seeing her go by; and when they have school exercises or anything I'm always there in a back seat."

With Brant it was more difficult to make headway, because he was almost inarticulate. Still, he was perfectly willing to reveal his thoughts to her, such as they were.

"If I had money," rumbled Brant, "I'd spend me time travellin' up and down the Bay on them big steamboats. Onct I had trip on one when I was

arrested, and the bull was takin' me up to Baltimore to stand trial. The bull he wouldn't stay down below, bein' a kinda high-toned guy, and so I had a look at the grand saloon, bein' as I was handcuffed to the bull. Jeeze, it was swell! And *warm*. Say! It was a night in Febrooar' with a hell of a nor'east gale and sleet. And I thinks o' them poor mutts aboard the pungy, and I ses to meself, I ses: 'Shiver, you poor bums, shiver!' I ses. And I had me dinner up in the first-class dining-room too, among the big-bugs, and they handed me a clean white napkin and a silver knife and fork. I ain't never forgot it."

"What was the charge against you?" asked Sue.

"Murder," said Brant simply. "But they proved it was self-defence."

Sue shivered. "What happened?" she asked.

"I don't remember," said Brant, "bein' as I was drunk at the time."

Earl stuck to Sue like a shadow. Becoming weary of his watching, she left him sitting on the cabin trunk, while she went forward where Beetle, New York and Chick were shooting craps beside the mainmast. The pitching of the vessel gave an added uncertainty to the game. They pursued the rolling cubes on hands and knees. Sue sat on the deck to watch, but her coming spoiled the game, for they felt that the elaborate bad language which accompanied it was unsuitable to her ears, and they couldn't play without it.

The game stopped, and Beetle strolled away. The shifty-eyed Beetle was uneasy in Sue's presence, and Sue reciprocated the feeling. Of all the men on board she felt that only Beetle, the spy, was hopeless.

Sue sat with her back against the mainmast, Chick on one side of her, New York on the other; and they talked. Chick's clothes were yards too big for him. He looked like a gamin, but was thirty-three years old; a case of arrested development. Yet his wits were sharp enough.

"When I git my stake outa this," said Chick, "I'm agoin' to New York, I am, and buy me a swell outfit and hire a room and bath at the Waldorf Hotel."

"Yes, you are!" retorted New York. "All you're gonna get outa this is a clout on the coco with a length of iron pipe!"

"Nah," said Chick, "I'm too little. They'll overlook me!"

New York strummed with his long, stained fingers on an imaginary banjo, and sang:

"You can bring Pearl, she's a darn nice girl;
But don't bring Lulu!"

"Well, if anybody hits me a crack," he went on without pausing, "I hope they make a job of it, that's all."

“What has spoiled your young life?” asked Sue, laughing, though she did not feel merry. There was a tragic reality in the reckless, grinning face.

“Drink and the devil,” said New York, fortissimo on the imaginary banjo.

“Well, can I bring Ann? You bet you can!
But don’t bring Lulu.”

“He likes to make out he’s a reg’lar Hellion,” said Chick. “Don’t you believe a word of it, Sue. Take a girl to t’ movies Sat’day night and a chocolate malted milk afterwards. That’s all the devil he is.”

“If I get anything out of this,” New York went on dreamily, paying no attention to Chick, “I’ll ship for the South Sea Islands. I’ll buy an honest-to-God banjo and sit under a coco-nut tree till I rot. . . . Oh! and I forgot; I’ll have a keg of palm licker or whatever it is they drink out there, nested up in the branches of the palm with a tube down to my mouth, and, jus’ let her gurgle!”

“You won’t forget even then,” murmured Sue.

“Forget what?” he asked sharply.

“I don’t know. Whatever it is you want to forget.”

“That’s just it,” said New York. “There isn’t anything to forget! There isn’t anything that’s worth shucks anywhere! The whole thing is such a sell! such a sell!” He shouted out the song:

“She’s the kind of smarty, breaks up every party;
Hullabalooloo, don’t bring Lulu;
I’ll bring her myself!”

Meanwhile on the other side of Sue Chick was babbling: “I’ll spend t’ hull of it in one night. I’ll go to the swellest restrunt in town, and take a seat near t’ orchestra. And I’d hand out ten-dollar bills to t’ leader and make him play ev’yt’ing I said. And ev’ybody in t’ place would tink I was young Vanderbilt. And I’d have a guyl wit’ me. . . . Oh, Sue, if I could on’y have you wit’ me that night! You know, meanin’ no harm, Sue, but just to let them see me wit’ a real swell-lookin’ guyl for once! Say, if I could forgit just for once what a mis’able little runt I was, I wouldn’t care what they did to me after!”

The long day drew to an end at last. When the sun went down the wind still held steady, but with diminished force, and the hearts of the crew rose at the prospect of giving their pursuers the slip. All other diversions were forgotten then; they stood on deck watching alternately the sky, the sails, the

following pungy. The watched-for darkness never comes; yet in the end it was there! But not dark enough to suit those on the *Four Sisters*. After two days of the north-wester the air was like crystal. There was no moon; but every star in the heavens hung out its little lamp.

As the daylight failed, the *Esmeralda* crept up closer astern. Neither pungy showed a light. By the shadow of their sails against the stars, and by their phosphorescent wake she could follow them almost as well as by day. When the men aboard the *Four Sisters* realized that their hopes of evading her were vain, they groaned in disgust. It seemed as if the devil himself was ranged against them on this cruise. The *Esmeralda* came up until her bow was all but cleaving their wake. When they came about, she instantly followed. Even when they could no longer see him, every soul on board the *Four Sisters*, could picture that mountain of flesh with the cruel, impassive face standing back there quietly biding his time. And his blackguardly crew; fifteen men to seven!

At nine o'clock Ole Bierstedt took the wheel again. For an hour or more he kept her on the port tack until they were out in the middle of the Bay again. Out there he made a series of short tacks back and forth, all of which the *Esmeralda* dutifully copied.

"What are you doing this for?" asked Sue curiously.

"Wait and see," he answered, grinning.

After awhile the red and green lights of a big steamship were to be seen bearing down on them from the north. It was evidently a slow-moving tramp. Ole was zigzagging back and forth, directly in her course.

"Mind that ship," said Earl nervously. "Remember, she can't see us."

"Leave it to me!" said Ole.

The steamship was almost upon them, but about to pass to port, when Ole suddenly came about, and headed directly aft of her red light. The huge black hull shaped itself out of the darkness. When a collision seemed to be unavoidable, and everybody aboard the *Four Sisters* was holding his breath, Ole luffed. The *Four Sisters* hung in stays with all her sails cracking like musketry. The *Esmeralda*, unprepared for this manoeuvre, shot by them, and passed out of sight under the steamship's stern.

Ole instantly let the head of his vessel pay off, and running out his sheets, headed straight down the Bay, running before the wind like a cup defender. A hoarse and furious bellowing through a megaphone was heard from the steamship. By the time the *Esmeralda* got back around the ship, the *Four Sisters* must have been swallowed up in the dark. At any rate they saw

no more of their pursuers that night. Like magic the menace of danger was lifted from their breasts.

A stern command went along the deck, and all rejoicing had to be limited to silent pantomime. Earl clapped Ole on the back; and the hands shuffled amidships to the tune of New York's imaginary banjo.

Ole soon changed his course; changed it again. When he was certain that he had lost the *Esmeralda*, he took a long tack back towards the eastern shore. "This wind has pretty near blowed itself out," he said. "We don't want to be caught too far off our course. If we get any kind of a fair wind we'll make the islands to-morrow morning. Nobody knows the islands better'n me."

Sue remained on deck yet awhile, tempted by the beauty of the clear summer night. She sat on the cabin trunk, and Earl stretched himself out alongside her, supporting himself on his crossed arms. Earl, the master of the riches in the hold of the *Four Sisters*, could afford to breathe easily again.

"Aw, Sue, don't be so up and down with me," he murmured.

"Oh, don't begin that again," said Sue impatiently.

"But you treat me worse than the commonest mucker aboard."

Sue explained as to a child: "I would treat you just the same as the others, but you force me to keep up my guard against you."

"All that is changed now," he said. "I've learned my lesson. Hereafter I swear you need never bar your door or carry a gun against me."

Sue made no reply.

"Don't you believe me?" he asked.

"I am willing to believe you," said Sue; "but I shall go on barring my door just on general principles."

He chuckled in the dark. "You've got a sharp tongue! . . . You don't dislike me, do you?" he asked, quite humbly for him.

"No," said Sue.

"I'll tell you the truth," he went on; "I never knew a woman like you. I didn't think there were any. I thought as long as a fellow wasn't exactly hump-backed or cross-eyed all he had to do was to reach out and take them where he wanted. Well, you've taught me different. I respect you for it, Sue."

This was very sweet to Sue, but she had no intention of giving herself away. She said to herself warningly: The clever devil is only trying to get around you another way now!

“Haven’t you got a word to throw to a dog?” he went on, in his warm and cajoling voice—Sue could imagine how merrily and mockingly his black eyes were lighted up. “Don’t I deserve a little credit for ’fessing up? There’s not many men would do it.”

Sue smiled into the dark. “Oh, you’re very keen about collecting your credits!”

“No, but, Sue, on the level, I have a very different feeling for you now,” he protested. “Gosh! I’m afraid of you! It’s a wonderful feeling. I never had it before. It’s the real thing, Sue.”

In spite of herself Sue felt an insidious softness creeping around her heart. This would never do! “You forget,” she said a little crossly, “that even now, while you are saying you’re sorry, you’re still breaking the promise you made me that there would be nothing of this sort while I was on board.”

“But why not?” he said, “as long as you don’t dislike me.”

“Oh, you have no convictions about anything!” said Sue. “With you, everything goes as long as you can get away with it!”

“Yes, that’s me!” he said ruefully. “But I’d like to be different now. Teach me, Sue.”

“Then keep your promise.”

“I can’t,” he said. “I may as well face it. But I’ll make a new promise which I will keep. I’ll promise never to come closer to you than a foot unless you give me leave. But I can’t help speaking of my feelings sometimes.”

“Oh, well, if it’s only speaking, I suppose I can stand it,” said Sue.

“Sue,” he presently whispered, with warmth and laughter in his voice, “may I drop my hand on yours? See, it’s hovering just a foot above!”

“No!” said Sue. “Don’t be ridiculous!”

“Very well,” said Earl, “I obey.”

XXI

UP TONGER'S RIVER

SUE, having the *Esmeralda* still on her mind, appeared on deck shortly after dawn. Ole Bierstedt, after a sleep, was again at the wheel. The wind was in the east, and the *Four Sisters*, having it fair abeam, was bowling along at a good six-knot clip. The sky was completely overclouded, and rain seemed imminent. Land was no longer visible to the eastward.

"The bay is thirty mile wide here," said Ole. "We're doin' fine! Had a fair wind ever since midnight, and there's the first of the islands already showin' ahead."

Sue saw some dim low shapes, more like a thicker stratum of cloud than land.

"There's islands pretty much the whole way up the Bay now," Ole went on. "Grand hidin' places! If it's a bay now, once you go in, you damn well got to come out again, but an island you can go round the other side."

"How about the *Esmeralda*?" asked Sue.

"Well, there's four sailing vessels in sight," said Ole; "and two of 'em I make out to be pungies." He pointed. "Her. And her. . . Her over yonder"—he was pointing to a vessel about four miles to the eastward—"might be the *Esmeralda*. And then again she mightn't. Time will tell. Figeroa knows of course that we're bound north; and it wouldn't be hard to figger that we'd stick to this side to keep out of the way of the eagle boat. That craft yonder's out-sailing us. But there's the islands. I wouldn't mind givin' them a game o' hide and seek amongst the islands."

The distant pungy, however, evinced no curiosity concerning them. She was sailing on the same course; and for many hours the two vessels remained in sight of each other without drawing appreciably closer. Meanwhile they drew up to the first island and left it to port. It was a low, alluvial island of wide extent, deeply indented with sedgy bays. It was populated and under cultivation; a wind-swept place, showing scarcely a single tree. The yellow of the beaches, the greens of sedge grass and fields, the painted houses showed up with a jewel-like brilliance against the background of grey sea and sky.

During most of the day rain fell, somewhat restricting their vision. After crossing a wide stretch of open water, they came to another and larger group

of islands; or rather one great island like the mainland itself, with innumerable pieces of all sizes broken off and scattered around. This made a chaos of little sounds, straits, creeks and bays. On the starboard side all was open water with the eastern shore in view again some six or seven miles away.

Every sail that appeared during the day was the subject of excited speculation aboard the *Four Sisters*. But in each case they were happily disappointed. It proved not to be the *Esmeralda*. In the afternoon a new sail was discovered astern, which gave rise to fresh forebodings. At the end of an hour it was seen to have gained on them. Suspicion slowly hardened to certainty. It was a pungy; she was riding high out of the water; her bows were crowded with men watching them.

About four o'clock the *Esmeralda* came abreast, two or three hundred yards to windward. A chorus of mocking yells was raised on her deck. It was received by the men of the *Four Sisters* in a sullen silence. Ole Bierstedt muttered under his breath:

“That’s all right, my bullies! I’m in my home waters now. You’ll have to hump yourselves to catch me!”

A while later he passed the word down the deck to stand by the sheets. He gave the wheel a twirl, she fell off sharply, the sheets were paid out, and a moment later the *Four Sisters* was apparently driving head on for the beach quarter of a mile distant. However, as they drew in close, the mouth of a creek opened up. The *Esmeralda* missed it, and had to come about before she could follow.

“If it was on’y that she was loaded and we were light I could lead her high and dry up on a shoal,” muttered Ole. “At that she may strike if they don’t watch themselves.”

The creek they entered was deep, narrow and very tortuous. It was as if a part of the island had broken off, leaving a jagged crack between the two pieces. Cultivated fields came down to the water’s edge on both sides, and the farm labourers paused in their work to watch the two pungies sweeping through with all sails set. They could never have made it, had the wind not been dead astern. As it was they jibed dangerously around some of the bends. Unfortunately the *Esmeralda* did *not* run aground. After several miles of this they came out into open water again amidst a crowd of little islands through which Ole threaded his way unflinching, and the *Esmeralda* followed.

“With the wind in this quarter we can make the passage back again through Dutch straits into Ducking Bay,” said Ole. “Then out again through

Bushman's straits, and up Tonger's River. I want to fix it so we'll be entering the mouth of the river at dark. They'll think they got us trapped in there; but I know a little cove where we can lie hid, and let 'em sail by. If the wind holds, we'll come out after, and sail straight acrost the bay to the mouth of the Pocomico."

"Can you show me all this on the chart?" asked Earl anxiously.

"Hell, no! I'm no hand with a chart," said Ole. "I on'y know it from havin' sailed it since a boy."

They were moving at what seemed like a dangerous speed up a winding river which might have been the Styx, so dark it was. The rain had ceased; but the sky was still densely overclouded. On either side the shores were lined with a high and impenetrable wall of verdure, just a little blacker than the opaque sky. The channel was neither buoyed nor lighted, but Ole urged her into the darkness unhesitatingly. He was able to name each of the shadowy points that they rounded; though all appeared exactly alike to the others. They were heading east with all sails furled; astern the infernal roaring of the kicker was flung back and forth between the walls of trees. A strong flood-tide had them in its grip.

The awful darkness and solitude laid a spell on Sue. "It's more like Africa than Maryland," she murmured.

"Oh, it's got a bad name, Tonger's River has," said Ole, with a cheerful chuckle. "I wouldn't want to be concerned in all the devilment that's been done up here!"

So perfect was his familiarity with the place, Sue could not help but suspect that not much went on in Tonger's River that Ole was not a party to.

"On'y hope we don't meet nothin' comin' down without lights, that's all," said Ole.

"That damn kicker is advertising us for miles!" grumbled Earl.

"That's all right," said Ole. "If his Nibs wants to foller us up here he's got to start his kicker, ain't he? And if he starts his kicker shootin' he can't hear ourn."

"We're a'most there now," Ole said presently. "Once there was a manor on the shore hereabouts. The house is gone long ago, and the fields all grown up; but you can still see the old trees of the park stickin' up over the second growth. There's a tulip poplar must be a hundred feet high I guess. That's what I steer by."

He called the crew aft. "New York, you and Clipper take poles," he ordered, "and stand in the bow to port. She'll strike the bank there. Don't try to hold her off, for the bank goes down like a wall, but push her along with your poles. Lean against your poles, and walk back along the deck as far as you can. Chick, make fast a casting line to the bow hawser, and stand by to hand it to me when I jump ashore. Earl and Beetle will man the windlass to haul in on the hawser when I give the word."

They went forward. Soon afterwards Ole pointed out to Sue the dim shadow of the towering tree. Ole showed a flash to Brant, who was in the kicker, and the engine stopped. Stillness descended on their ears like a benediction. They could then hear the exhaust of another motor-boat, perhaps half a mile downstream.

"He's after us!" said Ole, with a chuckle.

He jammed the wheel hard over and the pungy swung around broadside in the stream. Presently her bow glanced against the earthen bank, and scraped along. Ole let the wheel spin, and pulled her hard to port.

"Take the wheel, Sue," he said brusquely. "Hold her hard to port. When New York and Clipper lose the bank with their poles, give Brant a flash to start his engine. Count fifty revolutions, and flash him a stop signal, that's all."

In the pitchy darkness, Sue had only a dim idea of Ole's manœuvre. But evidently it was one which he had often performed. Ole ran forward, while New York and Clipper came slowly walking aft, leaning against their poles. When they lost the bank, Sue started the engine; stopped it again. Ole's voice was heard from the shore giving the word to haul in on the hawser. A few minutes later branches of trees were swishing against the masts of the pungy, and Sue was strangely aware of a curtain of leaves overhead. Apparently they had turned around inside.

Presently Ole appeared on the bank not a yard away from the pungy's rail. "Pretty snug, eh?" he said, chuckling. "They say Blackbeard used to lie in here while the revenue cutters were combing the bay for him, and I can well believe it from the amount of oyster shells lyin' around. They's been many a big feed in here, that's certain."

A line from the pungy's stern was made fast to a tree. Absolute silence was enjoined upon the crew.

"I'm goin' to watch for the dago," said Ole. "Want to come, Sue?"

Earl accompanied them. Sue stepped directly from the rail of the vessel on to firm ground. After three days at sea it felt good. She was sensible of the feel of pine needles underfoot. They groped their way amongst the trees

for a short distance—not more than ten or fifteen paces, when Ole put out his hand to stay them, and Sue apprehended that a gulf was yawning at her feet. It was the river. Under that opaque sky it yielded not a glimmer of light, but they could hear the little sucking sounds made by the tide alongshore. It gave them a sense as of something alive, stirring there.

They sat down in a row on the edge of the bank. They could no longer hear the motor-boat downstream.

“He stopped maybe to listen for us,” said Ole, chuckling, “and not hearing us any more he ain’t sure what to do now.”

“I wish I had a smoke!” muttered Earl.

“Whist! striking a match might give the whole snap away!” warned Ole.

After awhile Ole whispered: “Here they come! Drifting on the tide!”

“Where? I can’t see anything,” whispered Sue.

“I hear them talkin’,” said Ole.

Then Sue heard, too. They waited with fast-beating hearts. The disembodied voices slowly drawing nearer without any accompanying sounds had an uncanny, dreamlike effect. Under the low-hung clouds and between the walls of trees it was like whispering in a room. Finally Sue became aware of a shadowy thing stealing up the centre of the river, where everything was perfectly black already. By determinedly concentrating her sight she could just make out the topmasts of the pungy moving against the dull night sky.

Ole put out a gentle hand. He breathed in their ears: “They might throw a flash. Better creep back!” They retreated among the trees.

The men on board the *Esmeralda* were murmuring in undertones, but so absolute was the stillness, the listeners could actually hear what was said.

“It’s so dark we might slip by him and never know.”

“I can see all right,” said another voice.

“There might be an inlet where he could slip in and hide.”

“I ain’t seen no inlet,” said the voice.

“There’s no inlet marked on the chart,” put in another.

“Well, I think we had ought to lie to till daylight.”

“Aah, shut up! Nobody ast you to put in.”

“It’s too good a chance to miss! He wouldn’t never believe that we’d follow him up here in the dark. And havin’ the tide with us, and all. We’ll fall on him by surprise.”

“Maybe he’s gonna run his cargo in here.”

“So much the better for us!”

Ole touched Sue with his elbow, to share with her his appreciation of the joke.

Suddenly the brooding silence was broken by a loud, trumpeting sound from the deck of the *Four Sisters*. Somebody had sneezed. The two men alongside Sue broke into groaning curses of rage. The crowd on board the *Esmeralda* was electrified by the sound of the sneeze. Excited cries in many keys were raised. Some sort of a flare was lighted, and the dark river was suddenly filled with a greenish light. Above the confusion of sounds they heard one thick ugly voice bellowing:

“Start the engine! Run her nose ashore! They’re in there! We have them, boys!”

The three watchers ran back to their vessel.

XXII

THE ATTACK

WHAT happened after that was like an incredible nightmare. Sue simply did not believe in what she saw and heard going on around her. She was conscious of no feeling except a sort of wonder.

It was Clipper who had sneezed. New York in his first ungovernable rage had snatched up an iron pipe and struck him over the head with it; and the negro was lying on the deck as one dead, thus reducing the number of able-bodied men to six. The two lines were cast off, and Brant, springing into the kicker, madly spun the flywheel; but the engine would not start. The others, snatching up poles, shoved like madmen against the bank; but the branches of the trees were entangled in the rigging; and before they could budge her, the *Esmeralda's* crew came pouring over the little neck of land that separated the cove from the river.

Most of them carried a torch in one hand, and some sort of weapon in the other. The torches lit up the trees in a wild red glare. The scene when the crouching, grinning shock-headed creatures appeared over the little rise was like some fantastic effect upon the stage. There was one weazened little man, quite old, who wore a Derby hat jammed down on his head. He was showing his teeth like an ape; brandishing a torch; and squealing in a falsetto voice: "Attaboy! Attaboy!" Sue will never forget him.

