The SIGN *of the* BURNING SHIP

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Title: The Sign of the Burning Ship
Date of first publication: 1940
Author: Louis Arthur Cunningham (1900-1954)
Date first posted: June 21, 2026
Date last updated: June 21, 2026
Faded Page eBook #20260646

This eBook was produced by: Al Haines, John Routh & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at https://www.pgdpcanada.net

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TIDES OF THE TANTRAMAR
FOG OVER FUNDY
MOON OVER ACADIE
VALLEY OF THE STARS
OF THESE THREE LOVES
THE SIGN OF THE BURNING SHIP

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LOUIS ARTHUR CUNNINGHAM

THE PENN PUBLISHING
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NOTE

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

To
MY SISTER JANE

"*It was of a sea-captain that followed the sea.*
Let the winds blow high or blow low O.
'I shall die, I shall die,' the sea-captain did cry,
'If I don't get that maid on the shore O,
If I don't get that maid on the shore.'"

The Sign of the Burning Ship

Chapter I

All that long day of late summer the sun had poured its hot white light on the dusty winding road that followed the twistings and curvings of the Fundy shore. Sometimes, when some mighty cliff or foreland got in its way the road turned and lost itself in the dark forests of spruce and cedar. Here the solitude was almost terrible and the black walls of the trees closed in like grim ranks, glowering down on the man who trudged along, his face caked with dust and sweat, his black hair matted and unkempt. He carried a duffle-bag, sailor fashion, on his wide shoulders, seldom shifting it, never thinking of its weight.

All day, he had seen scarcely a living soul. At noon he had stopped by a fisherman's cottage to ask for a drink of water from the well and a little girl had given it him and stood by, wide-eyed, small mouth open, to watch him eat the bit of Canadian cheddar cheese and the two slices of bread he brought from his pocket. He had smiled at her and thanked her and because, underneath the sweat and the grime, there was something ever young and boyish in him, she had stopped digging her bare brown toes into the dirt and chips of the dooryard and smiled brightly back at him.

Since then he had seen and heard only the song birds and the crows and the chattering chipmunks who made noises like little sewing-machines in the branches overhead.

All day the waters of Fundy had been opalescent—shades of blue, pale and lovely and gleaming, striping its vast and calm expanse. Far off he could see the blue-black, undulating line that was the Nova Scotia coast. Now, as the road came abruptly out of the forest onto a high foreland he saw that the waters had turned to a deeper blue and looked dark and cold and sullen below the overhanging rocks, bearded with clammy sea-weed. A few miles

offshore, a tern-schooner, all her canvas spread to catch the breeze that had stiffened with the approach of evening, beat her way down the bay towards Martin Head.

He stood and watched her, easing the duffle-bag off his shoulder, slowly filling his pipe and slowly lighting it. She made a pretty picture, white and free as a gull, her canvas bellying out in the breeze that sent running ripples over the inshore waters. Her decks, he could tell, were piled high with lumber. He knew ships and he knew these parts though he had come from far away. He thought now of the last time he had sailed up the Bay of Fundy and his lips that had at times a cynical hardness that went ill with his fine dark eyes and strong features, twisted around the bitt of his pipe. And there was laughter in his eyes that was not good to see.

He watched the schooner until she lost the last of her tall spars behind a promontory, then he shouldered his bag again and trudged down the hill towards a cluster of little white houses and a tall red steeple above a white church. There was a fingerpost half-way down the hill that said "St. Ives." He waved his pipe at it and, grinning, thought of the old rhyme—

"As I was going to St. Ives
I met a man with seven wives—"

But it was another song he began presently to sing—a tuneful thing this, that he sang with a sailor's relish and gusto. He had a deep, rich baritone voice, and he wasn't afraid to use it—

"It was of a sea-captain that followed the sea.
Let the winds blow high or blow low O.
'I shall die, I shall die,' the sea-captain did cry,
'If I don't get that maid on the shore O,
If I don't get that maid on the shore.'"

The slow cows by the roadside fences stopped their grazing and stared at him with sombre, melancholy eyes, and he stared back at them. He was burned a deep brown by the sun and the sea wind and his forearms—his sleeves were rolled high and he carried his coat—were tanned and muscular and on the right one was tattooed a blue anchor, the badge of his calling. He was young in looks and he was still younger than one, even closely studying him, would guess, for the lines about his eyes and those that stretched from nose to lip-corner were graven by a harder hand than even the sea's, rough and cold as it is.

"This captain had jewels, this captain had gold,
This captain had costly a ware O.
And all he would give to this pretty fair maid—"

It was deepening dusk when he walked down the straggly street of the village. Cows were coming home from the pastures and oxen from their work in the fields. Smoke rose, gray-blue and cheerful, from the low chimneys. At one house he passed a mother was singing her child to sleep and he stopped by the white picket-fence to listen to the ancient lullaby and there came on his face a look of rare tenderness.

Queer, he thought, how simple things pleased him now—old men, bearded, leaning on their gnarled sticks, sitting in front of cottage doors, a little girl who gave him a dipper of water, a mother putting her child to sleep with a song that had been sung to him long ago, that had been used to close his childish eyes, that even now brought a tightness across his chest, a lump in his throat.

"Sentimental Johnny!" he muttered. "I thought it was all ground out of me. And I thought I'd never look at the sea again, and I wasn't outside the high stone wall before my nose was pointed towards it. Well, I can sit on the beach now and admire it. I'll have no more of its tricks and its treachery and it will have no more of me. You're not dead till your dead, mister, and what was it the poet said—

'The dirtiest things we do must lie forgotten at the last,
Even love goes past.'

Ah, maybe he was right. I hope to God he was. Maybe a man can forget even—"

His lips stopped their moving. They froze on the word 'even,' and his eyes, that had held some softness, some warmth, something boyish and good, became hard as blue stone—hard and cruel and staring, and he dropped the duffle-bag from his shoulder and standing there in the street of St. Ives as the quick night came on he laughed and laughed and laughed.

He laughed till there were tears on his cheeks. No noisy laughter that would draw the curious villagers, but some terrible, almost silent, choking mirth and, as if he would draw the attention of all the world to what amused him, he raised his arm and pointed a finger at the sign that hung from an iron bracket and swayed and creaked in the salt wind from the sea—

There was a rude painting of a vessel all on fire, sending smoke and sparks and lurid flame to the stars, and under it was written in Old English

script—

The Sign of the Burning Ship

"Forgotten!" he muttered. "Now what demon has tempted me hither! An inn, it is. Good cheer for men and beast. Well, I could do with a little cheer."

His body was wiry, strong as tempered steel, but he had travelled many a weary mile this day and his feet were sore and blistered. He had rum too, in his duffle and he thought it would be good, after he had eaten, to toast the Burning Ship, to laugh at it again.

It pleased his fancy to see in this quaint sign in this forgotten village by Fundy side, the hand of a leering, malevolent deity, a fate he could not dodge. Years ago, in those days he would like to forget, it had begun to sport with him and it must have found him rare game, for here it was again.

The Sign of the Burning Ship. It should be a good resting place for me, he thought. An appropriate one anyway. So in I go. Maybe mine host will meet me with an ax and a fire-extinguisher.

That fancy did not please him. He was scowling as he entered the porch of the inn, went into the hall and gazed at the wide parlor on the left where a log fire was burning against the chill of the evening. The nights are ever cool in these regions.

There were paintings of ships, obviously by local artists, hanging on the walls, and on the mantel, above the hearth, was the model of a four-masted barque. It drew him like a magnet. He had put down his duffle-bag in the corner and he hurried over to stare at the model, to study minutely every rope and spar, to run his finger along the sweep of the keel, to purse his lips and mutter, "Lot of dead wood there. Should have a cleaner entry and she's snub-nosed as the *Marco Polo*."

From the dark corner by the hearth a voice said, "He was getting old, mister. It was the last one he made. When one is old the eyes are dim, yes? And the hand—it is not so cunning, eh?"

"The devil! I beg your pardon. I didn't know—"

"It is all right. I will light the lamp now." The speaker stood up. He was a wizened, brown old man. He said, "I work here. The lady is away, but Robby Dalgleish will come very soon."