"Go down in the cabin and bar the door!" Earl shouted in her ear.

"I won't!" cried Sue.

He attempted to seize her, but she broke away and ran forward, where the others were gathered in a group. Earl had to follow. She jumped over the prostrate body of the negro. The bow had drifted away from the bank a little, and the attackers came leaping aboard astern. Sue found herself grasping a piece of iron pipe. How it came in her hands she could never have told. She heard the thick voice shouting: "Drop your torches! Drop your torches, or you'll have her afire!" and she saw the fat man on shore snatching the torches from his men.

But one man came running along the deck straight at her, waving a sputtering torch. A face hideously distorted; saliva trickling down from a corner of his mouth. Sue dodged him, and grasping the pipe in both hands, brought it down with all her strength on his head. He stumbled like a child, and running forward a step or two, crashed down. His torch flew up the

deck. Sue ran after it, and tossed it overboard. All the time there was a queer little commentary going on inside her: Me fighting! Me fighting like a man and trying to kill! She was relieved to see the man she had struck crawling out of the way.

Somebody seized her hair, jerking her head back. There was the sound of a blow, and she was free again. It seemed to become dark. She found herself standing beside the foremast with no one near. The scrimmage had drifted to the other side of the deck; stamping; cursing; the sound of blows and howls of pain. Then there was light again. She had an impression of the fat man on shore heaping up a blaze; moving with an astonishing celerity, his belly shaking, his wide trousers flapping.

Suddenly the light picked out Earl's face, ghastly; his mouth hanging open; his eyes starting out of his head; a pair of coarse seaman's hands closing around his throat. Sue could see the very pores in the skin of those hands. Sue struck blindly. Whether or not she reached her mark she never knew; for at that moment she was seized from behind, lifted clear of her feet, and carried aft, striking and kicking blindly. The utter strength of the man broke her heart. She could make no impression on him. She dimly apprehended that it was Brant. He held her over the companionway and released her. She slid down the ladder, landing in a heap on the cabin floor. Brant, if it was he, pulled the slide to, slammed the doors, threw the hasp over the staple and caught it with some kind of pin. Sue bruised her hands on the door in vain.

Sue raged like a madwoman. She was conscious only of an imperative need to get back in the fight. Springing on her berth, she beat out the glass of one of the little windows, and attempted to draw herself through it. With difficulty she wriggled her shoulders through, but her hips stuck fast. Though she grasped the rail of the vessel, and pulled with all her might, it was useless. A man running along the narrow deck, fell over her outstretched body, swore, picked himself up and ran on without stopping to see what had tripped him. Sue was obliged to drop back into the cabin.

Meanwhile the appalling sounds went on overhead; a stamping as of maddened cattle; yells; oaths; blows; a splash alongside, followed by a frantic voice crying to be saved. There were strange silences; then the uproar would be redoubled. Sue, listening with all her faculties sharpened like an animal's, guessed from the sounds that one man now was holding back the crowd. That would be Brant. Suddenly she heard that ungodly thick voice from the shore bawl out: "Knife him! Knife him!" There was a rush of feet along the deck. . . .

The next thing Sue knew it was all over. The silence was more dreadful than all the noise. In Sue the fighting fever suddenly gave place to the chill of terror. She shook literally as with an ague. Her friends, where were they now? What should she do? What should she do? That hideous, cruel fat face . . . ! She hastened from window to window, drawing the little shutters across and hooking them. They were but flimsy affairs!

All she could hear now was a busy jabbering above, and sundry small movements as of creatures engaged on a task. A yelp of cruel pain in which Sue heard the voice of little Chick. Finally a rough voice was raised asking:

“What shall we do with the ——s?”

The voice Sue dreaded, now on deck, answered: “Carry them on board our vessel, and dump them on the deck. Fetch anything you want out of her, then push her off on the tide. I guess this ship will be a good swap with what she has in her!”

There was a ribald chorus of agreement.

Sue then heard the measured tread of men carrying heavy burdens. They stepped ashore. There went the last of her friends! She had no means of knowing whether it was dead bodies they were carrying, or living men bound and gagged.

Later she heard the unmistakable slap-slap of the fat man’s tread briskly coming aft. Her heart rose into her throat. She had the little pistol in her hand. He rounded the stern, and she heard him say:

“Open the cabin.”

Sue had thrust her length of pipe through the rings in lieu of the broomstick. They yanked vainly at the door.

“Locked on the inside, eh?” said Figeroa’s thick voice. “Then there’s somebody in there! Fetch an axe!”

A pair of feet ran up forward. Sue steeled herself. In this moment of extremity her terror vanished. It is the end, she thought; and a blessed feeling of calm came to her. Well, I can meet it! There’s only one way of escape for a woman from such a crew. Thank God! I have the gun. I shan’t have to submit to having them lay hold of me. I shan’t have to beg for mercy and hear them laugh. I’ll make them respect me before I go. Five shots for them, and the last for me!

The running feet returned. Two blows from the axe opened a wide split in the door. A flashlight was applied to the opening; an excited voice cried:

“By God! it’s the girl! She’s a beaut’!”

“Here, let me see,” said Figeroa’s voice.

Evidently the first speaker was thrust to one side. Sue heard the thud of a pair of fat knees on the deck. The glaring white circle of the flashlight returned, flooding the little cabin with light. Sue could imagine the evil swimming eye that was applied to the crack above it. Raising her gun, she took aim at the spot where she supposed the eye to be.

There was a hasty exclamation. "God! she's got a gat!" Apparently, the fat man fell over on the deck.

A silence succeeded. She judged that they were whispering together. This was very hard to bear. An uncontrollable nervous tremor went through her. I mustn't break down! she thought. That was the worst horror. Then she heard a hand softly insinuated through the crack, and feel around for the bar which held the door. She stiffened again. It was all right if she knew what they were up to.

"If the door is opened I will shoot!" she said firmly.

The hand was hastily withdrawn.

There was a long silence. But Sue's sharpened ears told her that a body was creeping with mouselike caution all around the cabin trunk. Evidently examining the windows. A glint of the flashlight showed below the slats of the shutters. At the broken window a hand softly tried the shutter. There was more whispering, then Figeroa's fat voice was heard again with a new note of oily persuasiveness in it.

"You don't need to be afraid, sister. We wouldn't harm no woman. That's not our line. You're as safe amongst us as you would be in your own family. We're your friends."

Sue affectionately squeezed the handle of the little pistol. This is my only friend now! she thought.

"Come on out," he went on. "I won't tech yeh. On my honour. And what's more I won't let none of these other men get gay neither. I'm the boss of this gang; and what I say, goes! . . . Do you hear me?"

"I hear you," said Sue quietly.

"As a matter of fac' we don't want you aboard. Wouldn't know what to do with a skirt aboard. We want to get rid of you. Come on out, and yeh kin go wit' yer friends in the utter pungy."

Sue was sorely tempted. Her friends! How inexpressibly dear those rough men appeared to her now! The fat man *might* be telling the truth! But no! She had heard him telling his men to shove the other vessel off on the tide. It was only a trick. If she went out they would take her pistol from her, and then her case would be desperate indeed.

“Come on, sister,” wheedled the thick voice.

No reply from Sue.

“Aah! to hell with her!” he said with a sudden ebullition of rage. “Fasten up the door again. Drive a wedge into the staple with the axe. She’ll be safe enough down there until we want her.”

The door was fastened as he ordered.

“Now let’s get the ship out of here,” he said.

Another voice replied in a mean, fawning tone that made Sue shudder: “Let’s open the hatch, Baldy.”

“Not a drop!” said Figeroa sharply. “Not a drop for any of you till we get out of here!”

There was the sound of a confused cheer from up forward. “They’ve *got* it open!” the second voice cried excitedly. “They’ve got out a case! Oh, God! let me feel that good stuff burn me throat!” He shambled away forward.

Figeroa followed, cursing them horribly. It was evident that his men were getting out of hand; for the riotous sounds did not cease at his approach. However, he succeeded in getting hold of one man who was amenable to discipline. He brought him back aft, and sent him into the kicker to start the engine.

Within a quarter of an hour, it seemed to the listening Sue, the whole crowd up forward was roaring drunk. Their shouts and laughter no longer sounded human. They could not wait to draw the corks; Sue heard the necks of the bottles shiver as they were struck against the rail. Above all the other voices she could hear one that bellowed: “Plenty for everybody! Plenty for everybody!” Then an insane laugh. There was an animal quality in the voices that was calculated to freeze a woman’s very blood. Sue kept up her courage by saying to herself over and over: It’s no worse than before! It’s no worse than before! I still have the gun!

There could not have been much wrong with the kicker of the *Four Sisters*; for after awhile they got her started. The noise and confusion that followed, beggared all description. Sue could not follow what they were trying to do; she was limited to her sense of hearing. Apparently Figeroa and one or two others were all who remained sober enough to know what they were about. Sue could hear Figeroa cursing, striking, kicking his men, but without effect.

The *Four Sisters* began to move, but it was only to bump presently against the opposite bank of the cove. They pushed her off, and she bumped astern. They finally got her wedged fore and aft in the mud, and could not

budge her either way. Figeroa, beyond cursing now, moaned in his rage. A little more, and he'd bring on a stroke of apoplexy, thought Sue, hopefully. He sent a line ashore, and starting the windlass, finally managed to pull her head off. He then did what he ought to have done in the beginning, sent the kicker ahead with a towline.

The branches swept against the masts for the last time; the mud bank scraped against the side, and they floated free. Sue hardly needed the drunken cheer to tell her that they were out in the river again. The kicker returned, and putting her stem under the stern of the pungy, set up a roaring that was not again interrupted. They were headed for the Bay.

Sue fingered her little gun. Why do I delay? she asked herself; there is no hope now. I ought to have done it in the beginning. The longer I put it off the harder it will be! . . . What a poor miserable way to end a life! To be found dead in the cabin of a rum-runner with a drunken crew on board! What disgrace to my family!—But perhaps they will never know! When these fellows find me they'll chuck me overboard with a weight tied to my body. Nobody will ever know. Not Temp . . . ! I mustn't think of him . . . !

XXIII

TEMP IN NEW YORK

TEMP WYE, like all country boys, had always longed to visit New York. But that pleasure was for ever spoiled for him now. He visited New York, and he saw nothing of it. His sole concern with the place was to avoid being run over upon the crossings. Whenever in after life he thought of New York, it was only to be reminded with a sick shudder of the pain he had experienced there.

When he landed in the vast terminal station he asked himself what he had come for. To find a man. How was he to set about that in such a welter of humanity when he had not a single clue to go upon? And even supposing that by some miracle he should find his man, what good would that do him? Would it not just make him out a fool for his pains? Sue had chosen for herself. She was her own mistress. Whatever might have happened, it was irrevocable now. She was lost to him for ever. Better take the first train home and go to work.

But he could not do it. Some deep stubborn strain in him prevented him from giving in. He might not be too late. He might be able to save her from something that she would otherwise regret. It didn't matter what happened to him if he could save her.

He checked his bag in the station, and drifted out through a long corridor lined with handsome shops to the teeming street. He turned to the right at random—what difference did it make which way he turned? The throng of meanly dressed people on the sidewalk; the roaring tide of motor trucks, electric cars and taxicabs in the roadway; the towering ugly buildings on either hand; it all filled him with a dull distaste. Notwithstanding the uproar, it was not even one of the principal streets, as he was to learn later. He got the name of the street from a corner sign: Seventh Avenue.

He followed that street and its continuations for several miles. It led him through many different sorts of neighbourhoods, but none of them first class. His sole purpose was to search each face that passed; a fine way to find anybody in New York! He was well aware that the chances were 7,000,000 to one against its being the face he was looking for. Finally he came to a place where he could go no farther; the end of the island. He sat down on a bench, looking, as he thought, straight out to sea.

It was a glorious panorama of islands, forts and ships that faced him; at any other time Temp would have delighted in it. To his left rose the Statue of Liberty in all her majesty; and chief among the ships was a superb liner, with four great red funnels, moving slowly out to sea. At sight of her Temp was shaken by a fresh fear: Suppose Darrah has taken Sue abroad? Nothing else moved him.

Since he had seated himself full in the blazing sun, Temp had his bench to himself for awhile. By and by a woman came hobbling along the path, looked at him curiously; hesitated; then plumped herself down beside him. She was the sort of woman Temp had never before seen; a hardened park-bencher. He was not aware of her until she spoke to him.

“ ’S hot, ain't it?”

Temp looked at her, and looked away quickly. Her face was sodden with drink, and she was leering at him horribly. “Yes, it's hot,” he said politely. He could not speak otherwise to a woman.

“You're a handsome fella,” she said insinuatingly.

Temp blushed. He said nothing.

“But you look kinda down. What's the matter?”

“Nothing,” said Temp.

“I bet you don't belong to this burg.”

How he wished she would go away!

“It's no harm to talk, is it?” she demanded a little sorely.

“No harm at all,” said Temp.

“Being if you're a stranger here, and in trouble, maybe I could give you a word of advice.”

Temp looked at her with a hard smile. Advice from such a one as she! He was about to say something polite and cutting, when it suddenly occurred to him: Well, why not? Certainly of all persons in New York he felt the most helpless. Anybody should be able to advise him. “Do you know this town well?” he asked.

“Know this town!” she said with a raucous laugh; “I'll say I do! It's all I do know! I know it all the way from shanty town where I was born to the Tenderloin where I had my heyday, and all the way to the Battery, that's here, where I've come to the benches at last!”

Temp betrayed no interest in her autobiography. “How would you set about to find a person in New York?” he asked diffidently.

She was interested immediately. “Man or woman?” she asked.

“A man.”

“Friend of yours?”

“No!” said Temp with a flash of his grey eyes.

“Somebody who’s done you a dirty trick? I can understand that. I like you the better for it. . . . What do you know about this guy?”

“I know he’s a blackleg and a scoundrel!”

“Oh, sure!” she said sympathetically.

“I believe he’s a boot-legger; that is to say, a rum-runner on a big scale.”

“Well, why don’t you go to the enforcement bureau, and ast if they know him?”

“Well, I suppose they’re looking for information; not giving it.”

“Maybe so. Maybe so.” She studied the matter for a moment. “I know what you want to do!” she cried. “You want to go to the newspapers!” She pulled a smudged and creased newspaper from some recess of her clothing. “Look! This is the one. The *Sphere*. They make a specialty of these new human interest stories. All kinds of people goes to them for help, and they help ’em too, if there’s a story in it. In this papy it tells how a young lad from Brooklyn went to the editor and ast him if he knew of any adventure he could get on.”

“I wouldn’t tell them about myself,” said Temp, frowning.

“Sure, not the truth. But you could make up a story, couldn’t yeh? Just to get what you wanted.”

“Well, I suppose I could.”

She told him how to reach the office of the *Sphere*, and Temp, hot to try this plan, instantly got up. Out of the tail of his eye he observed her bedraggled skirt and wilted hat, and without taking his hand out of his pocket, peeled off a five-dollar bill from the roll there. He offered it to her, blushing.

She shrank from it. “Not from you!” she said quickly. “You’ll need it, fella. This was just between friends, like.”

“Take it!” urged Temp. “My uncle just died and left me a fortune—a couple of hours too late!”

“Well, in that case,” she said, taking it. “And thank you kindly. Onct I used to hand out five-dollar tips meself, but I ain’t seen the colour of once since God knows when. Life’s a funny thing!”

“I can’t see the fun in it, myself,” said Temp bitterly.

“Oh, you’re young,” she said. The bleared eyes dwelt on him oddly. “Good-bye, handsome boy. She was a fool to turn yeh down!”

Temp hurried away, blushing to the ears.

In the newspaper office he was hard put to it to evade the smiling cross-examination of the bright-eyed young fellow who had been told off to attend to him. Temp was no dissimulator. Having been led into several dangerous admissions, he finally cast himself on his questioner's mercy.

"Say, don't put any of that in the paper!" he pleaded.

"But that's my job," was the smiling answer.

"Sure, I know," said Temp bitterly; "it's a hell of an amusin' story to you, but to me . . ." He finished with a speaking gesture.

By way of answer the young fellow slowly tore in half the sheet of paper upon which he had made some notes.

"Thanks," muttered Temp. "It's more than I could expect."

"Earl Darrah?" said the young man thoughtfully. "His name has been in the paper. It's not a name you would forget . . . I've got it! He's one of Sam Thalmann's lieutenants."

"Sam Thalmann?" queried Temp.

"Never heard of Sam Thalmann?" said the young man, opening his eyes. "You *are* from the back counties! They call him the Rum King. They say he's at the head of the entire business of importing liquor into this country from Europe. He was arrested only about ten days ago. Out on bail. But the government never can get anything on him. He's too slick. They say he makes a million a year."

"Do you suppose I could find this man?" asked Temp.

"Find him! Bless your heart, he's no violet! One of our most conspicuous citizens. Lives in the swellest apartment house on Park Avenue. I'll get you the number out of the telephone book."

Temp indulged himself in the unaccustomed luxury of a taxicab. But there was no joy in spending money. On the way uptown he was thinking: I must lie to these people, or they won't tell me anything. I'm such a fool! I'll never be able to get away with it!

Since he had cut himself off from Sue he had heard no details of her trip to New York, consequently the magnificent apartment house, the servants in green liveries with silver buttons, struck no chord in his memory. Upstairs he was received by a middle-aged lady, very much rouged and overdressed, but with a gentle, timid manner. It appeared that this was Mrs. Thalmann.

"My husband is out," she said.

"Perhaps you'll do just as well," said Temp.

"I know nothing about his business," she said nervously.

“It has nothing to do with his business. I merely wanted to find out the present whereabouts of a . . . a friend of mine”—Temp hesitated, and gulped at the lie—“Earl Darrah.”

“Earl Darrah?” she said with a frightened look. “Why, he’s . . . I don’t know! I don’t know. But his wife is here. I’ll ask her to see you.”

His wife! Temp stared at her like a man transfixed. But the old lady was already pattering out of the room, and did not notice. His wife! Temp’s thoughts flew to Sue, of course. A terrible coldness seemed to steal slowly towards his heart. Had he come to the end of his search then? And arrived too late! But what else could he have expected? How could he bear to face her? And she? she would be confused at seeing him. Ah! he should not have come! he should not have come! Hearing footsteps approaching through the corridor, he hastily turned his back, and looked out of the window without seeing anything.

He heard her enter the room. He felt as if his body were growing smaller. But the voice which struck upon his ears was not the voice of Sue. “Well?” she asked sharply.

Temp whirled about with an extraordinary mixture of feelings. Astonishment, relief and suspicion were all written in his face. “Why . . . why . . .” he stammered. At first he did not recognize her, for he had never seen her without a hat. Then he remembered the blonde charmer whom he had seen dashing about with Earl and Sue in the high-powered car for a few days. “I thought you were his sister!” he gasped.

She laughed disagreeably. “Who are you?” she demanded.

“I am Templeton Wye of Travis County, Maryland.”

“What do you want?”

“Where is Darrah?”

She drew a mask of caution over her face. “What’s the big idea?”

Temp hesitated. Here was a situation calling for the most astute diplomacy, and he had none. He had not yet recovered from his surprise. The fellow’s *wife*! How was he to handle her? If she was really his wife how wickedly Sue had been deceived! At that thought a burning rage consumed Temp, and he could think of nothing else.

“He’s a damned scoundrel!” he cried.

She looked at him strangely, showing neither resentment nor surprise. It was as if she had said: Sure! What of it? What she did say, coolly, was: “What’s biting you?”

“Aren’t you human?” cried Temp. “If you’re his wife, are you satisfied to have him travelling about the country with another girl?”

“So that’s the nigger in the woodpile,” she said, with a pained and disagreeable smile; “he’s run off with your girl, has he?”

“You helped him!” cried Temp. “You came down there especially to deceive the girl by masquerading as his sister!”

She endeavoured to evade the charge, by assuming a commonplace dignity. “Well, you have your nerve with you!” she said, drawing herself up, “to come here and bawl me out in my own home!”

This had no effect on Temp. “What sort of a woman are you?” he said. “Have you no natural feeling?”

A flush showed under her careful make-up. She bit her lip. “Aah! I wasn’t helping him to get the girl for himself!” she cried.

“Then what were you doing it for?” demanded Temp.

“I’m not answerable to you?” she cried furiously.

“What were you doing it for?”

“You’ll get no more out of me. You might as well go.”

“Oh, I’ll go,” said Temp, looking around for his hat; “but do you know what I’m going to do? I’m going to kill that blackleg! I’ll come up with him sooner or later. He’ll be coming back here. I’ll shoot him as I would a dog!”

She caught her breath sharply, and flung him a terrified, sidelong glance. She saw that he was one of the rare men who mean what they say. All the natural colour faded out of her skin, leaving her like a painted corpse. Angry as he was, Temp could not help but see that he had her. Whatever the truth of the situation might be, she still retained some feeling for the scoundrelly Darrah.

“Don’t be a fool!” she said, with an attempt to conciliate Temp, in which there was something almost piteous. “You’ve got this all wrong. Earl doesn’t want the girl for himself. He’s married to me; he hasn’t chucked me. In a few days she’ll be back home, no worse than when she left it.”

“What does he want of her then?” said Temp incredulously.

“Look here,” she said, “if I satisfied you that there was nothing of that sort, would you let him alone? Not interfere in his business, I mean?”

“If you could satisfy me, yes,” said Temp. “It’s nothing to me the liquor he smuggles. I’m no revenue agent.”

“You promise that?”

“I promise it.”

“Then the truth of it is, he just wanted the girl’s help in his business.”

“In his business!” said Temp, staring. “How on earth could she . . . ?”

“Oh, figure it out! figure it out!” said the woman impatiently. “There’s a lot more to women than you’ll ever know! I suppose you look on them as ornaments to the home!”