The back door slammed and a brisk step sounded in the corridor. A tall clock chimed the half-hour after seven and a girl's voice cut in on its mellow

booming. “Portagee William! Where are you, Portagee William? Now do I get that firewood or—ah, there you are! Oh—”

The girl, she was a young and ruddy-faced wench with the sturdy build of the ’long shore folk, stopped and stared at the stranger.

“Did you want supper, sir?”

“Supper and a room, if you please.”

His clothes, his looks, were rough, almost as rough as those of the few tramps who came at rare intervals to St. Ives; yet she did not once question his ability to pay for what he ordered. She had the shrewd eyes of the Fundy shore-dwellers, had Robby Dalgleish. She knew this one would pay. Lord, but he was tall and had wide shoulders and his eyes sort of held and frightened you!

“Show the gentleman to the room at the stair-head, Portagee William,” she said, “and then get my wood.”

“Yes, Robby.” Portagee William’s voice was soft. He smiled when Robby had gone back to the kitchen. He shrugged and looked with his gleaming, bright black eyes at the stranger. “The young,” he said, “always impatient. And when they are women—oh, Dios! Come, sir, I will show you to the room. The barque—it was made by old Captain Wishart, who once owned the Burning Ship. He made many models. I used to work for him. I helped him. That was the last he made, the last vessel he commanded, the *Flying Scud*. She piled up on Sable Island, but not when George Wishart was her master.”

“You’re a sea-faring man yourself.”

Portagee William grinned. “I was, till the sea threw me up with a lot of wreckage from the Ship *Ottoman Empire* on the Devil’s Back out there.” He pointed through the hall window at the glimmering sea. “And gave me a smashed leg that had to come off. Old Captain Wishart made me a nice wooden one and I stayed here to help him. Ah, yes, mister, it was a broken leg that made me give up the sea. Now why did you give it up?”

“Eh!” In the gloom of the hallway—gloom that was only partly dispelled by the lamp Portagee William carried, they stared at each other. “How did you know—?”

“Maria!” chuckled Portagee William. “I am very old. I watch you when you enter the inn-parlor. The sunset light is on your face, my friend, and I see you look out that wide window that old Captain Wishart had cut just so

he could do what you did—look out at his love, the sea. I saw your eyes, then. I saw you when you touched the model of the *Flying Scud*, when you did not know I watched. Ah, yes, a broken leg caused me to leave the sea, shall I tell you what caused you to leave it, señor?"

"Tell me."

"It was a broken heart."

The stranger's eyes, wild and questioning for a moment, stared fixedly into the keen old face of the Portuguese sailor as if trying to read there just how much this old man might know. He seemed then to be satisfied that this was just an ancient's whimsy, just a stab in the dark. He shrugged. "You might call it that. What does it matter?"

"You're young," said Portagee William. He was short and bent and had a queer way of stretching his neck out of his loose collar like a turtle's neck, and peering up at one. And the brown skin of his neck hung in wrinkled folds like a turtle's and his head was small, slightly reptilian in shape. "You are very young."

"I'm as old as the world," said the stranger, unsmiling.

"Ah, yes; that I have seen. Your eyes have gazed on much that was not good to see."

"Much. But come—let's see this room. I've been walking all day. I'm tired and I never was much of a one for talk."

Portagee William opened the door at the stair-head and led the way in with the lamp. "It is a good room, bright and airy, like all rooms here. The window looks out on the bay. You will like that, yes."

He set down the lamp on the little table by the bed. There were two chairs, a washstand, a chest of drawers, neat hooked rugs of bright coloring on the floor, marine pictures on the wall.

"It suits me," said the stranger. "I won't ask about the bed. I could sleep on the main t'gallant yard tonight, Portagee William. Wait." He stayed the old man, who was about to go. He went to his duffle-bag, rummaged there and brought out a bottle of Jamaica rum. There were two glasses on the washstand and he poured a stiff peg into each and handed one to the Portuguese.

Portagee William beamed. He held up his glass to the light and watched the red fires burn in it. The stranger blew out the light with never a word of warning and went to the window and gazed out to sea.

"Your health, sir," said Portagee William. Not a nervous man, he was still a bit disturbed by this stranger's ways, by what he could read in his eyes, and still more by what he could not read.

"My name is Abel Brown," said the stranger, and only smiled grimly when Portagee William choked on his rum. "Good luck. Shipmates all."

He was gazing at the sea as he spoke, at the early stars that came shyly out of the saffron dusk. "Storm before morning," he said. "You can hear the crash and roar of the breakers here, I'll wager."

"You'd think they were in your room, Abel Brown the Sailor," said the old man slyly. He knew well the old sea-chanty.

"It's a good name, friend," said Abel Brown.

"Better than some others, eh?"

The brown fingers tightened on the thick tumbler as if they would make powder out of it and even in the near-dark Portagee William could feel something baleful in the look the stranger gave him.

"No offence, sir," he said humbly. "A man's reasons are his own and not for me to question. I will go now. I thank you for the rum. It is good rum."

"It's the devil's distillation," muttered Abel Brown. "It's the cure he's made for the ills he's caused and, damme, the cure, if you know it, is worse than the disease. Tell me, why do they call this place the Sign of the Burning Ship? Was there a vessel—"

"Portagee William!" Robby's shrill voice, utterly exasperated cut up through the stair well.

The old man jumped. "It is a long story, sir. Maybe tonight you will know. Maybe you will see it—"

"See it! See what?"

But Portagee William had gone stiff-legged out of the room and the question hung unanswered there in the last faint light.

"See it? What did the old fool mean—see it?" Abel Brown turned again to the window, resting his elbows on the wide sill, cupping his chin in his hands. The sash was raised. The sea wind was damp and cool and salty on his face. He breathed deeply of it, filling his great chest, drinking it in as a thirsty man would drink water. His eyes, too, fixed on the gray mystery of the sea, were hungry, were the eyes of a man who looks from behind bars on the love that is denied him. The sough and rush of the waves on the shingly

beach below St. Ives was music that he loved. In the night he would hear the crash of the giant waves against the cliffs and spray would dash against his window pane.

He took his hands from his face and clenched them hard and stared at them and drove one fist against the strong wood of the window sash with force enough to splinter it and draw the blood from his knuckles. He said no word. He stood there, unconscious of the pain of his bleeding hand. When, presently, the bell rang below stairs he lit the lamp and hastened to wash himself and put on a clean shirt.

He was the only one at the long table. He was hungry and ate heartily of the good broiled haddock and mashed potatoes that Robby Dalgleish brought him. She didn't try to make talk. She was too busy trying to size him up. Portagee William had told her, with a grin, that the stranger's name was Abel Brown. It meant nothing to her.

"Will you be staying long, sir?" she asked when she brought him his tea.

"Some few days, I think." He seemed surprised that she should have asked, as if it were a matter of wonder to him that anyone should bother about his staying or going. "Maybe longer. What does a man do for a living in St. Ives?"

"Most go to sea. Some are fishermen. Some in the coastwise trade. Some go to the woods in winter. There's a woodworking factory."

"Ah!" He seemed interested. "I'll look about in the morning."

"You think you might stay in St. Ives, Mr. Brown!" Robby's eyes were wide with disbelief. "Why, there is nothing here. This place, I heard father say, began to die when the last ship was built here. It used to be a rich place and they built great ships and thousands of men worked on 'em. But now they don't even build a dory. You wouldn't like it here, I'm sure."

He smiled ruefully. "It's peaceful and quiet, anyway."

"Oh, if it's peace and quiet you want, you'll get more than enough of both. But it's such a creepy place."

"Eh!" He looked at her sharply. "What do you mean—creepy?"

"I—well, I don't know just how to put it. But even in the daytime it feels like there was ghosts about—ghosts of all those old ships and men. It's the silence that does it, the stillness. You can almost feel the stillness."

"You're a queer girl, Robby."

"I wasn't till I came here, I can tell you. I think we're all queer in St. Ives. Why, just a few minutes ago I saw old Portagee William trying to pivot on his wooden leg. He fell down flat and all he did was laugh."

Abel Brown grinned and shook his head. "There's a reason behind everything," he said. "Even behind the eccentricities of Portagee William."

"Well, I don't know," said Robby. "You wait and see, Mr. Brown. I tell you I'd no more walk along those cliffs at night than I'd fly to the moon. Come dark, I lock myself in my room and put my head under the clothes."

Abel Brown had no answer for this. He understood, perhaps even better than Robby Dalgleish did, just what she was driving at. It was the spell of the sea. Some feel it, some do not, some are peculiarly sensitive to it. To him it was a vast brooding loneliness, as if he walked, a pigmy, in a forest of the giants. It was fear without reason, as if some awful presence, eternal and immense, watched from the skies or from the depths of the sea looked up. It was a stillness vocal, palpable, and it brought strange, mystic stirrings deep in his heart, odd fancies, queerer dreams. And it was a spell hypnotic, for always, when he had been a long time away from the sea, and then returned to it, he felt a satisfaction almost physical, a happiness great and profound.

Thinking of these things, he filled his pipe and walked into the parlor of the inn. There were three old fellows there now besides Portagee William, who had piled the fire with logs and made such a blaze as threatened to blast them out of the room. He bobbed his turtle's head at Abel Brown and the three ancients took their pipes from their mouths and bobbed too and, afterwards, pretending not to look at him where he sat by the big window that faced out on the dark waters of Fundy, they studied him with keen, sea-bleached eyes from under grizzled brows. Strangers, apart from the summer-tourists whose ranks were pretty well thinned by now, were few at the Sign of the Burning Ship, and here was no tourist.

"That was a fine day, Portagee William," said one of the old men. "But it will storm afore mornin'. It's blowin' up a gale o' wind already."

" 'Twill storm afore midnight, Seth," put in another. "An' maybe thunder and lightnin' after the dead heat all day."

"Young lady comin' home tonight, William?" asked Seth.

"She is supposed to come tonight. She was to drive down from Saint John with Dr. Allaby. It may be late. I hope it does not thunder. Not tonight."

Portagee William and the old men exchanged meaningful glances that Abel Brown did not see. He was looking out at the bay, what he could see of

it under the stars and a misty moon. He caught only the last words Portagee William spoke. He turned his head then and surprised all their eyes upon him. He frowned. He said, "Why don't you want it to thunder tonight, friend?"

Portagee William shifted his weight on to the wooden leg. The old men were looking at him now as if waiting for him to speak. Still he hesitated. Abel Brown looked with those glowing black eyes of his from one grizzled and seamed face to the other. "What is this?" he said. "Some mystery or other?"

"Oh, it's no mystery—not what you could call such, eh, William?" said Seth. "It's the burning ship, sir—the ship all on fire—" He stopped, his bony jaw sagging. He stared at Abel Brown. So did the others. The dark stranger had got out of his chair and stood, straight and tense in every muscle, like a wild thing at bay, and there was something not far remote from madness in his eyes.

"What do you say?" His voice was hoarse, almost a whisper, yet they could hear his every word, as could Robby Dalgleish, who had left her work in the kitchen in order to listen. "What sort of old wives' tale is this—a ship all on fire!"

The man called Seth bridled a little. He spoke with the quiet dignity that belongs to simple fishermen and peasants. "It's no fairy tale, if that is what you mean. It's been seen, often and often. I've seen it and Jonas Mudge has seen it, so has Barnaby Snell and Portagee William—seen its spars an' its riggin' plain as plain against the black sky, seen the sparks and flames shootin' up to heaven—aye, an' seen the men clingin' to her riggin' an' droppin' off like flies into the water an' drownin'—" He broke off. The stranger's face was ghastly under its tan. His eyes were tortured, the eyes of a man haunted, driven by some terrible vision. He stood for a moment as if all strength had gone out of his body; then he sank down into his chair and covered his face with his hands.

"What is it, sir?" Seth Meynal was alarmed at the effect of his recital. It was nothing to the people of St. Ives. They had seen this thing. The men sitting with him had stood beside him when he watched it. And why should it have this effect on a stranger? Maybe the man was ill. "A'n't you well, Mister—Mister—"

"Abel Brown," said Portagee William in his soft voice. "Mr. Abel Brown."

The stranger took his hands from his face. “I’m all right,” he said. “Touch of sun. Been walking all day on these damned hot, dusty roads. Felt sort of weak for a minute. What was it you were saying—something about a phantom ship, a ship all on fire? Do you really believe in such things?”

“We believe what our eyes see,” said Jonas Mudge. “Many in St. Ives have seen the burning ship. That’s how this inn was named. It’s been some years, sir, since it appeared but it may soon come again.”

“What is it? What does it mean?”

“Oh, it foretells some change in the lives of some of them as sees it—sometimes death, sometimes new hope, sometimes failure, sometimes success— The storm’s coming now. Maybe you will see it.”

“What could it mean for me?” asked Abel Brown with a laugh that made them move uneasily in their chairs, a laugh that had scarcely ended when the heavens seemed to split asunder with a deafening roar and a blinding flash that showed everything to the very rim of ocean clearer than in broad daylight, then was succeeded by blackness impenetrable.

Portagee William crossed himself. The thunder began again now, this time slow and ominous, and the lightning that played over the water was lurid with strange fires. No one spoke. Robby Dalgleish had come in from the hall and huddled in a chair in a far corner. They were all watching out that wide window that framed the awful pageant of the storm. Watching and waiting, their faces strange and haggard-looking in the dreadful light. Between the claps of the thunder and as a muted undertone to its roar, they could hear the booming of the waves against the dark rocks on the shore.

Suddenly in the play of light there appeared a ruddy core—red as flame, that grew and grew like a pillar of fire and smoke. They were all sitting forward in their chairs now. Higher and higher into the darkness of the sky reached the licking tongues of fire, as if they chased up the masts and along the spars of some tall ship.

Was it a ship? Was there in that vast flame something like the dark line of a hull, something like crumbling spars and rigging, like men who clung for a little while, then tumbled off into the dark waters on which the fell light shone?

Fading now, and the bright flame dying. Almost gone when the inn door crashed open, just as the rain came in one sheeted torrent; only enough of the strange light left to show clearly for a moment the face of the girl who stood with her back against the door—a pale, lovely face, framed in hair that

glinted with deep red lights. In her blue eyes was fear and something more than fear—something close akin to what Portagee William, who watched both of them, saw in the haunted eyes of Abel Brown the Sailor.

Chapter II

The storm passed almost as quickly as it had come and the moon shone out over the Bay of Fundy making the waters all silver and bright, and in the puddles the mighty fall of rain had left were reflected a hundred tiny moons in little oceans of their own. The old men had left the parlor of the Sign of the Burning Ship, just as soon as the rain ceased. They had left much earlier than usual and they had gone in a hurry. The stranger—none of them said anything about him as they walked up the village street towards their homes—it was the stranger, this man who called himself Abel Brown, who had disturbed them; yet what it was about him that made them uneasy, that caused them, usually so garrulous, to sit awkward and tongue-tied, they could not tell.

But they had seen the way he looked at Crispin Dean, the owner of the inn, when she came out of the storm and stood there by the door, rain streaming from her green oilskin cape, rain beading on her dark red-gold hair, on her long black lashes; rain glistening on her cheek. He had looked at her, they knew, as a man looks at someone he had once seen but never in this world expected to see again.

"He knowed her all right," said Jonas Mudge later, when they could bring themselves to calm discussion of that night. "It was plain as the nose on your face that he'd seen her afore. Likewise it was plain that she was the last one in the world he expected to see at the Sign o' the Ship."

"But she didn't know him," grunted Seth Meynal. "You can tell quicker about women than you can about men. Crispin Dean had never afore that moment set eyes on this man that calls himself Abel Brown."

"An' whose name," said Barnaby Snell, the slowest and quietest of the three, "is no more Abel Brown than mine's Tom Bowline."

"That's as may be," said Seth. "He minds his own affairs."