Temp was struck by the fact that this was exactly what Sue had once told him. He had almost forgotten the presence of this other woman now. His mind was casting back. “I suppose when he came to our river he was looking for a landing-place for his cargoes,” he muttered; “and the old wharf on the Rousby place . . . ideal for his purpose; and Sue . . . she knows the river better than any man . . . I see it all now!”

“You guessed it for yourself!” said the woman, with a terrified glance over her shoulder. “I didn’t tell you anything!”

“Oh, I’ll protect you,” said Temp.

“And you promised me you wouldn’t interfere with his business,” she went on excitedly. “Remembering it’s her business now; she’s going to make money out of it!”

“I said I wouldn’t interfere if I was satisfied as to their relations,” said Temp doggedly. “I’m not satisfied yet. Why was it necessary to deceive her about his being married? . . . And what’s more, *you’re* not satisfied either,” he said suddenly; “it shows in your face!”

She suddenly burst into tears, and ran from the room. Temp, since he had got what he came for, mechanically picked up his hat and let himself out of the apartment.

XXIV

SUE, A PRISONER

SUE heard a prolonged, soft sst! several times repeated. Finally it came to her that the man at the wheel was trying to attract her attention. Standing on the companion ladder, she looked through the split panel of the door. She could make out the steersman's silhouette outlined against the sky.

"Are you calling me?" she asked.

"Not so loud, girly, or they'll hear you," he whispered.

"What do you want?" asked Sue.

"Oh, just to make friends," he said. Sue could not see his face, but she could hear the leer in his voice. "You and me ought to be friends. I'm the on'y sober man aboard."

"The boss is sober," said Sue.

"He's drinkin' with the others now. Of course he can carry an awful load, Baldy can, but he'll be drunk in the end. I'm different from them other fellows, I'm a decent man. I was brought up in a good home, and all. You better stick to me. What do you say, girly?"

"I never refuse an offer of friendship," said Sue, smiling bitterly.

"That's right," came the eager whisper. "But you want to be careful about them other fellows. They're a rotten lot! . . . Listen! If I stretch my foot forward I can reach the cabin door. I'll work the wedge loose with my toe. When they're all drunk I ain't gonna be the on'y one to stay sober and work. I'll let her drift, and come and see you, hey?"

"How about the man in the kicker?" asked Sue.

"There ain't no man in the kicker. I'm runnin' the kicker and steerin' the ship too. Didn't I tell you I was the on'y sober one aboard?"

He was not any too sober, for Sue could hear the thickness of alcohol in his voice. "Well, you had better keep your mind on your job," she said, "or you'll have us aground."

"Aah! I can see where I'm goin' all right. . . . My name's Bird Packer. What's yours, girly?"

"Never mind that," said Sue.

"Aah! I got to call yeh somepin, ain't I?"

"I'll be nameless on board this ship. . . . Look here, you Bird, if you want to be friends with me, let her drift when they're all drunk, and carry me ashore in the kicker."

"Aah!" he whined, "be reasonable, girly. They say this vessel's got a million dollars' worth of rum aboard her. You wouldn't expect me to give up my share of that after riskin' me neck to get it?"

"No, I didn't expect it," said Sue, with a bitter laugh; "I just took a chance."

"If I was to play a trick like that on Baldy Figeroa," whined the voice, "he'd hunt me . . ." He suddenly broke off. "Watch out! Here comes one of 'em!"

Overhead a figure came lurching aft, a heavy man. As he came he muttered to himself: "Cheese! I'm drunk!" This was a voice Sue had not heard before. He fell across the roof of the cabin, and started to pound insanely on the sliding cover of the companionway. "Hey, down there!" he bellowed. "Hey, Sweetie! Come on up and let's have a look at you!"

The steersman remonstrated with him, but in a mild voice which suggested to Sue that he must be the smaller man. "Hey, cut it out, Pig. That ain't no way to treat a lady!"

"You shut your head, Packer!" roared the drunken man. "Or I'll damned well chuck you overboard!"

"Yeah!" whined the steersman, "and who'll take the wheel? There ain't a sober man aboard but me!"

"Aah! go sit on a tack!" growled the other. He turned back towards the cabin. "Cheese, I'm drunk!" he muttered. He began to pound again on the roof. "Hey, Sweetie! Come on up! Come on up! Don't be so exclusive!" Then in an undertone, with a giggle: "Cheese, I'm drunk!"

"You better not let the boss hear you," muttered the steersman.

"The boss knows what I'm doin'," retorted the other. He bellowed down to Sue: "Well, if you won't come up, I'm comin' down to yeh! . . . Cheese! I'm drunk!" He felt around for the handle of the door. Suddenly he began to laugh uproariously. "Damned if it ain't fastened up! And me askin' you to come up all the time! That's a good one! . . . I'll soon let yeh out!"

He found some object to hammer up the wedge with, and presently the metal pin rang on the deck. Seizing the hasp, he gave the door a yank. The iron pipe held it. Instantly he began to curse Sue. "So you've locked yourself up, have you, you ——! Unfasten that door or I'll break it down!"

"If you open the door I'll shoot!" said Sue.

With the inconsistency of a drunken man he immediately began to laugh again. “Tha’s good! Tha’s good! You ain’t the first gal that’s threatened to plug me, Sweetie, but Ah’m still whole! They never mean it! You want to take a look at me before you shoot. Ah’m a good-lookin’ man!”

Thrusting his hand through the hole in the door, he felt for the bar. Sue, in order to be sure of not missing him in the dark, approached till her face was all but touching the fumbling hand. Then putting her pistol against something which yielded, she pulled the trigger. The shot crashed in that confined space; the man yelled with pain, and snatched his hand through the door.

“The little wasp has stung me!”

“Serve you right!” muttered the steersman.

The shot and the cry brought the others tumbling aft. In the lead Sue recognized the peculiar slapping step of Figeroa. The wounded man, from the sounds, was rocking his body back and forth and moaning.

“What’s the matter?” demanded Figeroa.

“She shot me in the arm!”

Figeroa launched a torrent of abuse at his head. Sue detected an insincere note in it; and indeed, between groans, the wounded man protested:

“You sent me back yourself!”

“You lie!” roared Figeroa. There was a blow, and a heavy fall on deck. Silence; followed by a whimpering voice repeating over and over:

“And me wounded and all! And me wounded and all!”

“Shut up!” cried Figeroa, “or I’ll kick your teeth down your throat!”

“Ain’t nobody gonna dress my wound for me?” wailed the voice from the deck. “I’m all over blood! For God’s sake one of you fellows, dress my wound!”

“Take him up forward!” commanded Figeroa. “And get out of here, all of you! If I find anyone of you aft of the mainmast to-night I’ll knock him overboard!”

They shuffled and lurched away. The one they called Pig, who had lately been pounding so boldly on the cabin roof, was led forward weeping noisily. As soon as they had gone, Sue heard the plump of Figeroa’s fat knees on the deck. She smiled to herself, thinking of the picture he must present to the steersman. He put his lips to the broken panel, and the air of the little cabin was poisoned by the alcoholic fumes on his breath.

“Say, I’m real sorry it happened,” he protested in a fawning voice. “But you know how it is when fellows get drinkin’. There’s no stoppin’ ’em now.

I never touch the stuff myself. Let me in, and we'll hold the cabin against the lot of them."

Sue said nothing. It was obvious, of course, that Figeroa had himself sent the drunken man back to plague Sue, and had then knocked him down as a grandstand play.

"Do you hear me? Do you hear me?" he whispered, with a kind of urgency that nauseated Sue.

"Certainly I hear you," she said; "and I have five more bullets in my gun."

"Aah . . . !" he began. Suddenly he scrambled to his feet. "Shut up, or I'll smash you!" he cried, evidently to the steersman.

"I didn't say nothin'," protested that frightened man.

"You laughed, damn you!"

"I never laughed, boss. I on'y had a ticklin' like in me nose."

"Well, if you do it again, I'll tickle you!" Figeroa sent a hail forward. "You, Jim!"

A man came aft.

"Smash in the cover of the companion!" cried Figeroa in a passion. "I'm tired of fooling with this ——! Smash in the whole cabin if she won't come out!"

"Hell, I don't want her to pepper me!" grumbled another voice.

"Stand back after you strike, and she can't see you!"

Sue stiffened herself. Evidently they still had the axe, for she heard it thud on the deck. I must not shoot too soon, she told herself. Every shot must count. I must not shoot until I see my mark.

However, the blow on the cabin roof was never delivered, for at that moment the *Four Sisters* received a soft blow under her forefoot. She scraped along in sand; and her bow rose slightly. As she came to a stop, a little wave rolled and broke alongside.

Figeroa's attention was effectively diverted from Sue. "You've put us ashore!" he screamed at the luckless steersman with a frightful oath. The man began to whine. It was cut short by the sound of a sickening blow. He dropped on the deck like a log.

"Stop the engine!" shouted Figeroa. "Into the boat, and stop the engine!"

"I don't know this engine," grumbled Jim, climbing over the stern.

"Find the switch! Find the switch!"

"I can't find it!" presently came back.

Figeroa delivered a stream of imprecations at his head.

“She’ll stop now, all right,” said Jim with a loud, empty laugh. He came climbing aboard again.

“What have you done?” demanded Figeroa.

“Busted the feed pipe.”

“You fool! How’ll we get her off, now? I’ve a good mind to . . .”

“Yeah,” snarled the other voice. “Lay us all out cold, and then you can run things to suit yourself!” The speaker went forward.

The engine stopped. In the midst of his excitement, Figeroa remembered that the cabin door was unfastened. He found the pin, and dropping it through the staple, jammed it with a couple of taps of the axe. Then he ran forward, shouting:

“Get poles and shove her astern! Some of you jump overboard and get your backs under the bow. Get a move on you! The tide is falling now!”

They were too drunk to care. His orders were received with jeers. A voice cried: “You go overboard, boss, and we’ll follow you!” Another cried: “Aah! we’re safe enough here. There’s the beach!”

Under Figeroa’s furious urging they did make a half-hearted attempt to push her off; but soon gave it up. He cursed them in vain. Finally a voice cried:

“Let’s carry a couple of cases ashore, fellows, and make a night of it!”

It was all off then. The proposal was greeted with cheers. “Come on! Come on!” they cried. Presently Sue heard them splashing ashore. Figeroa must have followed them, for all became silent on board the *Four Sisters*.

Sue’s tight breast slowly relaxed. What a nightmare! Through all the horror of it she was conscious of the strain of absurdity. One could shriek with laughter at the spectacle of the fat, brutal, foolish Figeroa on his knees at the broken door trying to cajole her into letting him in. And the whining steersman; the drunken Pig; the clumsy Jim who could only stop an engine by breaking it up! What astonishing fools men could be! To gamble with their lives for this treasure ship, and then abandon their winnings on the sand while they got drunk!

Sue wondered if the steersman, whom she visualized as a little man, could have put the pungy ashore purposely, with some idea of saving her. But she dismissed the idea as fantastic. Every word the man had uttered revealed him as a worm. What had become of the steersman, anyway? She had heard no sound of him since Figeroa had struck him down.

At any rate the incredible thing had happened, and she now had a chance of escape. The men had all gone ashore, and the kicker was still tied under the puny's stern. To be sure her engine was disabled, but they always carried an oar on board her, and Sue was accustomed to sculling. The skiff was hanging amidships; but she could not hope to lower that without attracting attention. I only have one chance, she told herself. I must make no wrong move! Drawing back the shutter in front of the broken window, she stuck her head out to make a survey.

XXV

ESCAPE

TO SUE'S eyes, long accustomed to the perfect darkness of the little cabin, it seemed almost bright out of doors. The sky was clearing, and a few stars shone out. After a little study, Sue made out that the *Four Sisters* was heading almost due south. A palish strip, a hundred feet ahead of her, represented a sandy beach. The presence of sand suggested that they were near the Bay, if they had not already reached it. The beach was backed by a bank of moderate height surmounted by a wall of tall trees, showing no breaks anywhere; a deserted spot. By working herself partly through the window, and looking over the cabin roof, Sue could see that the bank curved around them on both sides, indicating that they had run up into a bay.

Not a sound was to be heard aboard the punga, and Sue was assured that every man had left it. The presence of the men ashore was denoted merely by a vague blur against the sand; but they were still making the night hideous with their hoarse cries. Finally a tiny flame appeared in their midst; they were building a fire. Soon it blazed, lighting up a weird picture. They crowded close around it to dry out their wet clothes. But some, already too drunk to care whether they were wet or dry, sprawled helplessly in the sand. Every man seemed to be armed with a bottle, and there was a continuous, automatic pantomime of crooking the arm, and tipping it up. Sue thought: Surely the fiery stuff will kill them if they keep pouring it down like that.

As the fire warmed them the noise increased. They began to lurch around under the impression that they were dancing; to sing in raucous voices; to pummel each other, whether in jest or earnest it was impossible to say. They flung the empty bottles into the water; they continually fell down, scrambled to their feet, fell again like broken toys. A yellow cut bank made a background for the sprawling marionettes, topped by a fringe of turf and supporting close ranks of tall, grave trees.

As the group around the fire shifted and opened, Sue caught sight of the vast bulk of Figeroa planted cross-legged like a hideous idol, with the firelight in his face. He had a bottle planted like a burlesque sceptre on his knee. His gaze was fixed on the fire, he paid no attention to the uproar going on around him, he never moved except occasionally to lift the bottle to his lips. His extraordinary impassivity fascinated Sue; her intuition whispered to

her: That one will not become helpless. He will come back. I must not delay too long.

Withdrawing her head, she turned her attention to getting out. She lit the lamp. Since the cabin had no windows looking forward, those on shore could not see her light. Thrusting her hand through the jagged split in the door, she found that she could touch the pin in the staple; but wedged in as it was, she could not possibly work it out. She could no doubt have forced her way out through the door with the iron pipe, but there was too great a danger of attracting the attention of those on shore. So she returned to the window.

The sashes were set in solid, the builders of the puny evidently considering that the companionway would furnish sufficient ventilation. Sue had already discovered that she could not squeeze out through the low sash; but if the sash were removed, she believed she could do it. It was set within a narrow beading of wood all around. A table-knife out of the sideboard drawer was the only implement she possessed. The round end of the blade made but a clumsy tool. However, she patiently cut and chipped her way through the beading, and was finally able to prise up the parted ends. Once the bottom piece was out the rest was easy. The sash finally came out in her hands.

Sue hung the little pistol around her neck on a string, blew out the light, thrust her suit-case out on deck, and wriggled after it. A glance in the direction of the shore convinced her there was no danger of being seen by those fire-dazzled eyes.

As she turned towards the stern she received a nasty shock. What was apparently the corpse of a man lay athwart the deck at her feet. She clapped her hand over her mouth to keep in the involuntary cry of horror. The steersman whom Figeroa had struck down! All this time he had been lying there and she had never guessed! He lay sprawled on his back, an uncomely sight. He had a bald head, a stained mouth, and a ragged pale growth of beard.

Ah, well, it was no concern of hers, thought Sue, gingerly stepping over his legs. As she did so, he stirred, and groaned slightly, giving her a worse shock than to find him dead. She sprang away from him, looking down in horror. "Water! Water!" he moaned.

There was something inside of Sue that could not withstand that whispered appeal for aid. Groaning at her own folly, she nevertheless put down her suit-case, and ran back amidships to the water-butt. Yanking the tin dipper free of its chain, she filled it and brought it back. Kneeling on the

deck, she passed an arm under his head, and raising it applied the dipper to his lips. He drank thirstily. When he had done he gazed at Sue.

“The girl . . . the girl . . .” he murmured in astonishment.

“Hush!” said Sue. “You’ll soon be all right now. I’ll leave the dipper where you can reach it.”

She laid his head on the deck again. Picking up her suit-case, she climbed over the stern into the kicker, and commenced to fumble with the knots that bound it to the pungy. The man contrived to raise himself on one elbow.

“Hey!” he kept saying stupidly. “Hey, wait a minute!”

“Be quiet!” warned Sue, “or they’ll hear you.”

Suddenly he began to yell with all the strength he could muster: “Hey, Baldy! Baldy! The girl! She’s gettin’ away!”

Sue stared at him, absolutely dumbfounded by such baseness. For the moment it sickened her of living. Was it possible to find bottom in the black depths of the human heart? This cur, half killed by Figeroa, was already trying to curry favour with him by betraying the one who had succoured him! How bitterly she regretted her impulse of humanity!

But she was instantly on the alert again to meet the changed situation. Like lightning she calculated her chances. Her head rose above the deck of the pungy, and she could see that Figeroa had heard the cry and had risen. Other men had their faces turned towards the pungy, but Figeroa was the only one who could walk steadily; he was the only one Sue had to fear. There was the skiff; he could follow her in that. She still had the pistol, but she had no wish to kill a man, not even Figeroa. Suppose she could prevent him from following?

At least a hundred feet of water separated the pungy’s bow from the shore. It is a slow business ploughing through water on foot. Then he would have to climb aboard. Say two or three minutes. It might be done! At any rate the skiff would serve her better than the disabled motor-boat, if she could only take one of the two.

She swung herself back on the deck of the pungy. Forbearing even to kick the yelling cur on the deck—he wasn’t worth it; she ran forward to the davits. Figeroa was in the water, pressing towards the pungy. Other men followed him, shouting drunkenly. It was the work of half a minute, perhaps, for Sue to throw the lines off the cleats. The skiff dropped into the water with a rattle and a splash; nothing to be lost now by making a noise. Sue sprang into her, and unhooking the falls, pulled her astern by clinging to the rail.

Sue rolled into the motor-boat, holding the painter of the skiff between her teeth, and tackled the knots again. The rope seemed to oppose her with the pertinacious malice of inanimate things. Figeroa was now climbing aboard the bow of the pungy. Would she be able to do it? He came running heavily along the deck. As he reached the stern, the rope came clear in Sue's hands. With all her strength she thrust away from the pungy's stern. Figeroa cast himself down on the deck, but only clutched the empty air.

Though only a yard separated her from the man, Sue, safe with both small boats in her possession, could afford to let her fast-beating heart quiet down. She coolly made the skiff fast to the side of the motor-boat that it might not interfere with her sculling. She could see Figeroa's fat body projecting grotesquely over the stern of the pungy as he reached for her. As a result of his exertions he was sobbing for breath. He began to speak. Strange it was to hear the breathless fat man labouring to be reasonable and persuasive.

"What's the matter with you, girl? I wouldn't let any harm come to you. Come on back. You're safest aboard. There isn't a house within miles of us. You'll only lose yourself among these islands. And when the wind comes up you'll be swamped! Come on back. I'll take care of you!"

A great contentment filled Sue. The space of water between her and the pleading man was widening. He had no means of pursuing her. She was safe! She suddenly laughed out.

"What do you think I am?" she asked scornfully.

Figeroa scrambled to his feet, and raising his clenched fists above his head, began to call down frightful curses on her head. Part of it was in a foreign tongue. Sue had heard so much bad language this night, that it no longer impressed her, Spanish or English. Only one thing that he said caught her attention.

"I'll make you pay for this!" he shouted. "You shall pay for this, if I swing for it! You needn't think you've seen the last of me. *I know who you are!*"

Sue shivered apprehensively. How could he know? Still, if by some extraordinary chain of circumstances he had learned her name, would he not be able to spoil the rest of her life?

"You're lying!" she said, to draw him out. "If you know my name let me hear it."

"That's all right!" he cried. "I know who you are! You'll see me again!"

Sue shrugged it off. He was only bluffing. Fitting the oar in its groove astern, she sculled away, pursued by his maledictions.

As she left the puny behind her, the banks drew closer together, proving that the befuddled steersman had carried the *Four Sisters* into a bottle-shaped bay and piled her up at the head of it. As she worked her heavy oar, she considered what she must do. It was true that she was in a wild and uninhabited neighbourhood; still it was Maryland, and one could not travel very far without coming to settlements. In a general way she knew that villages and farms lay to the south. The outgoing tide must be her guide. If she followed it it must bring her to the bay. To go against it would only be to lose herself in forgotten creeks.

When she did find help, how would she explain her predicament? It would be awkward. There were presentable clothes in the suit-case; but she had scarcely any money. However, her heart refused to be troubled. Why worry about such details when she had just escaped from a most horrible death. How sweet life was! How beautiful the night, with the starry sky emerging from the murk. She would manage somehow. Thank God! she had a persuasive tongue in her head, and people always liked her!

She passed out of the little bay into a larger body of water. Land was still faintly visible on the far side. She allowed her boat to drift in order to discover which way the tide was setting. For a long time she seemed to hang motionless, then, gauging by the trees on shore, she perceived a slight drift to the northward. She resumed her sculling in that direction, keeping close to the port shore. This was the same shore that the *Four Sisters* was stranded on below.

By and by this shore ended in a point. Sue began to suspect that it was a large island. If that was so, and if it was uninhabited, the position of the hijackers was a very unpleasant one, unless they could float the *Four Sisters* at the next high tide. Without a power-boat, without even a skiff to carry an anchor astern, she did not see how they were going to do that. But she was not worrying about their fate; let them drink themselves to death; or let them rot in jail if they were captured; she was thankful only to have got away.

Off the point of the island she ran into a little tide race, though there was scarcely any wind. With her knowledge of the tides, she perceived that two currents, one from the south, one from the north, collided here and swung away to the west. She thought she recognized the entrance to Tonger's River, where they had passed in at dusk. Like all the rivers thereabouts it was not a true river but only a narrow, winding inlet from the bay. If she was right, a wide sound lay around that point, with more islands on the far side, and then the bay itself.

As Sue was about to bring the head of her boat around to the west, she thought she saw a shadow dead ahead, in the middle of the wide stream that

came down from the north. She dismissed it as a trick of her eyesight; there could be nothing there. But it would not be dismissed; there *was* something there; a big dim shape drifting down on the tide. Her heart rose into her throat; under the impulse of unreasoning terror, she brought her boat around, and sculled frantically away from it.

However, her sober sense quickly reasserted itself. If there was anything there there was a rational explanation of it she told herself. Curiosity was stronger than fear. Resting on her oar, she watched it. It slowly resolved itself into the shape of a big vessel without sails and without lights, drifting aimlessly on the tide; in its way, a shocking sight. Sue made out the two raking masts, and the sides, higher than those of the *Four Sisters*; and then a light broke upon her. The *Esmeralda*, of course! Having been set adrift she had floated upstream with the flood, and was now returning on the ebb. And if Sue's ears had told her aright the luckless crew of the *Four Sisters* or their dead bodies were now lying on her deck.

Sue's feelings were mixed upon making this discovery. Her first thought was: I owe them nothing; I stuck by them as long as their voyage had any chance of success; but they've lost out; I cannot help them now; they mean nothing to me. I'd better escape while I can. Under the influence of this reasoning, she started to scull away again; but presently her arms refused their office. She found that she could not leave her shipmates. In common decency I must see whether they are alive or dead; she told herself. If they're tied up, and the pungy drifts out into the Bay, they'll be wrecked. After all, Sue discovered, bad men though they might be, they had weathered dangers together; it had created a bond that she could not deny.

Sue brought her boat alongside the *Esmeralda*. The sides of the pungy were too high out of water for her to grasp the rail. She scraped alongside to the stern, where she found the kicker still lashed in place. Making her two boats fast alongside, Sue climbed over the bow of the kicker on to the stern of the pungy with a heart full of dread of what she was to find.

XXVI

ON THE "ESMERALDA"

UPON the deck of the *Esmeralda* all was quiet and still. A gentle breeze hummed through the shrouds; somewhere aloft a small rope slapped a spar; on deck the wheel creaked as the conflicting currents of the tide swung the rudder. The cabin doors were open, and a black hole yawned at Sue's feet; not for worlds would she have set foot in it. She raised a faltering voice:

"Earl! . . . Ole! . . . Brant!"

From somewhere amidships a strangled voice answered her: "Here! I can't move!"

A feeling of thankfulness gushed up in Sue's breast. She was not alone on board with the dead! She ran forward. In the waist of the ship she came upon a sufficiently woeful sight. Six bodies trussed up like fowls, and gagged as well, lay about the deck in cramped attitudes, just as they had been thrown down. She saw Earl lying like a dead man with his eyes closed; Brant with an ominous dark stain under his head; Chick, whose eyes were open, and who was bumping his head on the deck, the only sign of welcome he could make to her; and Ole Bierstedt who appeared to have chewed right through his gag, for he could speak. The other two lay farther forward.

"Thank God! you're safe!" muttered Ole. "For God's sake get me out of this!"

Sue dropped on her knees beside him. "If I could lay my hands on a knife!" she muttered.

"In my left-hand pocket," said Ole.

She quickly cut him free. He sat up rubbing his cramped muscles. "You're all right?" he said anxiously.

"All right," said Sue.

"How come they let you go?" he asked, mystified. "Were you in the cabin? I made sure they had carried you off."

"They did," said Sue; "but I escaped."

"Escaped!"

"I'll tell you as soon as I help these fellows. There are only six here. Who is missing?"

“New York,” said Ole. “He was dead, and they slung him overboard.”

Poor lad! thought Sue, with a pain at her breast. So he got his wish!

She next cut Chick’s bonds that she might have more help. As soon as he got a hand free, the little man seized Sue’s hand, and covering it with kisses, burst into tears.

“Oh, they didn’t hurt you! they didn’t hurt you!” he cried.

“Not a bit of it!” said Sue in a gruff voice to hide that she was touched. “Are you able to move about?”

“Watch me!” cried Chick. Sore as he was, he jumped up and down on the deck to prove his spryness.

“Make a fire in the galley, and put the kettle on.”

He hobbled forward.

Ole brought Sue a lantern that he had found in the cabin. Lighting it, they turned their attention to Earl. He appeared to be unconscious, but was breathing naturally. He had no wound nor broken bones.

“I believe he’s just asleep,” said Sue. “It’s exhaustion.”

She shook him violently, and he did indeed open his eyes. But like a child he was still dazed with sleep, unable to take anything in. When they let go of him, he dropped on the deck, and slept again. Brant was in a worse way; for he had a scalp wound four inches long.

“That’s got to be sewed up,” said Sue with a shudder; “and I must do it, I suppose.”

Proceeding to Clipper and Beetle, they found the negro in a stupefied condition; but Beetle was all right. When he was freed of his bonds he sat up without a look at Sue nor a word; and sullenly felt in his pockets for a cigarette.

“Ungrateful dog!” muttered Ole, as they left him.

While they worked together, Sue and Ole swapped experiences.

“Yes, they got poor New York,” said Ole. “He was right alongside of me. His skull cracked like an egg. . . . He was a nice feller! . . . But we got at least two of their men,” he went on with unctiousness. “I seen one feller stretched out by the bitts for’ard and he was as dead as hog’s-flesh. Another was knocked overboard and drowned. That was Smut Keesing, damn him! The crabs got him after all! . . . How did you manage to get clear of ’em, Sue?”

“They ran the *Four Sisters* aground a mile or so away from here. Then they all went ashore and got drunk. It was easy.”

“And they hadn’t harmed you before that?” he asked anxiously.

“I stood them off with my gun,” said Sue.

“There’s a girl for you!” said Ole admiringly. “. . . Ashore about a mile from here, you say? Which way?”

“Do you know where we are?” asked Sue.

He stood up and took a careful survey of shores and sky. “It’s a bit confusin’,” he said, “because we’re makin’ sternway. But this here is the mouth of Tonger’s River all right. That land to starboard—or to port as it had ought to be, is the end of Beekman’s Island; No Man’s Point on the other side. We are drifting out into Spanish Sound.”

“The *Four Sisters* is ashore on the inside of Beekman’s Island,” said Sue. “In a little bay shaped like a bottle.”

“I know it,” said Ole; “Powder Flask Bay, they call it.”

“Is Beekman’s Island inhabited?” asked Sue.

“No,” said Ole. “Why?”

“Then they’re marooned; unless somebody finds them.”

“You couldn’t see a ship that was ashore in Powder Flask Bay unless she was close to the mouth of it. But why couldn’t they warp her off with an anchor?”

“Because I’ve taken both the kicker and the skiff. They’re tied up astern here. They have no small boat.”

“By God! you’ve got a head on you!” cried Ole gleefully. “That’s the best news I heard since I got cracked on the head! That cargo they stole will do them no good now, except what they can drink of it! . . . They’re drunk, you say?”

“Roaring drunk and dead drunk,” said Sue. “Still drinking. They’ll kill themselves.”

“Hm!” said Ole enviously. “It’s a pleasant way to die. Far too good for them——!”

After awhile Sue said: “Ole, I’ve got an idea . . .”

“Out with it, then!”

“At first I thought, just like you, that the game was up, and we were lucky to have escaped with our lives. I was beating it for home when I ran into you drifting downstream. But now I’m thinking . . .”

“What?”

“I suppose you’ll think I’m crazy. But, well, there they are helpless on the beach; paralyzed drunk. Why shouldn’t we go back there and pull the *Four Sisters* off ourselves?”

“By God!” cried Ole. “. . . But there’s only about four of us uninjured!” he added anxiously.

“I doubt if there’ll be a single one of them able to put up a fight to-morrow,” said Sue. “At any rate, there’s nothing to prevent us from going back and having a look. They can’t touch us, having no small boat.”

“Oh, gee! Oh, gee! If I thought we could win her back again!” groaned Ole.

“We can’t do anything until high water,” said Sue. “That will be just before noon. Do you know of a quiet cove where we can lie?”

“Sure,” said Ole, “there’s any God’s amount of coves. Just behind No Man’s Point yonder, there’s as snug a cove as you could ask for.”

“All right,” said Sue. “I’ll start the kicker, and you steer her in. We’ll drop anchor there, and I’ll sew up Brant’s scalp. To-morrow we’ll leave the pungy lying there while we go after our business in the kicker.”

“Just as you say,” said Ole. “You’re the real skipper of this outfit!”

XXVII

THE EAGLE BOAT

MORNING found the *Esmeralda* lying like a picture ship in a green pool so still and clear that the anchor could be seen lying imbedded in the sand at a depth of three fathoms. The cove was shaped like a half-moon, with one horn longer than the other. A gleaming cream-coloured beach bordered the green water, and back of the beach hung a tangled curtain of wild grape, honeysuckle and the trumpet-flower vine, festooned from the branches of chestnut oaks.

Seen close aboard, the pungy presented a less agreeable sight, for she was filthy above decks and below. Sue had chosen to sleep on the cabin roof for what remained of the night. The men, too, in the morning light were anything but pictures; all bore marks of the fight in Tonger's River. The negro's head was covered with bloody abrasions. One of the many blows he had received had literally knocked him silly. He was in an imbecile state. Chick had a black eye, and the clothes had been partly torn off him. Earl had a raw and livid bruise on his cheek. Captain Ole's ordinarily thin nose had taken on a bulbous aspect.

As for Brant, his wound was badly inflamed, and he was already feverish; clearly an infection was setting in.

"He'll die if we can't get him medical attention," said Sue anxiously. She had a soft spot in her heart for the great simple brute of a man.

"Well," said Ole, "we're not going to move out of here till near noon. I'll have time to take him back to Neal's Island in the kicker. The government keeps a little hospital for sailors there. It's fourteen miles each way. I'll be back before eleven."

"Go ahead," said Sue.

In her own mind Sue had now taken complete charge of all further operations. Nobody was inclined to dispute her. Sue was discovering qualities in herself that she had never suspected. Hers was the kind of nature that is stimulated to fresh efforts by misfortune and defeat. She had forgotten that she was ever a young lady. Her sole aim was to get square with the unspeakable Figeroa, and to recover the property of herself and her comrades. In a time of stress she had risen to the top through sheer force of character. All these men were now prepared to obey her. She tasted the sweets of power.

But after Ole had gone, she looked around at the rest of the men with considerable misgiving. It was not very promising material with which to carry out a dangerous cutting-out expedition. Earl appeared to have been utterly crushed by the loss of his fabulously rich cargo. He had been told of Sue's scheme, and had given an apathetic acquiescence. He was sitting on deck astern, with his back against the cabin trunk, and his head sunk on his breast. Beetle, an equally sullen figure, was up forward nursing his bruises; the negro was strapped in a bunk below. Only Chick seemed to have any get-up-and-go in him; he followed Sue like a little dog.

Sue went to Earl. "Oh, buck up," she said, with good-natured scorn.

"There's no use fighting against luck," he said morosely. "Luck has been against us from the start; the revenue dicks, the head winds, the broken spar, the hi-jackers, and to cap all that nigger sneezing just at the right moment to ruin everything!"

"Oh, well, let's save what we can out of the wreck," said Sue. "Ole says you can't see into Powder Flask Bay from the open water. No one will find them there unless they come out to the point to signal, and they won't do that the first day, having all they want to eat and drink. We have them where we want them in there."

"Yeah," said Earl bitterly; "me and Chick here, who's half a man, and Beetle and Ole. That's three and a half against that mob!"

"They're drunk," said Sue. "And here's another thing. At high water it will be up to their necks under the bow of the *Four Sisters*. They're going to have a time getting aboard her from the shore."

"Even suppose we should pull her out of there," said Earl; "that damned eagle boat is laying for us out in the Bay. We haven't a chance!"

"One thing at a time!" said Sue, laughing. "All I'm worrying about now is the hi-jackers. The revenue officers can wait."

"There's no use struggling when your luck is out," said Earl. "My luck has failed me!"

"Try mine, then!" cried Sue. "Luck is nothing anyway, but a belief in yourself. Well, I believe in myself. I never should have gone into this thing, but now that I'm in it I'm going to see it through. The more the odds pile up against us the madder I get. I'm going to beat them all if I have to do it single-handed!"

"I hope you may!" said Earl bitterly.

Except for themselves that part of the world appeared to be absolutely unvisited by man; nevertheless during the course of the morning a graceful canoe came dancing in from the sound, rounded No Man's Point, and started across the mouth of the cove where they lay. When the steersman perceived the pungy lying there, he let out his sheet and came sailing into the cove. Letting his sails down he worked alongside. When he stood on the deck of his tiny cabin forward, his head just rose above the pungy's rail. He was a tall, shambling specimen with a ragged moustache and a malarial complexion.

"Howdy, folks!" he said, grinning. "What drove you in here?"

Earl flushed with anger at his frank inquisitiveness. "Our pleasure, see?" he returned truculently.

The man stared. "No offence," he said, "I was just askin'."

"And I was just answering," said Earl.

Sue glanced at him warningly. She did not feel that they were in a position to make themselves offensive to any man, however insignificant.

"'Tain't often you see a work boat lyin' idle when there's a good sailin' breeze like this," the man went on. "That's why I ast."

"It's our privilege, isn't it?" said Earl, ignoring Sue's warning.

"Oh, sure, if you want to," said the man, unabashed. "You don't talk like a sailor. Maybe you all's just roughin' it for pleasure."

Earl did not answer this.

"Where you bound?" the other asked directly.

"To hell," said Earl.

"Sure!" said the man, "we're all goin' there, I guess!" He laughed conciliatingly; but his eyes showed the spitefulness of balked curiosity. He was not going to be put off. "Where are you bound for in the meantime?" he persisted.

Sue, seeing that Earl was about to retort angrily, hastily cut in. "To Cambridge," she said. She named a good-sized town thirty or forty miles to the north.

The man transferred his attention to her. "Howdy, miss," he said, pulling at his dirty cap. "Or maybe I ought to say missus, being as none of these gen'l'men is old enough to be your father."

Earl fumed at his ill-concealed insolence; but Sue kept the conversation in her own hands. "Yes, missus," she said calmly.

"Have you got folks in Cambridge?"

"No."

“Do you follow the water regular?”

“Yes.”

“Funny I ain’t heard of you before. You ought to be famous among the Bay men. What’s your name, if I may make so bold?”

“Mrs. Hopkins,” said Sue.

“Any kin to Sis Hopkins?” he asked with a leer.

“I don’t know her,” said Sue blandly.

“Your men seem to have been havin’ a bit of trouble,” he remarked, glancing significantly from Earl’s bruised cheek to Chick’s black eye.

“Oh, just a little difference among themselves,” said Sue, with an indifferent air. “They feel pretty rotten to-day.”

“Sure, I know,” said the man. “Bootleg liquor. It’s fierce what it does to a man.”

Sue agreed. “We’re laying off to-day to let them sober up,” she said.

“Got anythin’ aboard?” he asked, with an eager light in his mean eyes. “I might buy a bottle off you . . .”

“Not a drop left,” said Sue, undisturbed.

Earl could contain himself no longer. “Get out of here, you damned snooper!” he cried, springing to his feet. “What business is it of yours who we are or where we’re going? Get out of here before I come down there and knock you overboard!”

With a look of mean terror, the man made haste to push away from the *Esmeralda*. Safe at the distance of a yard or two, he paused to release a jet of bile. “Aah!” he snarled, “an honest man don’t fear to answer a question or two. You ain’t Bay folks; you’re damn foreigners! I on’y ast yeh outa friendliness; but now if yeh ast me, you’re a fishy-lookin’ outfit! Damn fishy, I say!” Running up his sails, he drew away.

“You’ve sent him away convinced that we’ve got liquor aboard,” said Sue to Earl.

“Aah! he made me sick with his impudent questions!” growled Earl.

“But why not string him along?” said Sue mildly. “It doesn’t cost us anything.”

“She’s right,” put in Chick. “He had spy and stool pigeon written all over his ugly face.”

“You shut up!” cried Earl hotly. “Nobody asked you to put your lip in!”

“Look!” said Sue significantly.

Their recent visitor was beating out of the cove. When he could weather the easterly point, instead of bearing away to port to continue his voyage up river, he came about, and went out around No Man's Point the way he had come.

"He's given up his morning's errand, whatever it was," said Sue.

"Aah, what does it matter?" grumbled Earl. "Let him bring in the whole revenue service if he wants. They won't get anything on us now."

"That's childish talk," said Sue. "We don't want the revenue service in here. I wish Ole was here! I wish we could move on!"

Two hours later Sue was down in the unsavoury galley of the *Esmeralda* looking about for what she could find to make a dinner. Below decks the stench was almost intolerable, but they had to eat. Ole had not yet returned, but might be expected at any moment now. Sue found a store of potatoes which were good food, and fat back which was not. She lit a fire, hoping that Ole would have the forethought to bring a piece of fresh meat from the village he had visited.

A sudden low cry of alarm from Chick brought Sue flying up on deck. There, rounding No Man's Point, she beheld the stubby grey shape of an eagle boat with the ominous figures 147 painted in huge dimensions on her bow.

Sue's arms dropped helplessly to her sides, and a groan of bitter chagrin was forced from her. All her brave plans came tumbling down like a house of cards. She could have railed aloud at the general cussedness of life; the incurable childishness of men; the malevolence of luck; but all she said was, to Earl:

"Well, you see what you've done!"

"What does it matter?" said Earl, with a shrug of bravado. "It's all of a piece with our luck!"

Sue roused herself. "It matters something to me!" she cried with spirit. "I'm not going to give up! . . . Listen, you men! When these fellows come aboard, let me talk to them, do you hear? You, all of you, refuse to answer their questions until I get my story out. Then you support that."

"What does it matter . . . ?" Earl began again.

But on this occasion even the sullen Beetle rallied to Sue's support. "Aah, let her do the talkin'," he growled. "No man can equal a woman at *that* game!"

Earl acquiesced with a shrug.

A moment later, however, when the other two were out of hearing, he approached Sue, and mumbled with a hangdog air, “Say, Sue, I’m sorry I appeared to go against you. I was just so sore I couldn’t see straight. I just want to say . . . You’re the best man amongst us, Sue.”

She flashed a brilliant smile on him. “All right, old top! I’ll do what I can to save the ship. We’re in bad so far already we’ve nothing to lose!”

XXVIII

THE BUZZARD AND THE CHIMPANZEE

THE eagle boat was about the same size as the pungy, but drew considerably more water. She felt her way cautiously into the cove with a sounding line going continuously. They could hear the engine room telegraph within her hull. Upon her bridge, alongside the blue-clad skipper, were to be seen two figures in neat city clothes, who looked strangely out of place in that lovely sun-drenched wilderness of green water, creamy sand and tangled verdure. As the vessel drew closer the faces of these two resolved themselves into the cadaverous features of Strowlger and the brutal, hairy phiz of Croker.

“The Buzzard and the Chimpanzee,” murmured Sue.

Finding he had plenty of water, the skipper did not drop an anchor, but manœuvred his craft directly alongside the *Esmeralda*. During this operation, Strowlger and Croker looked down on them with lofty contempt. The one was chewing a cigar; the other had a cigarette drooping from a corner of his mouth. It was obvious that they had not recognized Earl and Sue in their old clothes.

When the vessels came together, the two detectives jumped down on the deck of the *Esmeralda*. With scarcely a glance at her crew, Strowlger said in a grating voice:

“Throw off those hatch covers!”

The three men instinctively looked at Sue for orders. Sue made a little gesture of negation with her forefinger, and nobody moved.

“Do you hear what I say?” demanded Strowlger, looking at them then. “Which one of you calls himself the skipper of this tub?”

“You can deal with me as the skipper,” said Earl coolly.

The moment he spoke, Strowlger recognized him. The man’s cadaverous eyes glowed; he positively turned pale with joy, and a hideous grin overspread his face. But true to the code of a detective, he attempted to disguise the fact that he had been taken by surprise. He pulled his partner aside, and whispered to him. The younger man had less self-command.

“Darrah!” he cried, so all could hear; and shot an astonished glance over his shoulder. “Yes, and that’s the girl, too!” he added excitedly.

Strowlger affecting the greatest coolness, spoke up to the bridge of the eagle boat. "Captain, we'll take this hooker in tow! We have found the man we're after."

But he could not altogether conceal his savage exultation. Striding up close to Earl, he muttered out of the corner of his mouth: "You slick young blackguard, I've got you! You thought you were a little too clever to be caught, didn't you? But let me tell you this: *I always get my man!*"

"You sort of stubbed your toe on him this time, didn't you?" said Earl.

Strowlger turned away, affecting not to hear. "Get your anchor up!" he ordered curtly.

"What for?" asked Earl.

"What for? You're under arrest, and your vessel is seized! Is that clear to you?"

"What's the charge?" asked Earl coolly.

"The charge, hey? Having liquor in your possession!"

Earl's smile broadened. "I have no liquor in my possession."

"Sure, sure," said Strowlger, with heavy sarcasm.

"Look for yourself," said Earl. "Any fool could see that we were riding light."

A nasty doubt attacked Strowlger. Again he ordered the hatch covers removed; and this time Beetle and Chick ran to do his bidding. The two detectives peered into the dark hole of the after hatch with long faces. To satisfy themselves they jumped down. Sue's men waited for them to reappear with anticipatory grins. The detectives made their way forward below, and came up through the main hatch. At the sight of their bitter chagrin, Earl and his mates (but not Sue) roared with laughter. To witness the discomfiture of their enemies provided some slight compensation for all they had lost. The detectives heightened the joke by making believe to look as if they had not heard the laughter. They darted into the fo'c'sle; they ran back along the deck, and descended into the cabin. Not a bottle rewarded their search.

Strowlger's face was livid with rage when he reappeared. "What have you done with it?" he shouted.

Earl merely smiled.

The detective shook a forefinger within an inch of his nose. "I know you took a cargo out of Norfolk!" he cried. "You got it out of the *Cassandra*! What have you done with it?"

"It appears to me that's up to you to find out," said Earl.