He had been thankful, had Abel Brown, for the dimness of the inn-parlor, thankful that he sat by the great window, far from the lamps in their brackets on the wall, from the ship's lamp that hung in its gimbels from the raftered ceiling of the inn. He had thought, seeing her there by the door, that she was a spirit out of the storm, a part of this phantasmagoria through which he was now living. It was all unreal, illogical, insane. It was all a play

got up for him. The name of this inn, the strange old men, the story of the burning ship, the thunder and lightning and that awful lurid vision in the heart of the storm. Only fancy. There was no ship there. Nothing that looked like a ship. Just some trick of the storm.

So he had thought, fighting off old fears, thrusting away mad thoughts that threatened to destroy him, beating away dark and verminous things like evil birds that cut at him with their sharp beaks and tried to rake his soul with their awful talons.

Then she was in the room. She was there in the flesh, fairer, lovelier, more able to stir a man's blood than even he had dreamed her.

He could only sit and stare and let the wonder, the beauty, of her soak into his heart, into his very being. So he was thankful for the dim light, for the shadows that prevented her noticing how closely she was observed. He did not know that Portagee William watched him, or the other old men. He did not realize that they were nearer to him than she was and that their old eyes, sailor's eyes, were very keen.

Ah, God, but she was lovely! How often in Bede Wallace's cabin aboard the *Orsina* had he gazed on the colored picture that had the place of honor on the captain's desk. He could still see the bold flourish of her writing at the bottom of the picture—"To Bede, with all the love of Crispin Dean." How often in his loneliness had he found some pretext to go to Bede Wallace's cabin just to see that picture and to dream his dreams.

Those dreams! His mouth looked funny now as he thought of them. Far, far from any possibility of realization then, they were now so futile, so utterly crazy, that just to think of them brought him pain. But he could still look at her—that was something. He could gaze his fill for a little while. He could worship her. Nothing to keep a man from doing that. He had a right to do that, hadn't he? It didn't hurt her. She didn't know him from Tom the Devil. He meant nothing to her. She would probably have a good laugh if she knew the part she had played in his life.

Sure, that was it: she would laugh. And she would hate him, despise him, the same as everyone else did. She more than all the rest. Bede Wallace was dead—dead with the three hundred others. She was the one who had lost most by Bede's death, so she would blame him most. She would blame Brandon Phare, once first officer on the burned ship *Orsina*, just as all the world blamed him, for the deaths of so many, for the death of the hero, Captain Bede Wallace, the man she would have married. She would think

his disrating, his prison-sentence of two years were meager punishments for what he had done.

But she didn't know Abel Brown. Brandon Phare was dead. He had died in the crowded Admiralty Court when the judge had said, "Mr. Phare, in all the history of our merchant-marine, I have come across no instance of misconduct worse than yours. When you were supposed to be on duty you were lying drunk in the cabin of one of the women passengers, about whom the less said the better. You were there while the *Orsina* was swiftly burning into an inferno. Smoke and flames all about you, the cries of dying men and women and children all about you. And you could not hear them. Through your negligence more than three hundred people on that ill-fated vessel were burned to death or drowned. In the sight of God you are guilty, in the sight of men, you are reprehensible, you are a dark blot on the fine tradition of the service to which you once belonged."

Bede's mother was in the courtroom. Bede's brothers and sisters. Once she had been his foster-mother, they his foster-brothers and sisters. The Wallaces had taken him from the Home for Sailors' Orphans when he was a boy of five. They had raised him as their own. He and Bede Wallace had grown up together, sailed on their first voyage together, climbed together high in the work they loved.

And then this.

He was seeing it all now as he watched Crispin Dean, who had loved Bede, talk to Robby Dalgleish. So often he had heard Bede talk about her —"She's wonderful, Brand. The picture doesn't begin to do her justice. Just wait till you meet her. Man, you'll be crazy about her. Three more voyages and we're going to be married."

'But alas, alas,' thought the man called Abel Brown, 'he sailed commander of the ship that never returned.'

Strange, strange, that it should all be brought back to him here in this remote village, in this little inn on the lonely rock-girt shore of Fundy. What had brought her to this place? And what Fate had led his footsteps here? He felt that he was assisting at a play which had been written long ago, which had been waiting for his entry. The burning ship—Crispin Dean—all the dark tragedy of his life here in this little room.

She came over to him after the old men had gone and only Portagee William busy with the fire-tongs, was left in the room. She wore a blue woolen dress with high neck and little black frogs down its front. Her hair was thick and wavy and her mouth was the heaven he had so often dreamed

of; and her eyes, so like the eyes of the picture, were warm and smiling. She had not changed in the two years and a half since the *Orsina* was burned. She must have suffered. She must have grieved. But her face was serene, girlish still—and so beloved.

She was here. She was standing close to him, smiling up at him, smiling as often she must have smiled into Bede Wallace's eyes. If she only knew, he thought grimly, who it was she smiled upon. He could see those blue eyes darken, that soft mouth grow hard. He could see the pain and the horror in her face, in the way she would step back from him. Brandon Phare—she would go from Brand Phare as from something unclean—a man guilty in the sight of God of mass murder, a man reprehensible to his fellows, his name one of the darkest in the history of the sea.

But he was Abel Brown.

"How do you do?" she said, and her voice had the sweet husky timbre he had known it must have. He liked it so much he did not answer, just to make her talk more. "You've been made quite comfortable, I hope."

"Very comfortable, miss. It's a nice place you have here. Such a quaint place. I—" So long since he had talked with a woman, talked with anybody. In prison, nobody bothered much with him. Thieves and murderers the convicts didn't mind, but a man whose neglect of duty had caused horrible death for hundreds of innocent people—they didn't even pity him. He had been pilloried, too, by press and pulpit, his name, his career for ever blackened. No man called him friend, no country claimed him for its own.

He had no right to be talking to any woman, to Crispin Dean least of all. He tore his gaze away from her face. His brown hands, sturdy, seaman's hands, fumbled with the blackened briar-pipe that he had brought from the *Orsina* and always treasured. In his heart was a pain so great that it was only a numbness. Like a dumb beast he stood there and suffered, and all the other ordeals he had undergone—the ordeal of fire, of trial, of condemnation, of prison—were as nothing compared with this. To stand so close to her, so close that he could, merely by reaching out, touch her sleeve, her soft rounded arm. To find her well disposed towards him, kind to him—Ah, no, not to him, not to Brandon Phare, but to Abel Brown the sailor.

"Are you going to stay here for a while?" The blue eyes were curious and kind. "Sailor, aren't you? Looking for a ship?"

"No—no, not exactly," he stammered. "I'm staying ashore for a while. I've been tramping around looking for work. I—I have money to pay you, miss."

He saw the soft lips tremble and he could not guess why. He had forgotten that people could be kind, that hearts could ever be warm and friendly, that any man or woman could feel for another. He had come to believe that the world was a great wolfpack, cruel and ravening. He was still right in thinking so, he knew he was. If she knew the man she talked to—well, he could pay his way. He'd be under no debt to her.

"I'm not worrying about that, Abel Brown." She smiled at his start of surprise. "Oh, Robby Dalgleish whispered your name to me."

"Yes—yes, Abel Brown it is. No, I don't think I'll be staying here. I'd like to stay. It's such a peaceful place. I'm a bit of a wood-carver and I like to make ship-models." His voice was suddenly young and eager. "I've always made them. The girl, Robby, told me there was a woodworking factory here. I thought—what I had in mind was to settle in some place like this and make ship-models and the like and sell them to tourists. It's easy to sell them. When I was—"

He bit his tongue. Babbler! Fool! He had been about to say "When I was in prison I made a lot of them and managed to sell them, and the money I have in my belt now is the money I got for them. That's how I can pay my way for a while."

She was looking at him with the same gentle smile. He couldn't stand it. He had to get away from that serene blue gaze, from the nearness of her, the faint perfume that came from her hair, the smallness of her, the gentle rondeur of her breasts beneath the dress of blue wool. Such as Crispin Dean were not for him, could never be for him. Only, for him, the gnawing burning hunger that could never be appeased, the bitter memory of a youth denied him.

"Wouldn't you like to sit down and talk to me for a while?" She could not know what she offered him, what temptation, what agony, "I usually make a cup of cocoa before I go to bed. Maybe you'd have one with me?"