Strowlger was at a complete loss. He visibly ground his teeth. He had been so sure that he had his man! He and Croker consulted apart. Croker, with a glance at the battered faces of the men aboard, was heard to say: "They've been in a fight." Finally they appeared to make up their minds.

Strowlger swaggered and sneered. "You're under arrest," he said to Earl. "I've got plenty of evidence. Go aboard the eagle boat."

Sue, sitting on the cabin trunk, was taking everything in with an inscrutable face. She could see Ole Bierstedt approaching up the sound in the motor-boat. She sent him a little private wireless through the air, warning him to keep away. Ole must have got it; or perhaps when he saw the eagle boat lying alongside the *Esmeralda* he needed no other message; at any rate he chugged across the mouth of the cove without pausing, and disappeared up the river.

Sue now intervened in the proceedings. Coming forward with a face of distress, she said in a trembling voice: "Oh, don't take him away! I'll tell the truth!"

Her friends stared at her, open-mouthed, this was so unlike Sue.

"Will you tell me where the stuff is?" Strowlger demanded eagerly.

Sue avoided a direct answer. "I'll tell all!" she said, "if you'll let him go."

"All right," he said, with an ugly smile. "You're free, Darrah. Now, girl!"

"This is not our vessel," said Sue. "Our vessel and her cargo was seized from us last night by a robber called Luis Figeroa."

"Ha!" exclaimed Strowlger, exchanging a glance with his partner. "What was her cargo?"

"A lot of boxes," said Sue cautiously. "I couldn't swear to what was in them."

Her friends concealed their grins.

"That's all right, I know what was in them," said Strowlger. "Where did this happen?"

"Up Tonger's River, back of here. Figeroa had followed us all the way from Norfolk in this vessel. Our skipper ran into the river at dark, hoping to give him the slip, but he followed us and . . ."

"Wait a minute," interrupted Strowlger. "Where is your skipper?"

"Gone," said Sue.

"Gone where?"

“I don’t know. There were seven men aboard. After the fight there were only four. One is below, sick.”

“And what became of Figeroa, according to your account?”

“After the fight he sailed south.”

“How do you know that?” demanded Strowlger, with a disagreeable smile. He thought he had her there.

“Because they carried me off with them,” said Sue blandly.

“Then how did you escape?”

“They anchored in a cove, and went ashore to have what they called a big drunk . . .”

“On your cargo?” suggested Strowlger, sneering.

“I didn’t see where they got it,” said Sue innocently. “They left me alone on the punga, and I took the skiff and escaped. I rowed back, and found this vessel adrift in the river with these men tied up aboard her. I cut them free and we dropped anchor in here; that’s all.”

All this, being so close to the truth, had a very convincing ring, and Strowlger was impressed, in spite of himself. “Where is this cove you tell of?” he asked.

“I don’t know exactly,” said Sue. “I had to row three or four miles to get back here. I heard them say they were going to Neal’s Island to-day. They had two badly wounded men on board they wanted to put in the hospital there.”

“Where is the skiff you say you escaped in?”

“Tied up astern here.”

Strowlger put a hundred cunning questions to Sue with the object of tripping her up; but Sue’s story was too strongly buttressed by the truth to be shaken. His questions only enabled her to add a hundred more convincing details. The negro was carried up on deck. His wounds and the battered faces of the other men offered mute corroboration of Sue’s tale. Moreover, in the cabin they found evidence that Figeroa had been living aboard the vessel.

Finally the two detectives retired a few paces to consult together.

“She’s lying,” said Croker; “take it from me.”

“In what way?” demanded Strowlger.

“Well, I admit you didn’t catch her out anywhere, but it’s a matter of principle with these people not to tell us agents the truth.”

“Sure, I know that. But in this case they’ve lost out, see? They’re sore. They don’t want the hi-jackers to get away with the stuff. That’s human nature.”

“But they must know if we get the stuff we can convict them through it.”

“This is how I figure it,” said Strowlger; “while we go after the hi-jackers they’re countin’ on makin’ their own getaway. But I’ll put a spoke in that.”

“There’s one thing,” said Croker, “there’s no use takin’ them in without we get the stuff too. It would on’y make fools out of us.”

“You’re right,” said Strowlger, “but the stuff can’t be far. I’ll get them and their stuff too!”

He came back with his gaunt face radiating satisfaction. “All right, my girl,” he said. “If you’re tellin’ me the truth, it’ll count in your favour. But if you’ve been lyin’ to me, God help you! It’ll on’y take us three hours to run down to Neal’s Island and back. Get aboard the eagle boat, all of you.”

“But you promised,” said Sue in dismay, “you promised if I told, you wouldn’t arrest us.”

“Oh, all right,” said Strowlger, with his ugly smile, “if you prefer to wait for me aboard this stinkin’ tub it’s all the same to me. . . . Hey, Captain!” he called aboard the eagle boat, “send me four men and let them bring their knives.”

When the sailors jumped aboard the pungy, Strowlger said with sneering jocularly: “Untie the sails and cut the lacing. Throw the canvas aboard the eagle boat. When you’ve done that, make their motor-boat and skiff fast to our stern. We’ll just lame the heels of these amachure pirates so we’ll be sure of findin’ them when we come back.”

The sailors, laughing loudly at Strowlger’s pleasantry, set to work as he bid them. Sue, looking on with a perfectly inscrutable face, thought: “Laugh, boys! I’ve got a better joke than yours!” She avoided looking at her friends for fear they might all burst out laughing together, and give the snap away. Strowlger’s last act was to nail two signs to the masts of the *Esmeralda* notifying all and sundry that the vessel had been seized by the United States Government.

Strowlger finally boarded the eagle boat with derisive gestures of farewell.

“Don’t give him the razz!” whispered Sue out of the corner of her mouth; “or he’ll smell a rat!”

So with pretended glum faces they watched the eagle boat steam out, towing the two small boats. Strowlger was waving his hand to them from the bridge. Once they were out of sight around the point, what a change aboard the *Esmeralda*! Their pent-up feelings broke loose. They did a war dance on the deck. It was a glorious reaction from despair. Even the negro appeared to understand what had happened. They gazed at Sue almost with adoration.

“Who says our luck has failed us?” cried Sue, pluming herself. “Did you ever see anything work out more prettily?”

“Sue, you’re a wonder!” cried Earl. “I never saw a richer piece of comedy!”

In a few minutes Ole Bierstedt rejoined them in the second motor-boat. He had been watching from a place of concealment. He had to be told the whole story with more yells of laughter.

Sue cut it short. “Look here, you fellows! We’ve got to eat, and beat it! Three hours seems like a long time, but we’ve plenty to do. We’ve got to be hidden away before the eagle boat heaves in sight again!”

XXIX

THE CUTTING-OUT EXPEDITION

IT was a few minutes past noon before they were ready to start; but the tide had not yet turned. The breeze held light and steady from the south.

“We’ll be able to put sail on the *Four Sisters* when we get her out of the little bay,” said Ole.

“We got to get her out first,” remarked Beetle.

“Who doubts our luck now?” cried Sue.

Beetle’s gloomy forebodings were shouted down.

Sue looked at Clipper speculatively. The negro was slowly recovering; but was not yet of much use to them. “Shall we leave him here till we come back?” asked Sue.

“No, fetch him along,” said Ole. “He may be cuckoo, but he can lean his weight against the windlass just the same.”

“I need a knife,” said Sue. “A dozen times within the past twenty-four hours I’ve needed a knife.”

“Take Clipper’s,” said Ole.

The negro handed it over good-humouredly. Sue also had the little pistol tucked inside her dress; but she did not call attention to it. A sufficient supply of iron bars, clubs and such-like weapons was stowed in the motor-boat. They filled her tank with gasoline, and took along an extra five gallon can to be prepared for all emergencies. Finally the cooked dinner was handed in to save precious minutes, and they pushed off.

They ate their fried fat back and boiled potatoes with a good appetite while chugging up the wide sunny reach behind Beekman’s Island. It was like a picnic. Everybody aboard was in high spirits except Beetle. Beetle eyed the clubs in the bottom of the boat with a strong distaste. He had not much stomach for that kind of work; the tongue was his weapon. Chick, the smallest man in the party, was the most pugnacious.

“I on’y hope I get one good lick at Baldy, that’s all,” he said. “I’ll moralize him!”

“Go on!” said Earl, grinning. “Baldy could swallow you with one bite!” All trace of Earl’s glooms had disappeared.

Sue was thinking with a little pain at her heart: New York would have enjoyed this part!

Said Ole: "Fellows, I votes that we elect Sue in charge of this here operation, so she can keep an eye on everything while we're putting our shoulders to it."

This was carried enthusiastically. Sue accepted it with a little private smile. She was thinking: Captain of the Rum-Runners! What would they say in the County if it ever comes out!

"Well, Cap'n, what's orders?" asked Ole.

"We'll look over the ground first," said Sue prudently.

How different a place looks by day! The shore of Beekman's Island, which to Sue the night before had been only a long black shadow, presented an endless diversity of outline in the sunlight. It was honey-combed with creeks, as they are called, though they were more properly pools inside the line of the beach. Some of them had openings; others were closed by the sand; some were deep and black; others filled with marsh grass, and gay with big pink and white mallows. Blue and green herons frequented the pools, with an occasional white heron, dazzling against the greenery; sure sign that these waters were rarely troubled by man. Kingfishers dipped and chattered.

By daylight it was easy to see how the boozy steersman had run the *Four Sisters* aground. In the belief that he was still in the river he had been closely following the starboard shore, and that shore had led him right into the little bay. It had a wide mouth, but was closed part way in by a point running out from the other side, which hid the bottle part within. This point, like all the surrounding shores, was low, but it was covered with a dense growth of pine. As they approached it, Sue gave word to shut off the engine; and picked up an oar to scull in.

"If we can, we want to see them first," she said.

All fell silent as they approached the point; their hearts were beating fast. When the little bay opened up inside, they saw the *Four Sisters* lying there, bowsprit to the beach, and a murmur of relief and satisfaction escaped them all.

"I never expected to see her again," said Ole.

His experienced eye told him at once that his vessel had no buoyancy. "She's still aground," he said; "but not very high. We can get her off, if we're not interfered with."

On the beach ahead of the puny, a dozen or more clumsy dark shapes were scattered about in the sand anyhow. They looked like nothing in the

world but what they were—drunken men, an insult to the beautiful, natural surroundings. Only one of them was sitting up nursing his knees; and even at the distance they had no difficulty in recognizing the fat body of Figeroa.

He saw them at the same moment that they saw him. Scrambling to his feet with the extraordinary quickness that was characteristic of him, he ran about from figure to figure, shouting hoarsely, and trying to kick them into activity. Some he could not rouse; some fell over again like dead as soon as he had roused them; but four or five got to their feet. Sick and sorry as they no doubt were, their heads were clear enough; when Figeroa pointed out the approaching motor-boat, they knew what to do. Led by Figeroa they all plunged into the water.

The instant Figeroa had got to his feet, Sue gave the word to start the engine, and a weird race to the pungy began. Sue anxiously counted her chances. Six men were plunging through the water, whereas she had but five; of whom one was still groggy from the punishment he had received the night before; one had no stomach for a fight; and one in size was hardly larger than a boy. However, she soon saw that her party would gain the ship first. Having possession of the deck would give them an immense advantage. Figeroa's men could only climb aboard by the bobstays forward.

The motor-boat reached the pungy; and the men scrambled aboard. Leaving them to run forward, Sue made a line fast from the stern of the motor-boat to the stern of the pungy, and started the engine again. The line tautened with a jerk. Sighting by two trees on the shore, Sue anxiously watched for results. But her sights did not change position by so much as a hair's breadth; the pungy was still fast in the sand.

A derisive cheer, and shouts of laughter from the deck, caused her to shut off the engine, and clamber on board the pungy. Running to the bows she beheld a comical enough sight. Figeroa and his men were stalled a few yards from the pungy, up to their necks in water. They had forgotten the difference that the rising tide would make. When they went ashore the water had only reached to their armpits. There they stood, impotently brandishing their arms above their heads, and launching terrific curses. Sue's men shouted and howled with laughter. Little Chick rolled on the deck, holding his ribs. Beetle became very brave.

“Back to the shore! Back to the shore!” shouted Figeroa. “They're not off yet! We'll get them!”

The whole half-dozen of them turned tail, and splashed for the shore, pursued by jibes from the *Four Sisters*.

“Yump, Yon, yump! Yeh kin do it in two yumps!”

“Hey, wait a minute, and we’ll pitch yeh a coupla life preservers!”

“You could do it if you rode each other’s shoulders!”

“Hey, Fatty, git a pair of water-wings!”

“Git a porpoise!”

And so on.

“Cut it out, fellows!” cried Sue. “We’re wasting time!”

“Ah, what can they do?” said Beetle.

“They can do what they ought to have done long ago,” said Sue; “build a raft.”

Ole and the others then set to work with a will. Everybody felt fine. There were two anchors left on board the *Four Sisters*. They unshipped one from its cable, and bent a hawser to the ring instead. Sue brought the motor-boat up to the bows, and the anchor was carefully loaded aboard. Sue and two men carried it a couple of hundred feet astern of the pungy, and cast it overboard. Meanwhile the others paid the hawser along the deck, and out between the stern bits. Sue put her two men back on board, and all hands manned the windlass. Sue, meanwhile, made the motor-boat fast to the pungy’s stern again, and started the engine to help out.

All this took time, and the men ashore were not idle. Sue kept the tail of an eye upon them while she worked. There were plenty of fallen dead trees under the bank, and they had carried an axe ashore the night before to chop firewood. One chopped while others carried the logs down to the water; still others lashed them roughly together with grape vine. Their cold bath had evidently freshened Figeroa’s men, who worked with a feverish energy. They succeeded in waking two more of the sleepers, increasing the odds by so much against Sue’s party.

Only four men could man the windlass. It was a heart-breaking job. As the full strain came upon the hawser, the anchor suddenly broke its hold; caught; broke again. The sweating men groaned in bitterness. It was clear to them all that the sandy floor of the bay would not afford sufficient purchase to haul the pungy off. In a moment the tables were completely turned on them. The men on shore, seeing what had happened, sent up a cheer, and redoubled their efforts upon the raft. It appeared to be nearly ready now.

Sue climbed aboard the pungy, and ran forward to put heart into her men. “Quick! the second anchor!” she cried. “One almost did it! Two will surely do the trick!”

The whole performance of unshipping the anchor, bending a rope to it, and carrying it astern in the motor-boat had to be repeated. With too much

haste they lost time; fouling the lines, and colliding with each other. They cursed each other, and their own clumsiness. Tears of impatience were rolling down Chick's cheeks. Every man was working with one eye on the raft.

"Steady! Steady!" implored Sue. "Keep your mind on your job! I'll watch Figeroa's gang!"

They got the anchor overboard at last, and hastened back to the puny. Six hands were now required at the windlass: four to work the handles, and one to each hawser to take in the slack. Before they got the full strain on the lines, the raft was launched. It bore up the eight men dry shod. With shouts of triumph they pushed out with poles towards the *Four Sisters*.

"Listen, men!" said Sue. "The motor-boat is our weak point. If they seize that they'll have us where we had them before! I'll have to keep her out of their way, while you stay aboard."

"Go ahead!" said Ole grimly. "We'll hold the ship!"

Sue sprang into the motor-boat, and starting the engine, sheered off into deep water a little way, shut off her power, and stood watching the course of events. Figeroa's men poled their raft close amidships of the *Four Sisters* where she was lowest to the water. But before they touched her side they stopped. Indeed, they were at pains to hold her off a yard or so with their poles. For along the rail of the puny Sue's five men were lined up each armed with a club or an iron bar, and all with murder in their eyes. Even the dazed negro knew what was required of him now; as for Beetle, he was rendered desperate by fear.

Sue, as she watched, perceived that the odds were not so unequal as they might have seemed. Figeroa's men were hampered by their own numbers; by the unsteadiness of their footing; by the fact of being at least four feet lower than the men on deck. Not more than half of them could come into action at a time; because unless they kept their weight evenly distributed over their logey craft, she would have rolled under and pitched them off.

They made some unsteady passes with their poles at the defenders; but it was child's play to avoid the thrusts of these clumsy weapons. Earl and Ole managed to seize a pole, and after a sharp struggle, obtained possession of it. In *their* hands it was a dangerous weapon, for any man on the raft who was struck by it must certainly have been knocked overboard. Three of Figeroa's men got hold of it simultaneously. The raft rolled and tipped dangerously; the others flung themselves down in the attempt to steady it. They finally recovered their pole, but did not attempt to use it again.

“All together!” shouted Figeroa. “Shove up against her side, and make a spring for it together! They can’t hurt yeh!”

He was not obeyed.

“Come aboard! Come aboard!” taunted Earl. He made his club whistle.

A complete deadlock resulted. Every man on the raft was aware that if he laid a hand on board the pungy’s rail, it would instantly be smashed by a cruel blow. They stood, separated by a yard or so, glaring at each other with faces distorted by rage. They did not curse each other now; the strain was too intense. Some faces were fixed in an awful smile; some worked as if about to weep; some were deathly pale and some crimson. There was no reason why this should not have continued indefinitely; each party had the other *stopped*; for while Figeroa’s men could not get aboard, no more could Sue’s men get forward to the windlass. Sue saw that it was up to her to create a diversion.

Now the raft had been very hastily slung together, and from the butt ends of the logs which formed it, broken root ends stuck up in the air. In these Sue saw her opportunity. She made a slip-knot in the end of a line, and took a couple of half hitches around the towing post of the launch. Then starting her engine, she made a wide circle around, and came back alongside the raft, heading towards the mouth of the bay. Some of the men aboard the raft watched her sullenly; others refused to take their eyes from their enemies aboard the pungy.

When she came abreast of the raft, say fifteen feet away, Sue suddenly picked up her loop and cast it. It caught on a couple of projecting roots, and Sue pulled the knot tight. She steered her craft by leaning against the tiller. One of the men aboard the raft cast himself down to throw the rope off, but Sue had made it short on purpose, and almost immediately it snapped taut. The raft received a jerk that bowled over the standing men like ninepins. Several toppled into the water; but all except one managed to cling to the raft. Sue had a brief glimpse of one floundering a yard or two away from safety, and supposed that he would drown. She had no time to worry about him then. Not until later did she learn that Ole threw him a rope, and hauled him aboard the pungy where he was made prisoner.

Meanwhile she was slowly pulling the heavy raft away from the vessel’s side. Roars of triumph went up from the deck of the *Four Sisters*. On board the raft all was confusion. The man nearest the rope, instead of cutting it, braced his feet against the projecting roots and strained to haul it in. No doubt he had some dim idea that he was going to capture both Sue and the motor-boat by this means. Figeroa, more perspicacious, screamed at him to

cut it, but he hung on with a bulldog tenacity. Two other men joined him; and the three of them slowly hauled it in hand over hand. Sue affected not to notice what they were doing; but inwardly she rejoiced. She thought: In five minutes I'll have them where I want them! An open knife lay on the thwart beside her.

When they had hauled themselves up to within a couple of yards of the motor-boat's stern, she picked up the knife. The taut rope parted almost at a touch. The three men who were clinging to it fell over backwards with the loose end in their hands. The motor-boat shot away. When others on the raft picked up their poles they discovered that they were hopelessly out of their depth. The men aboard the *Four Sisters* hugged each other, and danced in a wild pantomime of joy. Figeroa screamed curses at his luckless men, and tore at his hair.

Sue returned to the puny. Her men greeted her with looks of positive adoration. "Sue, you're a wonder!" they cried. They all manned the windlass again. Meanwhile Figeroa had lined up his men along each side of the raft, and had set them to work paddling with their hands. It was a comical sight. They made the water fly; but with all that dead weight below the water line, they might as well have attempted to paddle a battleship. After a good laugh, Sue's men were able to give their sole attention to getting the *Four Sisters* off.

The arms of the windlass worked up and down like a walking beam, or like the gear of a handcar. Ole and Beetle took one side; Earl and Clipper the other; Sue and Chick took in the lines. It was gruelling work. The four men grunted and sobbed under the strain. Sue got two trees in line on the shore and watched them. They never changed position, yet the lines continued to come in an inch at a time. It was a contest between dead matter and living human thews.

"Something's got to give!" gasped Ole.

But it seemed as if the men would give out first. They were obliged to pause often to rest. Earl became white around the lips under the strain.

"Let me relieve you," said Sue. "I'm strong."

"You stay where you are!" snarled Earl.

Almost as he said it, he keeled over in a dead faint.

"Cut the prisoner loose," said Sue.

Ole led the man forward. "Put your back into it!" he commanded him savagely; "or I'll chuck you back to the fishes!"

He was a brawny young scoundrel with the shoulders of a prize-fighter. Anxious to curry favour with his present masters, he pumped with a will.

But the other three were about all in. And still the two trees had not changed position.

“The tide’s falling,” muttered Beetle. He was ready to give up.

Sue understood then how the master of a ship may be tempted to strike a man down. To hearten them she cried: “Heave, lads! Heave! She’s moving!”

It gave them courage for a last spurt. This time she did move. All felt it.

“We got her going!” cried Ole. “Take a rest, boys!”

Little by little the heart-breaking strain eased up. Finally, with a little shiver, the *Four Sisters* became buoyant under their feet.

“We’re off!” roared Ole; and threw his cap into the air.

XXX

A NEW ADVERSARY

WHEN the discomfited hi-jackers huddled on the raft saw that the *Four Sisters* floated, they changed their tune. They shouted, pleaded, whined for help. It was a contemptible chorus, and to do him credit, Figeroa did not join it, but sat in silence clasping his knees, waiting in perfect stoicism for whatever might come. Realizing finally that their confused bawling was not likely to get them anywhere, the others put forward one of their number as a spokesman.

“We give up,” he shouted. “Take us aboard, and we’ll work your ship for you. You wouldn’t leave us here to burn up in the sun, would yeh? or die of thirst and hunger? We’re human like yourselves. Take us aboard! Just put us on the mainland where we can walk somewheres!”

This placed Sue in a bitter quandary. They still far outnumbered her own men, and prudence suggested she ought to give them a wide berth; but on the other hand her woman’s nature was revolted by the idea of leaving them in such a pass. She looked at her men for help.

“Let ’em rot!” said Beetle.

But Earl, Ole and Chick said it was up to her to decide.

“What time is it?” asked Sue.

Ole consulted a watch as big as a small clock. “One-thirty,” he said. “A lot seems to have happened, but it’s on’y an hour and a half since the eagle boat left us.”

“But we’ve got little enough time to get across the sound before they come in sight,” said Sue.

“We couldn’t do it anyhow,” said Ole. “Wind’s too light.”

“What are we going to do then?”

“Run up Tonger’s River.”

“That cost us pretty dear last night.”

“This time we’re goin’ right through. Near the head of the river there’s a side creek into Bedloe’s River, and so back into the Bay. Nobody would believe you could work a loaded puny through there, but I’ve been through. Anyhow, there’s no other course open to us. If we venture out into open water the eagle boat’ll have us within two hours.”

“Well, I’m going to take a chance in rescuing these men,” said Sue. “I couldn’t leave them here. I wouldn’t be able to sleep nights for thinking of them.”

Beetle was frankly disgusted. Earl and Ole looked dubious, but made no attempt to dissuade her.

“Earl, you and Beetle come with me, and we’ll parley with them,” said Sue.

They jumped in the motor-boat, and approaching near to the raft, shut off the engine.

“Look here, you men,” said Sue. “We’re willing to put you back on your own vessel which is anchored at the mouth of the river, a mile from here. But you’ll only be allowed to board the pungy one at a time; and you’ll have to let us tie your hands. Do you agree?”

Did they agree! What a change was to be seen in their sullen faces! Grins spread from ear to ear. They vociferously agreed to do anything Sue might say. Figeroa looked on in silent contempt.

“All right,” said Sue. “Wait here until I fetch those stiffes from the beach.”

Of the six men ashore, two were now sitting up in a dazed condition; the others lay like the dead. The two who could walk were commanded to get in the motor-boat. Earl and Ole carried the others between them, and rolled them over the gunwale. They lay in a heap like sacks in the bottom. They were put aboard the pungy. Then Sue went after the raft and towed it alongside.

They took their measures cannily. Earl, Ole and Clipper lined up along the rail with clubs. Beetle and Chick took up positions behind them with lengths of rope ready to tie each man’s hands as he was passed through. Finally Sue stood on the rail to one side, clinging to the shrouds in such a position that she could command the whole party. She produced her gun.

“If any one of you tries to play a trick on us I’ll shoot,” she said.

The appearance of the firearm, the only one in all the party, created a sensation. All of Figeroa’s men had had proof that Sue was perfectly capable of using it. Like sheep, they meekly climbed aboard the pungy one at a time, and submitted to having their hands bound behind them. They sat down where they were bid in a long row against the starboard rail.

Ten minutes later the *Four Sisters* was sailing wing and wing down the broad reach behind Beekman’s Island. The wind was light, and the kicker chugged noisily astern to help out. Every minute was precious. Sue sat on deck, forward of the cabin trunk, keeping a sharp eye on the line of

prisoners, her gun in her hand. They were a battered and a tattered lot; the majority of them mere lads. They looked deathly sick as a result of their debauch the night before; and they joked among themselves to hide how badly they felt. Like schoolboys they begged Sue for cigarettes or for food, without the least expectation of receiving it.

Figeroa sat at the after end of the line, and therefore nearest to Sue. He smiled and nodded at Sue in an attempt to ingratiate himself; but his pig eyes were cold and watchful.

“You’re a clever girl!” he said fawningly.

Sue shrugged.

“I’m a clever feller myself,” he went on. “You wouldn’t never have got ahead of me if I’d had anythin’ better’n these skunks to back me.” He cast a look of hatred down the line of his men.

“Maybe not,” said Sue.

He leaned forward confidentially. “Looka here,” he said, “see if you kin git Earl Darrah to take me along with him, see? I’ll make it worth your while. I’m sick o’ this hi-jackin’ game. Yeh got the world against yeh! I’d like to git into reg’lar boot-leggin’. There you got some standin’. And say, I’d be a vallyble man to Earl. Me and him could work together fine. For I know the shady side of this business from A to Z. Him to handle the kid glove end, and me to do the dirty work. Me, Luis Figeroa, I’m a thorn in the side of the rum-runners, I am. Here’s his chance to make a deal with me, see? Say, open it to him, will yeh?”

“There he is,” said Sue. “Why not talk to him yourself.”

“Aah!” said Figeroa, “he’d just turn me down for a grandstand play. These things have got to be approached cautious-like. You just drop a word to him that I’m open to an offer, see?”

“Well, I’ll think about it,” said Sue coolly.

Figeroa glared at her poisonously.

At the mouth of the cove, the *Four Sisters*’ sails were lowered, and she was allowed to drift alongside the other puny.

“Hop aboard!” said Ole to the prisoners.

“Ain’t yeh gonna untie our hands?” demanded one.

“You can do that to each other after we’re gone.”

With their hands tied behind them, they began to hop from the gunwale of one vessel to the deck of the other like fleas. Only Figeroa held back.

“The sails are off her!” he cried. “The boats are gone! You better have left us on our raft!”

“Sorry, we haven’t got time to go back for it,” said Sue.

“Did you think we were going to leave you free to prey on us just as before?” asked Earl.

Figeroa, seeing that his men were out of hearing, whispered to Earl: “You better keep me with yeh, Darrah. I’d make a better partner than an enemy.”

“To hell with you!” said Earl contemptuously.

“In two minutes I could convince yeh . . .”

“Get over before I knock you over!”

Figeroa leaped to the deck of the *Esmeralda* with wonderful spryness, then turning, began to spray Earl with vitriolic curses. Earl laughed.

Ole was herding them all into the hold of the *Esmeralda*. “Jump, you frogs, jump!” he cried.

“Have you no bowels?” yelled Figeroa. “We’ll rot down there, tied up as we are, before they find us.”

“Don’t worry!” said Ole. “We’ve got an appointment here with the eagle boat in an hour from now. They’ll let you out. In with you!”

Figeroa had to jump after the others. Sue’s men put on the hatch covers that the prisoners might not by any possibility climb on each other’s shoulders to see which way the *Four Sisters* went.

Said Sue: “I’d like to be hovering overhead like a buzzard when Strowlger sees what he’s got.”

A few turns of the kicker brought them to the mouth of the cove. There the engine was shut off so that the sound of its explosions could not betray them to listeners. Sails were hoisted again, and they bore away around the point to port, and on up Tonger’s River. For the first three or four miles it flowed due south, if an inlet can be said to flow, and up this reach they were able to sail free. They kept an anxious watch astern. When they had put a couple of miles between them and the *Esmeralda*, they started the engine again. All on board breathed a sigh of relief when they lost themselves behind an easterly point before that stubby grey craft hove into view astern.

Thenceforward the river became narrow and winding. The sails had to be taken in again. They moved but slowly under the impulse of the kicker, for the tide was against them. Even in the sunlight this silent stream flowing between dark, unbroken walls of pine had a forbidding look. When Ole told Sue that they were approaching the cove where the fight had taken place, she shivered and went below. She was afraid of what she might see floating in the water there.

What a haven of refuge her neat little cabin seemed to her! She suddenly realized that she was dropping with sleep. She flung herself on her berth, careless now whether the door was locked or not, for every man aboard was her devoted slave.

When she awoke it was to find that four hours had passed. Coming on deck, she found the *Four Sisters* moored quietly alongside a cut bank in a narrow creek. A wide marsh faced them on the other side. Chick was getting supper, since Clipper's mental processes were not yet to be relied upon.

"Dead low water," explained Ole. "We have to lie to until the tide comes in at nine or ten o'clock. We left Tonger's River a couple of miles astern."

Supper was presently brought on deck. While they ate, they discussed their future prospects.

"The Buzzard will guess that we came up Tonger's River," suggested Sue.

"He'll know we did," said Ole. "Because he could see that we didn't sail out into open water; and he'd know we couldn't beat up behind Beekman's Island against the wind. There wasn't any other place for us to go."

"Then how do you know they're not right on our heels?" asked Sue. "Of course the eagle boat couldn't follow into a place like this; but she's got a motor-boat to send after us."

"Because they'd have to search every creek and cove on the way up to make sure we didn't slip out behind them," said Ole. "That takes time. They couldn't get up as far as this before to-morrow, and we'll be gone then."

"What's in front of us?" asked Sue.

"Between three or four miles of this creek; then Bedloe's River, a fair, deep stream running between cultivated lands. At its mouth, five miles below, is the village of Goldsboro. It's a biggish place and a favourite anchorage; they's always a slew of boats lyin' there."

"Hm!" said Sue, "that will be our difficulty then; to get past Goldsboro."

"Why should it?" said Ole, "if the eagle boat's in Tonger's River behind us?"

"She's not the only chaser in the Bay," said Sue. "And she's got wireless to send out an alarm."

"Gosh!" said Ole. "I clean forgot about the wireless! You have a head on you, Sue!"

There was something intoxicating to Sue's vanity in the respectful and admiring looks of the men. In Earl's looks there was something warmer than respectful admiration. Into his black eyes, so bold in the beginning, so impudently assured when they looked at women, now came a stricken look when they dwelt on Sue. She felt her power.

"While the light holds," said Sue, "Chick ought to be painting a new name on this vessel."

"Another name?" said Ole. "The old girl will get confused."

"Call her *Brown-Eyed Sue*," said Earl, looking at a pair of brown eyes.

"Yes," said Sue dryly, "that would be a grand advertisement! It must be something plain and inconspicuous. How about *Liza Jane*?"

"*Liza Jane* it is," said Ole.

"Ole," said Sue, "if we've got to lie here for three or four hours, why don't you carry Beetle down to the village in the motor-boat, and let him mix with the sailors. If the eagle boat has sent out an alarm for us, he'd be sure to hear of it."

"Right!" said Ole. "I'll do that!"

Earl lowered his eyes to conceal the gleam of pleasure that sprang up in them. This meant that he and Sue would be left practically alone together all evening.

Later the two of them sat on the cabin trunk in the pleasant coolness, watching the glowing colours fade out of the western sky, across the wide green marsh. Chick was still busy with his painting; and Clipper was stretched out in the bow asleep.

For an hour Earl had been pouring out his feelings to Sue. It embarrassed the girl. It had been the element of mystery surrounding Earl which had attracted her in the first place; his air of confident assurance, his mocking smile. Now, finding that he was just an ordinary young man who had become infatuated with her, and who was *weaker than herself*, she felt sorry for him. He appealed to her maternal instincts; but the old thrill was gone.

"Sue, you've changed me entirely," he was saying. "Sometimes I wish I'd never met you. Maybe the old me wasn't much, but I was accustomed to him. I had doped out a sort of line for myself. I knew where I was. Why, I used to think I was a whale of a fellow, and nothing could get under my skin. Now all that is changed. I'm not so sure. I find myself looking at things from your point of view all the time. It's a terrible thing to rob a man of his self-confidence. Oh, Sue, I love you! Without you I feel myself only half a

man! If I thought you weren't going to stick to me after this voyage is over, I'd be ready to jump overboard!"

Sue was partly won by the pleading voice. She felt that she had cut herself off from her old life. She thought: This is an honest feeling, anyway. . . . This man is *mine!* . . . What more can a girl expect? . . . He's not what I dreamed of in a man, but maybe he's the best I shall get. . . .

"You will stick to me, won't you?" he begged.

"Wait until the voyage is over!"

"But can't you give me a little hint to keep my heart up?" he pleaded. "Just a word? I don't understand you. I never know what's going on behind that quiet smile of yours."

"Not a word!" said Sue.

"Sue," he went on, "I've got a big stake in this voyage. When I cash in on it, let's you and I hop on a big liner, and wander over the world together. Let's see the cities of Europe; let's see the East. Let's bid America a fond farewell and spend our lives seeing the strange places of the world!"

"Our lives? No!" said Sue. "I'd like to travel; but I'd like to come back, too. This is my country. Why should I turn my back on it?"

He turned away his head. He could not tell her, of course, what was tormenting his mind. He was not sure of her.

Between nine and ten o'clock they heard the motor-boat returning. It was then quite dark. Having made their craft fast astern, the two men came climbing aboard.

"Well, did you learn anything?" asked Sue.

"Too much," said Beetle sourly.

"What do you mean?" asked Earl sharply.

"The revenue cutter *Cayuga* is lying at anchor off Goldsboro," said Beetle. "I got into talk with a warrant officer in an ice-cream saloon. Strowlger wirelesslyed them to be on the watch for us in case we tried to slip out by Bedloe's River, and the warrant officer said they would lie over for a couple of days to cooperate with Strowlger. They're going to send a boat up Bedloe's River in the morning to look for us."

"Oh, God!" said Earl bitterly. "I might have known it! The dice are loaded against us!"

"What are we gonna do?" said Ole.

“There’s nothing we can do! We’re caught in a trap here with the eagle boat behind us, and the revenue cutter in front!”

“Well, we’re not going to wait here for them to come and take us,” said Sue sharply. “We must try to sneak past the *Cayuga* in the dark.”

Even the stout-hearted Ole was cast down now. “There ain’t but one chance in a thousand we can do it,” he said. “She’s got searchlights stuck all over her like the eyes of a fly!”

“Just the same, we’ll take that one chance,” said Sue.

XXXI

RUNNING THE GAUNTLET

THEY started the kicker at midnight. Ole Bierstedt, with his uncanny faculty for steering at night, carried them through the narrow creek without touching ground. He was timing their movements to take advantage of the outgoing tide in Bedloe's River. A light breeze still held from the south; and in the river they shut off the engine, and raised jib and mainsail. This was sufficient to furnish them with steerage way in the current. The *Four Sisters*—or, as she must now be called, the *Liza Jane*—moved down without lights, like some gigantic bird of night.

The whole ship's company, excepting Clipper, was gathered astern. They had not been long in the river before they saw certain pale flashes against the sky ahead. A groan of disappointment broke from them all.

"The revenue cutter is working her searchlights!"

"Aah!" said Beetle bitterly, "we might as well scuttle the pungy and abandon her!"

"We can always abandon her," said Sue. "Let's wait a bit."

Rounding the last point in the river, they beheld the lights of the village a mile ahead, and the lights of the vessels riding at anchor. From a dark spot in the centre of the river radiated two shafts of light, one to port, one to starboard. The searchlights were now at rest.

"If they'd keep 'em still we might sneak by," muttered Ole.

But presently the shafts of light began to sweep the water on either side, darting in and out between the anchored vessels like lithe animals in search of their prey.

"What are we gonna do?" said Beetle.

"Keep going," answered Sue.

"There's a big flat in the middle of the river," said Ole. "The revenue cutter is anchored in the port channel, close to the shoal."

"Which side shall we take?" asked Sue.

"Starboard channel, as near to the shore as we can. We'll be a third of a mile away from her there. And there's more wind on that side. We'll get a sailing breeze outside."

"What good is a breeze against steam," said Beetle.

“Well, I dunno,” said Ole. “Unless she thinks we’re gonna try to run it, maybe she wouldn’t have steam up. She’d send a boat after us, of course; but the boat wouldn’t have no searchlight. We got a chance; a slight chance.”

He edged the *Liza Jane* far over under the northerly shore. This was the side opposite the village. Presently he gave the order to lower the sails.

“With bare poles we don’t offer such a good mark to the searchlights,” he said.

Sue said suddenly: “The lighthouse at the mouth shows a red sector over here. We can’t weather the light with the wind in this quarter.”

“Don’t have to,” said Ole. “There’s nine foot of water on the bar at this tide. On’y steamboats have to go round the light.”

“I get you,” said Sue.

Ole ordered a lantern to be lighted, and hung ten feet above the deck.

“Unless they looked real sharp they could easy mistake us for an anchored vessel,” he explained. “But if they picked up a vessel without a light they’d know right away there was somepin queer.”

It was a slow business. As the estuary widened the tidal current slacked off, and their motion was scarcely perceptible. The only way they could tell that they moved was by sighting against the distant lights. The searchlights alternately swept the waters and came to rest. It seemed as if the searching was becoming more perfunctory now, and the periods of rest longer.

“They’ve been watching a good while,” said Ole. “They’re gettin’ careless.”

It was a cruel period of suspense for those aboard the *Liza Jane*. They stood together in a group astern, nobody saying a word. Sue could hear Earl breathing hard. He had the most at stake. Chick fidgeted like a child. Not a sound came to them from the sleeping village across the water; but the breeze brought to them very plainly the murmuring whine of the generators aboard the revenue cutter. Suddenly with startling distinctness came the sharp, nasal sound of the ship’s bell struck on deck; six bells.

The searchlight swept over them two or three times without pausing, causing them to catch their breaths sharply. The distance was great, and the watch perhaps careless. They were almost abreast of the cutter when the light finally picked them up and held them, turning night into day aboard the pungy. With a common impulse they cast themselves flat on the deck. It seemed to them as if every rope aboard their vessel must be shown up in the all-revealing glare; but as a matter of fact at a distance of a third of a mile, they could not have presented much detail to the watching eyes aboard the

cutter. For an age it seemed to Sue and her men, the light clung to them, and they made sure they were discovered.

“Hadn’t I better drop into the kicker and start the engine?” Sue murmured to Ole.

“Wait a bit!” he said. “They ain’t sure.”

The light passed on, and the blessed darkness enshrouded them. They breathed again. After sweeping back and forth a few times, the shaft of light came to rest, pointing ashore. It now crossed astern of them.

“Our chances is improving,” murmured Ole.

“Just the same,” said Sue, “the next time they pick us up, if they have their wits about them, they will know that we have moved. I’d better get into the kicker to be ready to start her.”

“All right,” said Ole.

Several minutes of harrowing suspense passed. Then a hand aboard the revenue cutter grasped the lever of the searchlight, and the white beam began to sweep back and forth again. It picked them up, and clung to them. The sound of an order given aboard the cutter came faintly down the wind. Suddenly the peaceful silence of the night was shattered by three hoarse toots on her whistle. They waited for no more. Sue spun the flywheel of the motor-boat, and the engine roared out. On deck Ole shouted an order to make sail.

Sue scrambled back on board the pungy to help with the sails. Jib, mainsail and foresail; all hands hauled and swung on the halyards. The breeze was momentarily increasing in strength; they had it fairly abeam. The white glare of light clung to them relentlessly, blinding them to what might be taking place aboard the cutter. The roar of their own engine deafened them to other sounds. Perhaps five minutes elapsed, a period of heart-breaking tension—under sails and kicker they were making about seven knots; then they made out the red eye and the green eye of a small boat bearing down on them upwards of half a mile astern. It was a relief to discover her; they knew then what they had to expect.

“We have a chance!” shouted Ole in great excitement. “I know the boats she carries. They can only do a little better than we’re doin’ now. We’ll be out of range of the searchlight before they can overhaul us!”

But the glare increased. It was evident that more than one light was beating on them now. More minutes passed. The exhaust of the engine roared out; the pungy heeled slightly under the freshening breeze. Looking forward, she presented a weird beauty in the unnatural white glare. Instead of lessening, the light increased, and they could no longer escape the

conviction that the cutter herself was under way and in pursuit of them. Chick, straining his eyes to pierce the glare that beat upon them from astern, averred that he could see her red and green lights. Their hearts sank.

“Wait a bit!” cried Ole. “If she goes around the light she may lose us yet. If she follows us across the bar she may stick!”

“She may send a shot aboard us,” said Beetle.

“Not unless she thinks she’s gonna lose us. Anyhow them fellas aboard the cutters is no great shakes gunnin’. They ain’t like the navy.”

Chick said that he could only see the cutter’s green light now.

“Then she’s goin’ round the lighthouse,” said Ole.

A minute or two later Chick said both red and green lights showed.

“Then her skipper’s takin’ a chance in follerin’ us acrost the bar!”

The red eye of the lighthouse was hauling abeam of them, a mile or so to the southward. Meanwhile the cutter was overhauling them fast. That they could tell by the increased height of the searchlights above the water. Apparently she had outdistanced her own motor-boat. Ole was taking sights by marks known to himself. A dark point of land was looming up close aboard the starboard bow.

“We’re over!” Ole said curtly. “Now let’s see what she’ll make of it!”

Ole kept his eyes fixed on his course, and on his illuminated sails; the others strained to pierce the glare astern. They could only guess at the moment when the cutter was over the bar. Suddenly there was a flash from her deck, an appalling explosion, and a shell whistled over their heads.

Ole knew what that meant. “She’s struck!” he yelled. “She sees us getting away!”

A numbing feeling of terror gripped Sue’s breast. To be under the fire of big guns! It was like nothing she had ever known. She pictured the tearing shell striking the puny. But she had no thought of yielding. A yell of fright escaped from Beetle.

“Bring her up! Bring her up! We can’t fight the guns!”

But Ole held to his course. “Stand by to pay out the sheets!” he ordered calmly.

Earl, Chick and Sue ran to do his bidding. The baleful red eye of the lighthouse suddenly turned white and clear.

“Pay out!” shouted Ole.

He let her head fall off, and they ran before the wind at an increased speed. When they changed their course they could see that the cutter was

immovable astern. Again that shattering explosion; the shell passed somewhere astern of them. As Sue came aft Ole said coolly:

“You can shut off the kicker now. . . . Chick, douse that lantern forward.”

A moment later they ran under the point of land, and the pitiless white glare could not follow them. The return of darkness was like salvation.

“Whew! that was as close a shave as I like to take!” said Ole, with a chuckle.