Rum had been his drink. Rum had made him forget for a little while, but its witchery soon wore off and his demons came with strength redoubled to prey on his weakened spirit. Rum was no escape. He said, wondering that his voice could be so calm, so controlled: "Thank you, Miss Dean. I'd like that."

She would think Portagee William or Robby had told him her name. She would never know that often in the long nights when the moonlight had cast the grim shadow of the bars on the stone floor of his cell, he had spoken her

name and wondered what had become of her. She belonged to Montreal, he knew. It was there Bede Wallace had met her.

He sat there staring at the fire while she went to the kitchen and made the cocoa. Portagee William, who had been dozing in the corner, got up and started off to bed. He stopped in front of Abel Brown and looked at him with knowing eyes. "Good night, sir," he said. "You should sleep well tonight at the Sign of the Burning Ship. You can mend a broken heart, I've heard tell. Not like a smashed leg, not like mine. You have to get a wooden one, but you always keep the same heart if you go on living."

He nodded his little, shaven head slowly and stomped out the door. Abel Brown called, "Good night," and the old man waved his hand.

It was quiet there now, the fire was a mass of glowing embers, caverns and castles and valleys and mountains of living coals. Fire had been there and had left this. Fire sometimes left charred and blackened things. Fire was what had given rise to the idea of hell or maybe the devil had invented fire. Smoke—choking, blinding, suffocating, and the wild clanging of bells and the frantic tooting of the ship's siren, the pound of running feet, the screams and oaths and shouts—Inferno.

He drew his hand across his eyes. "Have mercy, God," he said reverently. "Have mercy. Let me forget it for a little while. Just for tonight, just for these few minutes. Let it seem as if it had never been."

The wind sighed with lonely voices about the eaves of the inn and somewhere a shutter rattled and somewhere far off a dog howled at the moon. Men passed in the village street. He could hear gruff voices and he saw the flame of a match as one paused to light his pipe. The tall old clock in the hall struck eleven booming strokes and when the last had sounded the vibrations still shimmered in the stillness. A little black cat he had not seen before came in with arched back and rubbed against his trouser leg.

He was impatient for Crispin to come, jealous of every moment she stayed away. It was only for tonight. Tomorrow early, before she got up, he must be on his way. Where? It didn't matter where. He dared not stay in St. Ives. He dared not form any human ties. He dared not think of her. He must go his way alone, always alone. If ever he took up with man or woman they would, sooner or later, find out who he was and learn his story. Then if he loved them he would suffer again, and he had had enough of suffering. He could go it alone. Life wasn't that long. It had to end sometime. He could find some joy in it too—when he worked at his wood-carving, when he saw a sunset over the sea, or a trim craft bound for some distant places. There

were bright days, too, to remember. He had visited most of the great ports of the world. He had seen the typhoon on the China Sea, the moonrise over Bengal, the snow on high peaks of the Himalayas, the smoke of Vesuvius. He had seen much in his young life, more than most men who lived to be eighty. And he had suffered more than any other, he sometimes thought, except Christ.

Crispin came with a tray and made him move a little table in front of the fire. She set out a plate of buttered toast and cocoa in ample cups. She sat across from him and handed him his cup and passed him the toast. She smiled gaily at him, pretending not to notice the awkwardness that years of rough eating had brought to him.

"You're very good to me," he said, knowing he shouldn't talk but feeling, too, that she wanted company, that it was for this reason she had asked him to stay. "I've got out of the way of this." He indicated the table, the cup and saucer.

She nodded. "Somehow I gathered that. But you never could forget, really. When I saw you tonight—you were the first one I saw sitting in the parlor when I blew in out of the storm—I thought—" She stopped. She looked away from his burning gaze and she could feel the heat of the blood that rushed to her cheeks. She went on hurriedly: "Well, it doesn't matter what I thought. So few people come to St. Ives now. The summer is almost over. It's nice to have someone to talk to—someone from the world outside. We're sort of lost and buried here."

"Why do you stay here?"

"I don't really know. The inn was left to me by my uncle, Captain George Wishart, when he died a few years ago—the inn and Portagee William and Robby Dalgleish—"

"And the phantom ship." He watched her closely over the rim of his cup and he saw her eyes darken and dilate. "Do you believe in that? Is it really there? You know, I fancied I saw it tonight. But then the old men had been talking about it, describing it in all its grisly detail and it's easy for one's fancy to re-create such yarns."

"I think I've seen it." Her voice was a mere whisper. "I'll swear I saw it tonight as I rode down the hill with old Dr. Allaby. He says he's seen it a dozen times. Most of the people here take it quite for granted."

"But is there any record of a ship ever having been burned out there? Anything that—"

"No one knows."

"And they say the vision portends some great change for those who see it. Do you believe that?"

She shook her head. "I do not know. I'm not sure that I want any great change in my life. Do you?"

"Yes," said Abel Brown quietly but there was a terrible intensity in his voice, in the strained look on his dark face. "Oh yes, I could stand a change in mine. But it would take more—more than a burning ship—"

"I hate the thing," she said suddenly. "Hate it. I wanted to tear that sign down. I wanted to get away from here the day I came. But I couldn't go. Something held me here. It's dull. Most people would call it stupid and me crazy to bury myself here. But I've been happy here—happier than ever I was in the world outside. No—no, once I thought I was very happy there. I used to believe in things."

"And something hurt you and destroyed your belief?" He hated himself for his hypocrisy. He knew so well what had happened to her. He knew how much of love Bede Wallace could inspire in a woman.

"A burning ship," she said and her eyes were fixed on some far off, unhappy vision. "It took many lives when it burned. It destroyed my happiness. A small thing maybe, but it was much to me. I was glad of the chance to get away from everything, to bury myself here. And when I came here I found the burning ship."

So like his own experience. There they were, they two, their lives marred and broken by the fire that had reduced the *Orsina* to a charred and smoking hulk. But hers was the pain and the misery; his the guilt and the shame.

He drew his hand over his eyes. She had seen him do that once before this evening. He seemed by that gesture to be trying to blot out something from his sight. There was a look, soft, pitying, in her eyes.

"Have you been ill?" she asked. "You look healthy. You're so brown and strong, and yet—"

"Oh, it's nothing. I walked all day in the sun. That's what did it."

"And you're tired and I've kept you up to listen to my tale of woe."

"You told me no tale of woe."

"But you can guess there is one."

"Yes. And it shouldn't be like that. Not for you. Life for you should be all beauty and laughter. It will be yet."

"But I don't look for laughter—not any more—unless it's the laughter that comes from the heart. And there's beauty here."

"It's not what I mean," he said awkwardly. He looked across at her very humbly. "I don't know how to say it. You're so young and so lovely and you must not let your life be wasted. You must not think your life is ended just because—"

There was impish laughter in her eyes. "You speak with old wisdom, Abel Brown. Perhaps you are the Old Man of the Sea, come to the Sign of the Burning Ship in the guise of a dark young sailor to rescue Crispin Dean from the doldrums."

He did not smile. "Perhaps I am just that. What is there here for you?"

"Oh, as much as there is anywhere else. In summer I am very busy with my inn. Quite a few tourists come here, you know. In the winter I teach the people handicrafts. I have a bit of a flair for that sort of thing. I've taught them to weave, to make blankets and tweeds and the like. I've started a bit of a pottery. It's all interesting work, and it's fun. And now, with you here, we'll have a ship-model industry. It will all help to put St. Ives on the map."

"I must go." He stood up. "I couldn't stay here." His eyes met and held hers. "I'll go early tomorrow."

"Why so great a hurry? Are you one of those people who can't stand staying more than a day or so in one place?"

"It's not that." He looked beyond her at the sea where the moonlight still was molten silver on the water.

"Then what is it? Tell me. I'm curious about you. Perhaps I could help you."

"Help me!" He laughed and he laughed louder at the fear and wonderment that showed in her eyes. "I think not. You're kind, but I'm afraid there's no helping me. This has been good—to sit with you and talk with you. This has been a very bright moment and it will shine through many dark days ahead. You can pride yourself on that, Miss Dean. You've done a lot more for me than you know, and I thank you for it."

"Good night." She held out her hand, but he pretended not to see it. He dropped his pipe and had to bend down to find it. He did not take her hand.

"Good night," he said when he straightened up. He went slowly out of the room without again looking at her. He knew she was watching him and there was a great question in her eyes. He wished he had never come here, never been exposed to this exquisite torture. He had paid for the crime they accused him of, paid and was still paying. He shouldn't have to face Crispin Dean. He shouldn't be allowed to know the sweetness, the wonder of her now when she was farther beyond his reach even than she had been before. It was like showing a sparkling spring to a man who must forever be content with ditch-water, if he would drink.

In his room he did not undress but went to the window and leaned upon the sill and gazed drearily at the bright vista of Fundy. So many nights of moonlight he could remember, nights of music and laughter on great white ships like the *Orsina*; nights when he had danced with lovely women, held them in his arms, flirted a little, lied a little, loved a little. Love! It wasn't love. He knew that now. Love was born of suffering out of denial. Love was a shining thing. Flowers and music and perfume and the bright look of brighter eyes, these were but outward seeming. He knew what love was. He had learned it tonight. Love was what he felt for Crispin Dean, and it was really love because there was no faintest hope of its ever being fulfilled.

She hadn't talked of Bede. A little encouragement, he thought, and she would have told him all her story. He wouldn't give her that encouragement. He couldn't have sat there and listened to her talk about Bede Wallace. Why should anybody pity Bede? He was dead. He was a hero. His name was emblazoned on the Roll of Honor of those men who had gone down with their ships—

"Mine the misery, mine the pain;
His the praise and the glory."

He stood there a long time, his pipe unlighted in his mouth, looking at the sea that was his love—another love denied him. But he was young enough yet to dream and, God help him, he had to trust his dreams a little, who had nothing else to trust.

I'll have a boat of my own, he thought, in some little village like this and I can sail her as far as I want to—just myself. I'll be captain, mate and crew and—

The bright image of Crispin Dean appeared suddenly on the deck of his little craft, and in Crispin's blue eyes was laughter, and her hair with its strange deep fiery lights blew in the wind from the sea. He let himself dream that dream for just a little while. He let her stand by the wheel with him, but

not even in his dream would he touch her, let his arm steal about her. Perhaps—yes, a strand of her hair, soft and light and cool as spindrift, blew against his cheek and even that little bit of her was heaven.

"A man can dream that much of her, can't he?" he muttered. "Even a man like me. It's not so much to ask. I'll take her on that boat and we'll sail away to—oh, to the moon, to Atlantis, to any place where there is no one to tell her that she sails with Brandon Phare."

He sighed. He had thought when he had finished serving his time in prison that he would be hard, that he wouldn't be bothered by romantic fancies, that there wouldn't be any bright colors in his life; only black and gray. And here he was seeing rainbow tinted visions. Bede used to say, "You're a hopeless romanticist, Brand. I'll bet when you were a kid you sat in the back row of the movies and had a grand cry at all the sad parts in the picture. You belong to the Middle Ages or the Crusades. You'd have been a swell Knight in Shining Armor."

Brandon Phare, who was Abel Brown now, thought of those words this night high up under the eaves of the Sign of the Burning Ship, thought of the man, now dead, who had uttered them, thought of the girl, Crispin Dean, who had loved him, sleeping, her bright hair a glory on the pillow, only a few doors away, thought of the dark and terrible thing that bound their three loves together, and he smiled—this time a gentle smile in which was no bitterness, no defeat.

"You were right, Bede—righter than you ever lived to know. Knights in Shining Armor are no more, but there are a few of us in linsey-woolsey and hobnailed boots and a seaman's cap."

He undressed slowly then and stretched out on the bed. He did not want to sleep though every inch of his strong body ached with fatigue. He wanted to think, to live again every moment of the evening past, to hear again each word she had spoken, to impress it on his memory so that he never would forget. No, he must not forget even the slightest change in the timbre of her voice, the least nuance in the deep blue of her eyes. These things he must have to remember.

Before the Sign of the Burning Ship was awake on the cold gray morning that followed that night he was well on his way, his duffle-bag on his shoulder. He had left a bill pinned to his pillow, and he had bent, damning himself for a sentimental fool, to kiss the arm of the chair in the inn-parlor where Crispin's hand had rested.

Chapter III

It was Robby Dalgleish who found the stranger's room empty that morning. She had grown weary of knocking and had pushed the door open and looked in. She came running down to the kitchen where Crispin, a bright smile on her lips and a gay little madrigal in her heart, was mixing the batter for the buckwheat pancakes. Bacon was sizzling in the pan and there was the goodly morning smell of coffee. Portagee William had just come in from the yard and thrown an armful of rock-maple into the woodbox with a terrible crash.

Robby held the bill in her hand. "He's gone!" she said breathlessly. "Gone without ever a word and without his breakfast. Now what do you make of that, Miss Crispin?"

"Gone! You mean—" He had been the only guest. The bright smile faded and the little song died in her heart. What a fool she was! She saw clearly now why the gray morning had seemed bright to her, why there had been music deep inside her.

"Maybe he robbed the house in the night. Maybe he was a fugitive from justice and the Mounties are after him," said Robby.

"Maybe your uncle's the man in the moon," grunted Portagee William. "If he was a thief, d'you think he'd leave money for his supper and his room? Ah, no, he was no thief, that one. He was a grand gentleman, I tell you."

"But why should he go off like that?" Crispin sat down in the tall-backed rocker and looked out the window at the gray of sea and sky, at the lonely gulls circling about the headland, at a string of barges, laden with pulpwood, bound down the bay from Harvey Bank, led by a puffing tug.

She felt tired and defeated. She knew she had been looking forward to seeing Abel Brown at breakfast. She had loved talking with him last night. There was something about him that attracted and held her, some strength that was born, she felt sure, of suffering. He was kind and gentle under the unnatural roughness that sometimes marked his speech and his ways.

Portagee William was loading his pipe from a little paper bag in which he kept the awful tobacco he grew and cured himself. He lit up and filled the

kitchen with blue, acrid smoke. “He is afraid, that man, that Abel Brown. I’ve seen fellows like that, a few of them. Some went to sea with me.”

“What was he afraid of?” asked Crispin. “Not the law, I hope.”

“I think not the law,” said Portagee William. “It seems to me he was afraid of himself.”

“Too early in the morning for riddles, William.” Crispin tried to shake off the sudden feeling of depression, of loneliness, that had come to her. Why should she, Crispin Dean, bother herself about a tramp, some fellow who came from God knew where, who had done God knew what? The Burning Ship was well rid of him. Yet she could not forget the honest eagerness of his voice when he had spoken of making ship-models and selling them. She could not forget that he had said she was made for beauty and laughter. If tramp he was, then he was the queerest of the breed. And he had paid. He had told her he could pay.

Portagee William was looking at her slyly. She wondered what was going on inside that shining, olive-skinned head of his. A wise old man, Portagee William. He had the answers to many things. Perhaps he had the answer to why she felt as if the sun would never shine again.

Robby said, “And here he was talking of staying in St. Ives, of finding work here.”

“Did he say that?” Crispin looked up with too quick interest. “When did he tell you that, Robby?”

“Last night when I was giving him his supper. He asked me what people did for a living in St. Ives and I told him about Mott’s Woodworking Factory and he seemed interested. Well, he’s gone now, and maybe it’s good riddance. Just the same he was—well, there was something nice about him —”

She began to lay the table in the dining-room. Portagee William, lingering by the door that opened out into the yard, said to Crispin, “I think he would have liked to stay. But there’s something driving him on.”

“What was there here to drive him on?”

“Oh, I don’t know that. But I think there was something.”

“Well, it’s all beyond me.” Crispin poured little yellow cakes of batter onto the smoking griddles. “I’m going to forget all about him. Ships that pass in the night, eh, William?”

"Oh, aye, miss. Maybe he was just that." But, William thought, she won't forget him that easily. There was something between them, something big, whether she knows it or not. And he won't forget her. If I'm not mistaken it was after he met her that he changed his mind and decided St. Ives wasn't the place for him. A queer one, all right. The ghost ship did something to him, too. Maybe he will come back. I wish he would. It's dull here for her. And the whole world is dull for him. He can't go on forever. He has to drop anchor someplace. And where better than here? Snug Harbor in St. Ives.