A few minutes later the lights of the motor-boat from the cutter appeared around the point. But those in the motor-boat could not possibly see the pungy now. Ole hauled in his sheets and bore away to the westward again. Presently Sue and her men had the satisfaction of seeing the motor-boat cross their stern, still seeking them to the northward. Sue, with the hideous crash of the guns still ringing in her ears, could not believe that they had actually escaped.

“Well, I’ve done my job,” said Ole cheerfully. “Where do we go from here, skipper?”

Sue pulled herself together. “All our enemies are on this side,” she said. “The way is clear to our landing-place. I say straight across the Bay to the mouth of the Pocomico. It’s not often that a vessel with wireless comes in there. And the Pocomico is the same as my backyard.”

“Right!” said Earl and Ole.

XXXII

THE WATCHER ON THE BEACH

WHEN TEMP WYE left the county he had not told anybody where he was going; consequently when he returned, he was not obliged to make any explanations. Such is the advantage of keeping a close tongue in one's head. Temp, as the heir of old John George Corbauld, was easily the most interesting figure in the county at the time, and his slightest movements provided the subject of discussion in every living-room from Absolom's Island to Lower Parrboro. But the gossipers had nothing to go upon, and could only fall back on the obvious. When Temp returned, a little whiter and sterner-faced, "more up in the air than ever," as his neighbours said, the good ladies shook their heads and said:

"Dissipation, my dear! You remember his father!"

Much against his will, Temp was forced to alter his whole way of life. It was cruelly hard to have to meet new problems, while one all-obliterating thought held possession of his brain, and like a burning core smouldered there night and day. He hired men to work his home place, and divided his time between overseeing them, and overseeing the labour on the big Corbauld place. Upon Lawyer Camalier's advice he bought a good car to facilitate his getting about. Temp hated it, because every time he looked at it he was reminded of how proud and happy he would have been could he have driven about in it with Sue at his side.

There were plenty of other pretty girls in the county who were ready to smile at Temp. And it was not all owing to the new car either; for Temp's handsome white face with the extraordinary lines of bitterness etched in it, his old-fashioned, stiff courtesy, his ominous quietude of manner, all rendered him a highly romantic figure in girls' eyes. They smiled in vain. Other women simply did not exist for Temp.

That trying woman, Temp's stepmother, chose to regard Temp's inheritance as a personal grievance. She went about the house with the air of a Christian martyr, ready to burst into tears upon the slightest word that he addressed to her. "I suppose I may expect to be shown the door, now," she repeated a dozen times a day, with variations.

Temp, exasperated beyond endurance, finally said: "Look here, Mother. Haven't I always taken the best care of you that I could?"

She was obliged to admit that he had.

“Well, then, just because I have more money why should I take any worse care of you?”

The tears overflowed. “Nobody wants an old woman around! It’s the way of the world!”

Temp went to the bank, paid off the mortgage on the Wye property, and duly transferred it to his stepmother. This was done dead against Lawyer Camalier’s advice. “Let her have the use of it during her lifetime,” he urged. “It is your family property; you should not let it pass into other hands.” But Temp would not listen.

When the deeds were presented to her, Mrs. Wye continued to weep. “What good is a farm to a lone woman? You will soon be leaving me!”

“I must live on the Corbauld place,” Temp explained patiently.

“And of course you don’t want me there!”

This was one sacrifice that Temp was not prepared to make. “No!” he said, with a firmness she could not mistake.

“Oh, I didn’t expect it! You will marry now!”

“No!” said Temp. “I shall live alone. Just like my Uncle!” A sudden rush of sympathy for that queer, crabbed old soul overcame him. “He knew!” Temp cried.

“Knew what?” demanded Mrs. Wye sharply.

Temp shook his head at the impossibility of explaining. “He was like me, I guess. People drive me wild! I’m not fit to live with anybody. Except negroes. They don’t interfere with you!”

“You talk like you hadn’t good sense . . .” Mrs. Wye began sharply.

Temp walked out of the room.

Lawyer Camalier was Temp’s best friend. The keen, dry little man was always businesslike. If he was aware of anything strange in Temp’s manner, he never betrayed the least consciousness of it; and Temp was grateful to him. But on one single occasion Lawyer Camalier failed him. They were conferring in the ugly bare sitting-room of the Corbauld house. The lawyer said, apropos of nothing which had gone before:

“Temp, you’ve got a great opportunity in this county.”

“What do you mean?” asked Temp, surprised.

“The county needs a leader. Your Uncle Edward Corbauld is sixty-seven years old. He’s looking around for a successor. Obviously, neither of his sons will do. But you are now one of the richest young men in the county; you’re on the right side in politics; you’ve got brains; you’re popular with the negroes. . . .”

He was interrupted by a grating laugh from Temp. He looked at the young man in an affronted manner. "What's the matter with you?" he demanded.

"I can't help it," said Temp. "It's just the idea of me leadin' anybody!"

"What's the matter with you?" repeated the lawyer.

"Everything!" said Temp.

The lawyer took off his glasses, and gesticulated with them. "Temp," he said kindly, "I never like to ask a man personal questions. My idea is, that a thing will come out when the time is ripe for it. I approve of a man, too, who keeps his personal matters to himself. But with the young—well, sometimes an old feller can save a young man a world of trouble by a word at the right time. You've been actin' like you had a barb festerin' under your skin. What's the trouble, my boy?"

The kindly voice was unendurable to Temp. He sprang up. "Let me be! Let me be!" he cried in a high sharp voice. "I put a good face on things, don't I? What more can anybody ask of me? What is it to anybody else if I'm goin' through hell?"

"Well," said the lawyer dryly, "for a young man who's just come into his fortune, you are certainly talkin' strange!"

Temp plumped down in his chair again. "That's just it!" he said. "It came too late! About an hour too late, to be exact. It's like a rotten joke that somebody played on me!" He suddenly spread his arms on the table and buried his head between them. "Oh, God! I wish I was dead!" he groaned. "I wish I was lyin' beside my uncle under six feet of earth!" His sleepless nights and tormented days exacted their price at last. His broad shoulders were shaken by hard, dry sobs.

Lawyer Camalier was horribly disconcerted. He arose, foolishly twirling his glasses between thumb and finger, and humming a little tune, the while his face was tragic with unspoken sympathy. He went to the window and looked out, drumming on the pane. He had a beautiful tact. He said nothing.

After awhile Temp raised his head, showing a shamed and tear-stained face. "Sorry I made a fool of myself," he mumbled, smiling with quivering nostrils. "Shan't occur again."

The lawyer made angry, inarticulate noises in his throat.

". . . I suppose you've guessed what's the matter with me," Temp presently went on, averting his eyes. "Or you will guess soon. If you guess it for yourself I suppose I've no right to ask you to keep it to yourself."

“What do you think I am?” demanded Lawyer Camalier heatedly. “Don’t I spend my life keeping the personal matters of this county to myself? Did you ever hear me take part in county gossip?”

“No,” said Temp. “You’re a white man. . . . If the people around here looked at me as if they *knew*, I just couldn’t stand it. I’d have to clear out.”

They made haste to talk about business matters. After a time the lawyer said:

“Temp, you ought to make a will. Of course you’re a very young man, but accidents happen. You wouldn’t want to leave your estate to be settled by the courts.”

“I have made a will,” said Temp quietly.

“Without consulting me?” said the lawyer.

“Sorry,” mumbled Temp. “No offence meant. It was such a personal matter.”

“Where did you learn how to make a will?”

“I just copied my Uncle’s,” said Temp. “You said that was all right.”

Lawyer Camalier cleared his throat and changed the subject again.

He wanted Temp to move into the Corbauld house immediately so that he could keep a proper eye on the servants. But Temp declined to do so without giving any reasons for it. Every night Temp went home and put up, more or less patiently, with the lamentations of his stepmother; and every night he slept in his own bed.

That is to say, he made believe to sleep in his own bed. As a matter of fact, every night, as soon as his stepmother’s snores began to roll sonorously through the house, he crept downstairs in his stocking feet, let himself softly out by the screen door, and put on his shoes outside. Every night he went down to the State road, crossed it, and passed along the farm road through the Rousby place and down to the little cove where the old wharf had stood.

There he took up his place. He knew that on one of these nights Sue and Darrah were going to land there, and he intended to be waiting for them. After working all day it was impossible, of course, for him to remain awake all night; so he carried a blanket down to the abandoned store on the beach; and when sleep overtook him, he lay down on the bare boards. He was well assured that the slightest movement outside would waken him. When the dawn began to break he went home. He tucked his blanket in a hole under the rafters that it might not betray him.

XXXIII

THE LAST LEG

IT was growing light when the pungy *Liza Jane*, ex *Four Sisters* ex *Ed. R. Green*, ran into the mouth of the Pocomico, a magnificent estuary ending in an almost landlocked bay where the navies of the world might ride. Under the high banks of Bold Point to starboard a number of sailing vessels, schooners, pungies and bug-eyes were lying for the night, but no craft having wireless. Sue, who was at the helm, did not pause at the anchorage, but kept on up the bay towards Absolom's Island, with its populous village.

Earl was keeping watch with Sue. "Beetle must go ashore at Absolom's," he said, "to get a registered package at the post office, and also to send a message to the trucks when to meet us."

"We'll run up the river and take to cover," said Sue. "He can come back to the Island in the motor-boat. There's no knowing what may come into the river to-day."

A mile and a half beyond the island with its sleeping village, they came to Point Turn Again, a curious formation of sand, which forced the whole river through a narrow passage at the end. They were obliged to use the kicker to get around it. A short distance above the point, Sue ran into a considerable inlet, which she said was called Husband's Creek. It was shaped like a hand, with the wrist for its entrance and five arms branching like fingers inside. Sue ran up to the head of what would be the thumb, and dropped anchor in a green pool. On the shore was a disreputable-looking whitewashed store, with several boats drawn up on the mud in front of it.

"The storekeeper yonder," said Earl. "Mightn't he smell a rat when he sees a loaded pungy run in here. I see he has a telephone."

"That's Bill Burbeck's store," said Sue, smiling; "the most notorious blind pig in St. Anne's County. Bill will be sure to come aboard out of curiosity. Give him a bottle of French brandy, and he's yours for life! I'll have to stay below all day. Anybody round here might recognize me."

Beetle was dispatched to Absolom's Island in the motor-boat. Since it was clear sailing by day, he went alone. His instructions were to order the trucks to be at Rousby's Point at one o'clock that night. At the post office he expected to find a package of money that was to be used in paying off the crew of the pungy.

He got away about seven o'clock and was expected back within a couple of hours. When three hours passed, and four, and five without a sign of him, a serious anxiety attacked those who were left on the *Liza Jane*.

"That money he was to get," asked Sue of Earl; "was it a large sum?"

"Yes," said Earl, "but not so much as he would stand to earn by sticking to us. So that can't be it."

In the meantime they received not one but two visits from the disreputable and good-natured Bill Burbeck, a giant of a man gone flabby. The present of a bottle brought him back with a mess of soft crabs for the delectation of the *Liza Jane's* crew. He received a second bottle. He evinced an open and childlike curiosity concerning the cabin of the *Liza Jane*, which was kept closed while he was aboard.

Dinner time came and went without Beetle. Finally in the middle of the afternoon, to their great astonishment, he suddenly appeared from amongst the trees on the shore of the pool where they lay, and hailed them. They were unable to bring him aboard, since he had taken their only small boat that morning. Earl told him to apply to Bill Burbeck for a boat.

That worthy himself brought Beetle aboard. Bill stood about the deck with his eyes fairly popping to learn what was afoot; but Beetle was carried down into the cabin, and the door closed. Sue, Earl and Ole were there to hear what he had to say.

"Where's the motor-boat?" asked Sue.

"I had to abandon it," said Beetle sullenly.

"You abandoned it!" cried Earl.

"Let him tell his story," said Sue. "And keep your voices down. The man on deck is listening."

"I got the money at the post office," said Beetle. "Afterwards I telephoned the message in code to Liondecker from the hotel. But it took me more than an hour to get Liondecker on the wire. When I came out of the hotel the first thing I saw was the eagle boat lying out in front of the village. She had already sent a boat ashore. I beat it for my boat which was lying around the other side of the island. When I got close to it, I seen two fellows bending over it. One was scratching at the bow with a penknife tryin' to read what was painted out. Their backs was turned to me, and I just turned around and walked away from there quick. What else could I do?"

"There's a motor-boat ferry from the Island over to this side, and I crossed on that. When we was crossin' I seen the eagle boat startin' up one of the creeks behind the island. On this side a fella give me a lift up the road in his car, and I walked the rest of the way. It don't sound like much, but I

been half the day tryin' to find you. This damn creek spreads over half the county."

Earl and Ole looked at Sue with blank and bitter faces. It seemed too hard after all the difficulties they had surmounted, when the prize was all but in their grasp, to have it threatened like this.

Sue spoke up briskly. "We must get out of this quick! It's lucky for us there's such a maze of creeks around the island, or the eagle boat would have been here already. If we can get around Corby's Point before she appears around Point Turn Again, we're safe. It will take her a couple of hours to search this creek alone."

"Get out of this? How?" said Earl. "There isn't a breath of wind!"

"Bill Burbeck is still on deck. Buy his motor-boat from him. He'll charge you double what it's worth, and keep his mouth shut afterwards."

As Earl sprang up, Sue said: "Wait a minute! We're going to be in difficulties to-night running this stuff ashore with only six hands."

"The trucks will bring plenty of men."

"We can't wait for them now. See if Bill can furnish you with half a dozen hands at fifty dollars a head. It's right in his line."

Earl hastened up on deck. He found the genial moonshiner perfectly amenable to his proposals. Indeed, this was proving to be a good day's work for Bill Burbeck. He only regretted, he said, that he couldn't go with them himself, but he was a little too well known. He took his pay for the motor-boat in French brandy. While the rest of the crew were getting up the anchor, Ole took Bill ashore in the motor-boat, and immediately came off again with six grinning, ragged Marylanders, who certainly appeared to be ready for anything. The motor-boat was lashed under the stern of the *Liza Jane*, and her engine started.

Before venturing out into the river, they sent the motor-boat ahead to scout. She returned reporting all clear. They issued out into the open with a shrinking feeling; the pungy was so horribly conspicuous in that wide expanse of sunlit water. Oh! for a mantle of invisibility to throw over her! or wings to waft them upstream! The river was like a sheet of glass, and the sun beat down through a light haze which seemed to increase its heat. Their sole power was furnished by the coughing motor-boat astern which pushed them through the water at perhaps three miles an hour—slower than a man could walk! It was cruelly slow! They watched the beacon off Point Turn Again with a sick anxiety.

The Marylanders had been sent down into the fo'c'sle to keep them out of sight. They amused themselves by playing cards. Sue remained in the

cabin, looking astern through the open door. It was the sort of day that frequently ends in a violent thundersquall. She glanced at the sky occasionally, with a little line between her brows. A squall at the wrong moment might very well spoil everything.

With what thankful hearts they finally saw Corby's Point pushing out astern of them, cutting off the view down river. An hour later they rounded Satterwaite Point, and could breathe almost freely again. At six o'clock they were passing a small hamlet on the St. Anne's side of the river, and Sue suggested that it would be worth while to take the time to telephone back to Burbeck to find out what the eagle boat was doing.

Earl went ashore in the motor-boat, leaving the pungy to drift on the slack water. He called up from the local store, and in due course had the satisfaction of hearing Bill's boozy, drawling voice over the wire. On a party line the conversation had to be conducted with a good deal of circumspection.

"Hello!" said Earl. "This is the party who was talking to you to-day."

"I get yeh!" said Bill.

"Anybody been inquiring for me at your place?"

"Yeah, there was a coupla city fellers come in shortly after you'd gone. Seemed real disappointed at missin' yeh."

"That's too bad! Where are they now?"

"Well, I told them I heard yeh say yeh was goin' to lie until dark in St. Barnabas' Creek, and they've gone over there. It was about five when they pulled outa here. Wasted a lot of time foolin' round as if they didn't believe what I told them."

"Funny how suspicious some fellows are!" said Earl.

There was a rich chuckle over the wire.

"Well, much obliged, Bill," said Earl. "So long!"

"So long, feller! Hope to see yeh again!"

When Earl reported this talk to Sue, she smiled. "St. Barnabas' Creek is on our side of the river," she said. "It runs inland for six miles, and has a dozen or more coves. It ought to keep them occupied the rest of the afternoon."

Shortly after this the squall broke, and the *Liza Jane* was forced to anchor under lee of the St. Anne's shore to ride it out. Fortunately it was not of long duration, and within an hour they were under way again, in a cooled and refreshed world. A light breeze sprang up from the south; they spread

their sails to it, and travelled a knot or two faster. Sue stood at the foot of the companion instructing Ole how to lay his course.

As soon as it began to grow dark, the crew from amongst their spare garments got together a man's outfit for Sue, so that she could come on deck without danger of being recognized by the Marylanders. She contrived a mask for the upper part of her face out of a handkerchief. Bill Burbeck's men were delighted by this element of romance and mystery. It started a story of the girl in the white mask which is still being told in Husband's Creek.

When Sue came on deck they were already in sight of Rousby's Point with the old-fashioned farm-house on its low bank, and the lights of the pavilion sparkling across the river. The dear and familiar scene caused Sue's heart to swell. It seemed years since she had left it. She ordered the engine shut off that they might not arrive too soon. A few minutes later the foresail was run down. Under the faint breeze the *Liza Jane* just moved, and that was all.

Sue, Earl and Ole stood together astern. "We must run right in and start our work," said Sue. "The eagle boat is sure to work up the river with her searchlight to-night."

"They'll pick up the pile of boxes on the beach."

"We'll stow them in the store."

"Only nine o'clock!" objected Earl. "Your family will hear."

"You must let all hands know that their stake depends upon their keeping quiet," said Sue. "My father's already in bed. Nothing short of a gun would waken him. If my brothers should come down to the cove—well, it would be darned awkward, but I could manage them."

"This unloading on a naked beach is a new stunt for me," said Ole anxiously.

"I've heard the old rivermen describe how it used to be done in the days when there were no wharves," said Sue. "I'll tell you. Wind and tide are just right."

XXXIV

LANDING THE CARGO

THE *Liza Jane* was heading for the crescent-shaped cove inside Rousby's Point. Sue was steering for the abandoned store, the roof of which was silhouetted against the sky. The sky was still mostly covered by the wrack of the storm, but stars were peeping out here and there; it would soon be clear. The mainsail had been cautiously let down; under the pull of the jib alone in that light air the pungy seemed to have lost all motion, nevertheless she still answered faintly to her helm. It was enough. The south wind was blowing directly on the beach.

As they drew in closer, the roof and the chimneys of the Rousby house showed above the trees on Sue's left. There were no windows commanding the cove. How strange it seemed to Sue to be stealing home in this manner in the dark of night! To hover so closely around the home folks without seeing them! She, of course, must go on with the trucks that night, and return the next day. She pictured her family; the father and the younger children in bed by this time; her elder brother racketing around the county in the Ford; one of the big girls entertaining a caller in the parlour.

Just before she expected to strike, Sue jammed her helm hard over, and the *Liza Jane* swung partly around. She grounded in the sand as softly as a whisper. Six men were poled ashore in the small boat carrying a line. The other end was made fast to the pungy astern. Digging their heels into the sand, and leaning on the rope, they slowly pulled her broadside to the beach. There was no danger of her becoming fast, for the tide was rising. Meanwhile others were softly taking in the jib.

The motor-boat was shoved between the pungy and the beach, and grounded there. A pair of heavy planks were run from the pungy to the small boat; another pair from the small boat to dry sand. All hands then took off shoes and stockings, and the unloading began. The hatches were already off, and part of the cargo piled on deck. Down one side of the double runway the men trotted each with a case in his arms; and up the other side empty-handed. A pocket flashlight was laid on the floor of the old store building to give them sufficient light to pile their boxes inside. There was no sound but the light pattering of bare feet and the cries of whip-poor-wills far away and near at hand.

It was Sue's job to keep watch on board ship and along shore. From the cove one could see straight down the river for upwards of three miles. Since no light showed there, Sue went ashore to judge what sounds might be reaching the house. Up the rise and through the barnyard she stole, a prowler around her own home. It gave her an eerie feeling. Reaching the house gate she noted how the dahlias had started to bloom in the front yard since she had left. No sounds from the cove reached as far as this. Within the screen door, the front door of the house stood open. There was a light in the parlour, and an automobile, dimly seen, waited under the big tree in the State road. Homely thoughts mixed with Sue's feelings of strangeness and danger. Perhaps we can get the whole porch screened now. Voices approached the front door, and Sue hastily retreated into the shadow of the barn. Her sister Virginia and young Jack Billingsley came out hand in hand, giggling under their breaths. They ran out of the yard, and down the rise to the automobile. The car whirled off up the road. She wouldn't do that if I was home! thought Sue disapprovingly. Then she smiled at herself. Good Heavens! What am I doing! And in these clothes!

Back and forth between house and beach Sue kept her vigil. The rapid pattering of bare feet down the runway and up the other side never ceased. Moment by moment the pile of cases in the old store building grew greater; at the end of an hour the *Liza Jane* was floating appreciably higher out of the water. At eleven o'clock Jack Billingsley went home. A light showed for a few minutes in the girls' bedroom window, then the house became dark. Sue, stealing around, looking at all the familiar objects, found that Virginia had forgotten to fasten up the chickens. She attended to it.

When she returned to the beach, Earl whispered to her in passing that the stuff was half off. Shortly afterwards Sue perceived the flicker of the eagle boat's searchlight against the sky down river. She was still a long way off. This fact was communicated to the men, and a bonus promised them if they got the *Liza Jane* out in midstream before the revenue agents came up. Thereafter the running feet pattered faster than ever up and down the slightly creaking planks.

It lacked a few minutes of one when the last case was carried ashore.

"How'm I gonna git her off?" said Ole Bierstedt, scratching his head.

"You'll have to tow her out with the motor-boat," said Sue.

"But that'll wake all creation!"