All day, try to forget him as she would, Crispin found herself remembering things he had said, remembering the quick dart of his black eyes, the way his thick hair curled, the trick he had of drawing his hand across his eyes as if to shut out some unhappy vision. She would stop in her work and think of him and her glance would stray up the hill at the end of the village street as if she expected to see him trudging down the crooked road to St. Ives.

"What's wrong with me anyway?" she asked herself angrily. "Why do I keep thinking of him? And why should I feel positively thwarted because he did not stay here? Drifters like that are never up to much. And yet—"

It was late afternoon and she had just returned from a ramble on the beach, with a basket of dulse on her arm, when he came back. She saw two men half carrying him from a great truck laden high with peeled pulpwood. One of his legs dangled helplessly, as if it was hung to him by marionette-strings, and his face was scratched and bloody.

She dropped the basket. She ran as fast as she could and reached the inn-porch just as Portagee William came to open the door.

"He didn't want to come here, Miss Crispin," said the truck-driver, Trueman Fry, a St. Ives man. "But this was the nearest place to get a doctor. It's lucky he wasn't killed. Harmon Lake's little girl was playing in the road just as we rounded the curve by the Lake place. She's deef, you know. We'd 'a' killed her sure if he hadn't jumped out and grabbed her. We sideswiped him. He passed out and he muttered something about the Burning Ship—"

All this Trueman Fry said as they carried Abel Brown up the stairs and into the room he had left before daylight that very morning, and laid him on the bed. Robby Dalgleish was at the telephone in the hall below yelling at someone to get off the line, that she wanted Dr. Allaby, that it was a matter of life and death.

Abel Brown's eyes opened and he looked up at Crispin. He didn't smile. He muttered, "I'm sorry. I—don't want to be a bother. I'll be all right—"

Crispin smiled. Her heart was glad again and the little song was there, beginning right where it had left off this morning when Robby told her he was gone. She said, "Of course, you'll be all right. See what you get for running away from the Burning Ship."

His smile was something terrible to behold. She hurried away to get hot water and bandages. She was glad to get away. She had wanted to cry right there in front of him. There was something in his eyes, some blind, terrible pain, that cut like a knife into her heart. And she knew, something insistently told her, that he would rather, like a wounded beast, have crawled into the roadside thickets, there to lick his wounds, than to be brought here. Why, why should it be so? What was he afraid of? Surely they had all been kind to him and he must know that there was no one in St. Ives who wished him ill.

Dr. Allaby's high old coupe clattered up to the inn-door just as she was carrying the basin of water, the towels and bandages into the room where he lay, eyes closed, his face gray and drawn under its bloodied tan. She was glad the doctor had come. She had dreaded talking further with Abel Brown. She said, "Here's a patient for you, Dr. Allaby. He pulled Mattie Lake out of the path of Trueman Fry's truck and I'm afraid he's broken a leg."

The doctor could see that at once. Broken legs were small items in his life. He had seen men smashed to matchwood on those dark rocks that scowled through the gray of the afternoon. He had gazed on the faces of the drowned; aye, and seen men die not a dozen yards from shore.

"We'll fix you up, my man. We'll set it for you and splint it and in a few weeks you'll be right as rain. You're in good hands here."

Crispin saw again that defeated, helpless look in Abel Brown's dark eyes. He muttered, "Thank you, doctor. I should have been quicker. I didn't know the little girl was deaf."

"Hmph! Deserve a medal. Fellows drive like fools anyway. Not bad enough to be carting away all the trees in the forests, but they have to kill off the people into the bargain. Soon be nothing left. Crispin, tell Portagee William to make some splints. He knows how."

Portagee William was already climbing the stairs with the splints under his arm. "I will make," said he, "the crutches right away. I have yet the ones Captain Wishart made for me, but I am not at all so big as Abel Brown here."

He did not wince when they set the leg, but the sweat stood in beads on his brown forehead and rolled down into his eyes. Crispin wiped it away. Fleetingly he glanced at her, thankfully, almost wistfully, then closed his eyes again. She bathed his face and the doctor dressed his wounds. Then they left him, closing the door softly. He seemed to be sleeping, but Crispin knew he was not asleep. There was that in his heart, there were those things seething in his brain, that would not let him sleep.

She answered with a shrug old Dr. Allaby's look of curious question. "He came here last evening. He was sitting in the parlor with William and Seth Meynal and some others when I came back. I talked to him and—and he was very pleasant—"

"Aye, he's young, dark and handsome," said the doctor. "And he's been something better than a tramp, it's easy to tell. Are you going to look after him?"

"He said he was a wood-carver. He planned to settle somewhere—maybe here in St. Ives—and make ship-models and sell them to tourists."

"Well! Well!" said old Allaby pettishly. "God guided his steps, didn't he?"

"What do you—?" Crispin's blue eyes widened and sparkled. "I never thought of that, doctor."

"You young ones! 'y God, what do you think about anyway! Out there in the old sail-loft above the barn that was a boat-shop in better days, old George Wishart's wood-carving tools are gathering dust, adding dust to the dust of years. If the man's hands are good, and good they look to me, why, it would make George happy to have him use the tools."

"I'll tell him," said Crispin. "I'll be glad to."

Dr. Allaby looked at her, laughter in his little blue eyes under tufted snow white brows. His hair was white and curly where it was still thick around the sides and in the back. His bald spot looked like a monk's tonsured poll, and because he was a good and humble man who believed that it was a doctor's work to cure and comfort, his face had gentleness and serenity and strength.

"I lost my heart to a gipsy lad," he hummed mockingly as he followed her down the stairs, "to a dark-eyed, gipsy rover." He looked at her slowly crimsoning face as he opened the door, and gave a roar of laughter that made Robby drop the ladle into the pot of clam-chowder she was making in the

kitchen. “I’d gladly break a leg myself, Crispin,” he said, “if it would make you look like that.”

They walked on tiptoe about the inn, but the stranger, when Robby took his supper up to him, was, she reported, looking fine. He had asked her to raise the window-blind a little so he could have a better view of the sea. “I wanted,” said Robby, “to ask him why he had run away this morning, but I didn’t like to. He ain’t a one you can ask questions of. Is he going to be staying here, Miss Crispin?”

“I don’t know. He can’t be moved for a while though. It’s up to him to say whether he wants to stay here. He’s a wood-carver and Dr. Allaby reminded me that all Uncle George’s tools are out there in the loft with nobody using them and we thought that maybe when he could get around he would like to try his hand—”

Portagee William was standing in the doorway. “I been out looking at them,” he said. “Yes, they’re all in their places just as when the captain used them for the last time. It was the day he finished the *Flying Scud* and when he put down the last tool, an awl it was, he said to me, ‘William,’ he said, ‘I’m all through with these. We’ll put them in their places and maybe when some other man as loves to work with his hands and can say a prayer with a block of wood comes along—why, then, they will serve for him.’ So we made everything snug and shipshape there. Maybe Abel Brown is the man Captain George had in mind. Maybe when them tools was made it was all settled by the good God that this man should use them.”

“Maybe he won’t want to use them, William,” said Crispin. “It seems to me he still wants to get away. I think he would rather they’d brought him any place else than the Burning Ship.”

“He will change,” said Portagee William shrewdly. “A few days of it here and he won’t want to go away. The people will like him here. He saved that little Mattie Lake from being killed and he saved Trueman Fry from going all his life with the picture of the little girl all crushed and mangled in the road. That’s no small thing here around St. Ives. Men don’t forget things like that.”

Portagee William knew whereof he spoke. Harmon Lake and his wife came to the Burning Ship after supper and Mattie with them. Lake was a farmer and lumberman, quite prosperous and very thrifty, but he said gruffly, “I want to see this man, Miss Crispin, and thank him. So does the wife and little girl. And I’ll pay and gladly for everything he needs. Mattie’s all we have, you know.”

Crispin went with them up to the room and ushered them in. Robby had lighted the lamp on the bedside table and Abel Brown was bolstered up reading a battered book whose title she could not see. It had come from his duffle-bag, for there were three others, equally well worn, on the lower shelf of the table.