"Can't be helped. With the wind dead on shore there's no other way. It isn't likely any of my family will come down. If they do, I'll handle them."

Sue, Earl and Beetle were to go with the trucks. Earl paid the other men off. Sue shook hands with Ole and with Chick with a full heart. The remembrance of the dangers they had shared was strong with her. Whatever might be said of them, they had been good pals.

“Good-bye! Good-bye!” she whispered. “And good luck to you both!”

“The same to you, Sue!” said Ole. “You’re a corker!”

Poor little Chick could hardly find words to express himself. “Say, Sue, I won’t never forget you!” he stuttered.

“Ole,” said Earl, “if you don’t want to meet the revenue agents, make your way down river as far as you can, then anchor, and beat it ashore in the motor-boat.”

“No,” said Ole, “I’ll stick by her. She’s empty now. They’ve got nothing on me.”

“When the Buzzard and the Chimpanzee come aboard give them my regards,” said Sue.

The men climbed aboard. The motor-boat was pushed up ahead of the pungy, and a line sent out. The engine started with a terrific roar, and the *Liza Jane* began to swing out. Sue, Earl and Beetle retreated down the beach a little way, ready to take shelter behind the bushes, should it be necessary.

But the minutes passed and no one came down to the beach. The noise gradually lessened as the pungy was drawn out into the river. Finally the three watchers returned to the store. Earl said to Beetle:

“Take the wire-cutters, and follow the old road back. Cut the fences where they cross. When you get to the State road wait there until the trucks come along, and guide them down here.”

Sue, meanwhile, who had brought her own clothes ashore, went into the building to change into them. Joining Earl, the two of them sat down on the edge of the half-decayed old porch. Earl said, with a shake in his voice:

“Well, Sue, the voyage is over. What is it to be between you and me?”

Sue did not answer immediately. She who always knew exactly what she wanted to do, was attacked by a great disquiet. Her thoughts flew over the rise, across the shallow valley and up on the next hill into the shabby pretentious house that stood there. She pictured a tousled, tawny head lying on the pillow, and a stern, bitter young face all relaxed and softened in sleep. Her breast ached.

“Earl,” she said, with her invincible honesty, “it’s only fair to tell you that I’m half in love with Temp Wye.”

Earl drew his breath between his clenched teeth. “That bumpkin!” he said in a voice sharp and hateful with jealousy. “You can’t mean it! That ploughboy in his faded overalls with his boots stinking of the stable! When he puts on his store suit he looks worse! He looks like just what he is, a hick in Sunday clothes!”

“What does all that matter?” said Sue. “He has the one great thing in a man—he has character!”

“He’s a conceited puppy, if that’s what you mean! The airs he gives himself are ridiculous! Huh! a nobody! In New York they wouldn’t give him a job sweeping the streets!”

“It won’t get you anywhere to abuse him.”

Earl instantly changed his tune. “Sue, you’re mine! You’re mine!” he whispered hotly. “What we have been through has bound us together for ever! Nothing shall ever come between us! I’ll never let another man have you! You’re mine!”

“That sort of talk doesn’t influence me,” said Sue. “I’m not yours unless I choose to be. . . . This is what I am thinking: Temp would have to be told of this adventure. If he was told he would turn from me in disgust. He thinks of a woman as something fine and dignified. I would never do for him. I must live life. I must be in the thick of things. . . . In any case I could no longer stay here. This night’s work is bound to come out when I produce the money to pay off the mortgage.”

“Come away with me!” whispered Earl. “I will give you a full life! The whole world shall be our playground! . . . Sue, I can’t do without you! You own me body and soul! You have stolen the very self out of me! You couldn’t throw me away like an empty husk now!”

“Now you’re talking,” whispered Sue. “That *does* influence me. . . . This is what I had to ask you! Would you be satisfied if I took you as second best?”

“I’d take you on any terms!” whispered Earl. “I’d lie and murder and steal to get you!”

“Hush!” murmured Sue, not altogether displeased: “that’s unmanly!”

“Sue, is that you?” said a voice out of the dark.

Sue sprang to her feet with a gasp. “Oh, heavens; he’s here!”

Completely absorbed in their talk, they had not heard Temp coming. He was panting as if he had been running hard.

THE THREE ON THE BEACH

THAT afternoon when Temp got home after a hard day's work in the Corbauld tobacco fields, he found a message awaiting him to call up Lawyer Camalier.

"Come over to supper to-night," said the lawyer.

"Oh, I can't!" said Temp.

"You've got to, that's all," said Lawyer Camalier calmly. "Ex-Senator Mattingly of St. Anne's is here. He's the president of the Southern Maryland Tobacco Growers' Association. As the largest tobacco grower in this county you've got to meet him."

"Oh, all right," said Temp unhappily.

He dressed, and drove to King's Green in his car. The supper was such as only Southern Maryland can set before an honoured guest. The Senator was a genial old bore; a tournament orator, who loved to mouth phrases about "our fair women and brave men!" Afterwards the ladies having discreetly retired, the three gentlemen sat out on the porch of the Camalier home discussing mint juleps, the veritable article, made of pre-war stuff. Two of them talked, and the third listened, courteously supplying applause and laughter in the proper places, the while his breast was burning with impatience to be away.

Suppose they come to-night! he was thinking.

It was nearly one o'clock when he turned in to his own place. Putting up his car, he entered the house somewhat noisily to advertise the fact of his homecoming; then paused at the door of his room to listen. Mrs. Wye's snores rolled through the house undisturbed. So Temp stole downstairs again, and let himself out through the screen door.

When he came out on the porch he heard the sound of a motor-boat's exhaust close inshore and less than half a mile away; in short from the cove on the other side of Rousby's. They've come! he thought; and started to run.

When he got through the Rousby farmyard he checked himself with a man's instinctive desire to learn the nature of a situation before he casts himself into it. When he got down to the beach all was quiet. The motor-boat was moving away. He could just make out the form of the pungy against the night sky. Am I too late? he thought with a sinking heart. Then he heard the

murmur of voices, and distinguished two figures sitting on the end of the porch of the old store.

“Is that you, Sue?” he asked quietly.

She sprang up with a catch in her breath. The man with her swore furiously in low tones. Instantly a great coolness took possession of Temp. His purpose became crystal clear to him. That was to save Sue’s good name. Nothing else mattered.

“You have run your cargo,” he said in an ordinary tone.

“What’s that to you, damn you!” said Earl.

Temp ignored him.

“What do you know about any cargo?” asked Sue wonderingly.

“I know all about it,” said Temp quietly.

“Snooping again!” said Earl. “He makes a business of it. By God! I’ll teach him to keep his long nose out of my business!”

“Oh, be quiet!” said Temp impatiently. “I’ll give you all you want directly. I don’t give a damn about your liquor. All I’m concerned about is Sue. . . . Oh, Sue, am I too late?” he said, with all his heart in his voice.

“What do you mean?” said Sue.

“Have you given yourself to this man?” asked Temp, with a terrible simplicity.

“Yes,” said Earl quickly.

It was a fatal mistake. “He lies!” cried Sue.

By a certain note of surprised promptness in her voice, Temp’s heart was assured that she was speaking the truth. It was almost too much for him. “Oh, thank God!” he cried brokenly.

Sue was angry with both of them now. “How dare you put your question in such a form!” she said. “I suppose you meant to ask me if I had married him.”

“Oh, you couldn’t marry him,” said Temp.

“Why couldn’t I?”

“You could go through a form of marriage, of course, but it wouldn’t mean anything. He’s got a wife living.”

Sue, in pure amazement, was silent.

“It’s a lie! It’s a lie!” cried Earl excitedly. “Sue, I swear it’s a lie! I’ll kill him for it!”

“Wait a minute! Wait a minute!” said Temp, waving him off impatiently. “Let’s get to the bottom of this first.”

But Earl, determined at any cost to head off explanations, rushed at him. He was met by the impact of Temp's fist on his jaw. The blow tumbled him over in the sand. He remained lying there. He remembered in his blood that he had taken a thrashing from this man once before, and he was afraid.

"What reason have you for saying such a thing?" Sue asked Temp with a dangerous calm.

"Listen," said Temp. "I followed you down to Norfolk. I traced you up to the moment when you got off the train at Suffolk, and returned to Norfolk with him. Losing you there, I went to New York to try to get a line on him. I learned that he was known as one of the lieutenants of Sam Thalmann, whom they call the King of the rum-runners."

"King of the rum-runners!" murmured Sue, aghast.

"I went to Thalmann's apartment to ask for him," Temp went on. "I was received by an old lady, Mrs. Thalmann. She said to me—these are her very words: 'I can't tell you where Earl Darrah is; but his wife is here; she will see you!'"

"He lies!" cried Darrah from the ground.

"Then she came in to me," Temp went on.

"Who?" whispered Sue.

"His wife, Ruby Darrah. Not his sister, as you thought her."

"Oh, Heaven!"

"When she saw that I already knew, she made no bones about it. She told me how her husband had posed as a single man in order to win your interest in himself, so that he could get you to help him run a cargo here."

"He lies!" cried Earl desperately. "And I can prove it!"

But Sue's intuition told her who was lying. A hundred little unrelated facts fell into place in her mind. This was why Earl had always talked of flying off to the ends of the earth. She suddenly dropped on the end of the porch. "Oh, Heaven! What a fool I've been!" she groaned out of the very abyss of self-humiliation.

Temp went to her swiftly. "It's all right, Sue," he whispered urgently. "Nobody knows anything but me. I'm prepared for everything. I'll save you from the county gossip. Come with me now, and leave him to his damned liquor!"

Sue stood up suddenly. "No!" she said in a bitter hard voice. "No man shall make a cat's-paw of me!"

Earl started to crawl towards her. "Sue, I swear to you," he whined, "whatever it may have been in the beginning, now there is no woman . . ."

“Aah! Keep away from me!” whispered Sue in sick disgust.

“Keep away from her!” growled Temp.

Earl stopped.

“I saved his cargo for him!” cried Sue. “A half-dozen times over it would have been seized if it had not been for me. Well, I don’t choose to have him profit through me! . . . Give me your matches, Temp!”

“What . . . ?”

“Your matches!”

Temp handed them over wonderingly. Sue ran into the old store.

“Sue . . . ! Sue . . . !” cried Earl frantically.

He attempted to follow her, but Temp shouldered him roughly aside. Inside the building, Sue picked up the first case that her hands struck, and raising it above her head, brought it down with a crash on the floor. She struck a match. The pungent spirit was running out through the cracks in the box. Sue put her match to it, and a wicked, cold blue flame sprang up. The inside of the old store was as dry as tinder. The wicked little blue flames darted around the floor like snakes, and licked at the matchboarded walls.

Temp grinned sardonically at the sight. “It’s all right,” he said approvingly. “But, quick! You’ve got to be away from here before an alarm is raised! Come with me.”

They left Earl insanelly trying to stamp out the wicked little flames. He only spread them. Hand in hand Sue and Temp raced along the sand, up the rise, through the barnyard, past the Rousby house, and across the State road. They ran up the hill to the outbuildings behind the Wye house, and paused. So rapid was the progress of the fire that they could already see a reflection of the flames beyond the Rousby barn, though the store itself was invisible.

Temp’s old Ford was standing in the carriage shed alongside the stable. “Get in,” he said, “and wait here until I come back. I must show myself at the fire.”

Sue, too excited to remark that the Ford was not in its customary place in the garage, obeyed; and Temp went racing back down the hill.

The bottles were beginning to explode now; first isolated pops, then a fusillade of popping like machine guns, and finally a series of big detonations that flung sparks and burning brands high into the air. The whole sky was lighted up. Temp found all the Rousbys in various states of undress gathered under lee of the barn, whence they peeped fearfully around at the wild sight below. The old store was a perfect inferno of flame. Mystification filled the onlookers.

“Look! it burns blue like the flames of hell!” cried one.

“What could be in there to make it burn like that?”

“Us fellows undressed in there yesterday when we went for a swim,” said Ed Rousby, “and it was empty then.”

Neighbours, arriving down the State road in their Fords, now supplied an explanation. Five big motor trucks had been heard coming down the road a short while before, and they had just been met tearing back again empty, as if the devil were behind them. At the same time Johnny Rousby, who had been scouting around the fire, came in to report that the wire fences which crossed the old road back from the store, had been cut.

“Rum-runners!” cried Sam Rousby. “Rum-runners busy on my beach, and me knowin’ nothin’ about it! There’s cheek for you!”

“Well, it don’t seem to have profited them much,” said Temp dryly.

“I thought I heard voices down there before the fire,” said Virginia. “Quarrelling, like. But I was half asleep.”

Temp, fearful that further details might be forthcoming, raised a laugh against her. “I guess you dreamed that, Jinny!”

All the remaining bottles let go at once with an appalling explosion. The whole earth rocked. The flames shot a hundred feet in the air, roaring with an indescribable fury.

“I never see a fire burn like that,” muttered Sam Rousby in an awed voice.

“It’s like the end of the world!” whispered another.

“What a sinful waste!” groaned Johnny Rousby, with a thirsty longing in his voice.

It ended even quicker than it began. With a last wild puff the soaring blue flames extinguished themselves. Nothing remained but a heap of red-hot bottle ends, glowing like coals, on the site of the store. Little runnels of molten glass ran down into the sand.

It was over, but other neighbours were still arriving. The story had to be repeated in all its details to each. When all danger of further explosions was seen to be over, all had to go down to the beach, and poke around the embers, exchanging the same amazed comments over and over until Temp felt as if he would go out of his mind. What will I do if the day breaks before they go home? he thought with a sinking heart.

However, shortly before three o’clock, the last Ford car chugged back up the road, and the Rousbys went back to bed.

Temp tore back to the carriage house. Peeping around his old car, he saw Sue all rolled up in an adorable bundle fast asleep on the back seat. His heart almost cracked with joy. He fell on his knees beside the seat, and wreathed his arms about her warm, sleeping body.

“Oh, my darling, darling Sue!” he murmured. “Thank God! you’re safely out of that! Oh, thank God!”

When Sue awoke, it seemed perfectly natural to her to find herself in Temp’s arms. Her arms went about his neck with a will. “Oh, Temp,” she whispered, with a sigh of content, “why did you never do this before?”

In pure surprise he chuckled in his throat. “Do it before! Did you want me to?”

“Always,” she whispered, straining closer to him.

Temp could allow himself but the briefest moment of bliss. He tore himself away. “Here!” he said, almost roughly, “if I don’t get you out of this, the daylight will be upon us!”

“What are you going to do with me?” asked Sue dreamily.

“Have you got nerve enough to drive up to Baltimore alone?”

She laughed. “Nerve enough! After all I’ve been through!”

“Good!” said Temp. “The old tin can rattles, but her engine is sound, and the tyres fairly new. It’ll be morning when you get there. Put the car up in a garage, and go to the Rennert Hotel. Call me up at eight o’clock, and say so all listeners can hear, that you’ve just got in from Norfolk, and can I come up and fetch you home.”

“But if I have your car . . .” objected Sue.

“I’ll make it,” said Temp dryly.

“But I don’t think I ought to bring you all that way . . .”

“Look here,” said Temp, “I haven’t got the time to argue with you. You do what you’re told!”

It was sweet to Sue to hear him give his orders. “All right, sir,” she said in a meek voice.

He had to kiss her again for that.

He pushed the Ford out, and let it roll down the hill to the gate on the State road. There, with a final embrace, he started her off alone.

When he entered the house, his stepmother was still lying awake in her bed. “Oh, Temp, what was it?” she called out.

“Big time! Big time!” said Temp gaily. “Somebody ran a cargo of rum ashore in Sam Rousby’s cove, and stowed it away in the old store. Then

somehow it got afire. Golly! how she did go up!”

“Well, it was a judgment on them!” said Mrs. Wye piously. “Oh, dear! I thought it was a volcano bursting from the earth!”

XXXVI

CONCLUSION

AT eleven o'clock next morning, Temp parked his car down the street, and ran up the steps of the ladies' entrance to the Rennert. Sue was waiting for him in the little room alongside the door. They were too shamefaced and happy to meet each other's eyes. Somehow they found their way into that extraordinary gloomy Moorish corridor in the rear of the hotel that surely every pair of lovers in Maryland has known. They sank on one of the divans with their arms linked together, unable to speak for a little while. Then Sue murmured:

"Temp, I can't understand it. . . ."

"Understand what, darling?"

"This change in you. . . . After what has happened . . ."

"You had me wrong."

"But I thought that you thought a woman must be . . ."

"Think back," said Temp. "What was I like at twelve years old, before this business of being grown up came between us?"

"The gamest pal in the world!" she said quickly.

"Well, I haven't changed underneath. I just got all tied up."

"Then you don't feel that I have disgraced myself?"

"Not for me! And nobody else knows. You may have been foolish, but I'm not going to quarrel about that now."

"I'll tell you all about it . . ."

"Sure! But there's something comes first. Will you marry me, Sue?"

"What do you want to marry into a family like ours for? We're going to be sold up on August first."

Temp grinned. "No," he said, "since you went away the sale has been put off."

Sue looked at him sharply. "What do you mean?"

"Answer my question," said Temp.

Sue turned away her head. Her hand felt for his. "Any time," she whispered.

Temp leaned over her with his eyes shining. "Do you mean," he asked breathlessly, "that you are willing to come and live with me in that

tumbledown house, and put up with that old crapehanger, my stepmother? There's no use blinking it, Sue; she's a terrible person to live with!"

"I'll work hard," Sue whispered, her fingers creeping around his; "I'll be an asset, not a liability. We'll make out somehow."

"Oh, God!" cried Temp, turning up his enraptured face to the ornate ceiling, "no man was ever so happy as me!" He jumped up. "Come on!" he cried, pulling at Sue. "Let's go and buy a ring!"

When he led her to the fine new car she stopped dead. "What's this?" she demanded.

Temp made believe to see it as if for the first time. "Well, I thought it was an automobile," he said, with a sober face. "Can I be mistaken?"

"Goose! Whose is it?"

"Oh, a fellow lent it to me," said Temp.

"I never saw it before," said Sue suspiciously.

"Not a county fellow. A summer visitor."

They drove to the most fashionable jeweller's in town. "First we must have an engagement ring," said Temp, "though the engagement is only going to last for a few minutes. I read in the newspaper that emeralds are the proper caper."

"Emeralds!" said Sue, staring.

"Show us some emerald rings," said Temp to the clerk. "Good ones. An emerald in the middle, and a diamond on each side."

Sue looked at him in horror. She thought he was mad. Nothing would induce her to express her preference, so Temp himself picked out the most beautiful of the rings, which was also the most expensive. A wedding ring followed. Sue awaited with a sick feeling of apprehension the horrible moment when the question of payment would come up. She gasped when Temp, with a sidelong twinkle, pulled an enormous roll of yellow-backed bills from his pocket, and paid for the rings on the spot.

Out in the street she turned a face of distress to him. "Temp, what does it mean?" she pleaded. "I never saw so much money in my life."

He laughed like a schoolboy. "It's all right!" he assured her. "I haven't gone crazy, nor have I gone into the rum-running business! Just let me enjoy my mystery for a little while!"

Half an hour later Sue found herself a married woman without any very clear idea of how she had achieved her changed estate.

"Let's eat," said Temp, with a grave face. "Somehow I've always noticed when I got married it gave me a fearful appetite!"

“Crackpot!” said Sue.

They dined gloriously at the hotel. Sue’s attention was divided between the inspired face of Temp, with his grave lips and devilishly bright eyes, and her own left hand, which she held under the table, wiggling her fingers.

When they could eat no more, Temp said: “I am now going to exercise my right of buying you some dresses!”

He would not be denied. After they had visited dress and hat shops, he carried her to a furniture emporium, where he picked out the most expensive bedroom suite on display, a beautiful and simple design painted grey.

“Something tells me this will go well with pink curtains,” he said dreamily; “and pink shaded lights, and pink—well, you know what I mean!”

“If you don’t behave, I’ll leave you,” said Sue.

A dining-room suite followed, and an enormous sofa and pair of arm-chairs for the living-room. Sue was in a daze. Nothing would stop Temp until the imposing roll was reduced to one last bill.

“There’s plenty more where this came from,” he said.

They drove home in the late afternoon, not saying much. When they reached King’s Green everybody who was out of doors opened their eyes very wide.

“Oh, don’t stop!” said Sue in a panic. “I can’t face them yet!”

However, they saw Lawyer Camalier coming out of the absurd little dolls’ house that served him for an office, and they had to stop for him. Out of the tail of his eye the lawyer observed Temp’s transfigured face, but he did not remark upon it.

“I certainly am glad to see you home, Miss Sue,” he said, with old-fashioned courtesy. “You are looking well.”

“Why shouldn’t she be looking well?” said Temp, offhand. “She is married to me.”

“What!” cried the old man.

Temp, with a laugh, let in his clutch and sped down the road.

He did not turn off for Rousby’s Point, but kept on down the main road. “Where are we going?” asked Sue.

“To pay a little visit before we go home.”

He drew up before the largest dwelling house in Travis County, which was an imposing affair, if not beautiful.

“Oh, we’re going to see Mr. John George Corbould,” said Sue.

He did not answer her. He opened the front door, and drawing Sue's arm inside his own, stood in the hall, looking around.

"It's pretty ugly," he said deprecatingly, "but any changes that you would like can be made."

"What do you mean?" gasped Sue.

"This is our house, darling Sue," said Temp. "Uncle John George Corbauld died on the day you went away, and left me everything he possessed. That's why I went chasing down to Norfolk after you."

"Oh, Temp!"

The devilish twinkle appeared again in Temp's eye. "If you think the house is hopeless," he said gravely, "we can build another. The quickest way to get rid of this would be to burn it down. You love fires, don't you?"

Sue hid her face in his coat. "Oh, you lovely goose!" she murmured. "I didn't know you could be like this!"

"You never married me before!"

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *Cap'n Sue* by Hulbert Footner]