"Mr. Lake and his wife and Mattie have come to thank you for what you did," she said. "For saving the little one's life."

"It's only one," he said surprisingly, and his voice was strange. "A little girl's life." He did not smile as he shook hands with the Lakes. She noted, as she had noted before, that he seemed unwilling to shake hands with any man. "I'm glad I was there and that I got her in time. But you're to think nothing of it and you're not to feel grateful to me. I don't want that."

"We can't help it, sir." Mrs. Lake was a soft-spoken, sweet-faced woman. "I saw it all from the upstairs window. I saw Mattie playing in the road and the big truck coming down the hill and I called to her, forgetting she was deaf, even if she could hear me at that distance. Then I prayed to her. Sometimes I can make her come to me that way. But not today. I closed my eyes and I never again want to go through what I did then. When I looked out once more, you were there. I never saw a braver thing. It's something to save a life, sir, and you can't ask us not to be grateful. We'll do everything we can. We're not poor people."

"You've repaid me," said Abel Brown. "Richly. I need nothing more." He reached out and touched Mattie's yellow curls. He looked at her pensively and what he was thinking about made him smile whimsically. He was thinking, here's one life saved for over three hundred taken. Could a man who was responsible for three hundred deaths set out to save three hundred lives? And if he did, would it expiate his guilt? No, it wouldn't bring back the dead. It wouldn't help the mothers and fathers who lost their little ones by fire, or the children who were orphaned or the wives who were widowed. You can't straighten out a thing like that any more than you can repay one injury by inflicting another.

"We'll come again," said Harmon Lake. "If there is anything you want, just tell Miss Dean. When you're well, I want to see you. Perhaps I can—"

"You're kind," said Abel Brown. "But it's all done with now. I was a lucky man to happen along at the time. It didn't hurt me any. I'm tough. And Miss Dean has been very good to me. I'll be right as rain in a little while and I'll go my way. Good night. It was good of you to come. But you owe me nothing."

Crispin brought him a cup of cocoa before she went to bed. He was not reading when she came in; the book was lying face down on the bed and he, with his hands clasped behind his neck, was gazing out at the night beyond the window—a night of shifting fog, of gray, wispy vapors, like sea wraiths, that swirled and eddied in the sickly light that came through the inn windows. A good night to be warm and snug indoors. A fire crackled in the parlor downstairs. The old men were sitting there again and Portagee William had brought his accordion and was playing softly, strange songs of his native land, lovely, languorous things that he sang to in a warm and husky voice.

Crispin knew the song he began to play just after she came into Abel Brown's room and she knew the meaning of the words he sang so plaintively with an overtone of laughter: once he had translated them for her —

> "He is dark, my lover,
> Dark of eye and dark of hair;
> At his voice my heart awakens
> 'Neath the stars when soft he whispers,
> 'Be my love, my loved one be—'"

She was hearing the words, trying at the same time to think of what she should say to Abel Brown whose eyes lingered, dark and glowing, for a moment on her face, then strayed again to the window.

"That's lovely music," he said. "I've heard that song before. I heard it last in Lorenço Marques, one night under the stars. A fellow in a boat was singing it and playing a guitar."

"Do you know what it means?" The words were out before she realized what she was saying. She could have bitten out her tongue. Her hand shook as she put down the cup and she could feel her heart beating up in her mouth. She was relieved unutterably when he said slowly, "No—no, I do not know the meaning of it."

"I thought you might like a cup of cocoa. It will make you sleep."

"You gave me one last night and I ran away on you."

"But you can't run now."

"I—believe me, I didn't want to do it. I don't want you to think I was ungrateful for your kindness. I just had to go."

"But why?"

He did not answer that. He took the cup of cocoa and sipped it. He said, "What you have here isn't for me. I can't make you understand. I don't think I want to. You've been so kind to me. Be kinder still, and while I'm here forget about me. I don't need much attention. I—I don't want you to be kind to me." The black eyes looked into hers almost bitterly. "I want you to let me be."

"Oh!" She turned quickly so that he could not see the hurt in her eyes. It was as if he had slapped her. She felt like a little girl whose offer of friendship has been met with a sneer. She could not understand, could not realize that anyone could be so unkind. She moved towards the door. She had her hand on the knob when he said, "Wait! Please wait. Sit and talk to me for a little. Or just stay in the room. It means more to me than I can ever tell you, just to have you near me—"

"Yet you send me away." She turned and her eyes were stormy. "I don't see why I bother."

"Nor do I, Crispin." It was the first time he had used her name and there was, in the way he said it, some reverence, some gentleness, almost like a caress, that went deep into her and smoothed all her anger. "I'm nothing—a tramp, a transient, a man from no place going nowhere. Such as I are afraid of kindness because we know or we feel that we were not meant for it nor it for us."

"That's not so." Still she stood by the door. "We're all entitled to kindness, no matter who we are or what we may have done. And you—well, you did something today that the people of St. Ives won't soon forget. You're a bit of a hero now, you know, Mr. Abel Brown."

He shook his head. "I can't go on that. I can't be a hero. I have to be just what I am, just what I seem to be. I want you to understand that."

She moved over and sat in a rocker at the foot of his bed, her face beyond the rim of the lamplight. "You can do what you said last night you wanted to do. You can make your ship-models here in St. Ives. I—Last night I didn't think of it and I mightn't have today if Dr. Allaby hadn't spoken."

He was alert, suspicious. She saw it by the way he put his cup down and reached for his pipe that was on the bedside table. Why, she wondered, should he be suspicious of favors, resentful of any kindness? She wasn't the sort to stuff kindness down anyone's throat. This man made things so hard for her, for everyone. Almost rudely he had rebuffed the Lakes who had a right to want to repay him in some measure for the debt they owed him, a debt not readily liquidated.

"My uncle left a workshop. It's out in the sail-loft above the barn. He used to be quite a wood-carver. You saw the model of the *Flying Scud*? He carved figureheads for vessels in his time. He left his tools. Everything is there just as it was the day he locked the place up for the last time. Well, he wanted some other man to have them. It is a dying art now. He would be glad, I know, if someone who loved the work as much as he did should have the chance to—"

Abel Brown had a trapped look now. He had difficulty with his pipe and finally gave up trying to light it. "You mean you'd let me use the workshop and the tools?"

"Why not? They're no good to anyone here. Just gathering dust out there among the cobwebs in the loft. If you can make use of them, if they'll give you any help to find what you're looking for, you may use them, and welcome."

"Thank you," he said gruffly. "Thank you. I'll have a shot at it."

She felt absurdly glad. She felt so light-hearted she could have laughed. She knew she had been afraid that he would brusquely refuse and tell her to mind her own business. She felt almost as if she had won a victory. She thought, he will stay here now. He will settle down and perhaps make something of himself. He won't go wandering along the coast like a lost soul. He might stop eating his heart out.

"I'm glad," she said simply. "I hope it will work out all right. I know it will."

He was far from sure, but he said he too hoped so. "Next to sailing ships," he said, "I like to make them. It must have been wonderful to live here when they built those great timber droghers, built them every stick and rivet with the stuff they had to hand, took a stand of spruce and pine and turned it into a proud ship. Men who could do that have always seemed like gods to me. They'll be only toy boats that I build."

"Something more than that, I think. Few men have the skill and patience to make even a good toy boat, as you call a ship-model. I think wood-carving is godlike work anyway. You take a block of wood and with a knife and chisel make something beautiful out of it. That is what George Wishart used to do. When I was a small girl I used to come here on my holidays and he used to let me watch him while he worked. I've never forgotten it."

Abel Brown thought of Crispin watching him and he took deep joy in the thought. He could see her sitting in the great loft among the clean

smelling chips and shavings while the sun-shafts crossed the moted gloom. And he worked there at his bench making things of grace and beauty and from her bright presence there his hand would find a greater skill. He would work for her, for Crispin Dean—

It was only a dream—a dream in which he must not indulge. It could never have reality. He was only storing up more grief for himself, he knew; yet, like one possessed of the craving for a drug whose dreams are death, he would not, could not deny himself.

"I'll go there," he said, "as soon as I can use the crutches. That won't be long."

"But it will be a long time before you can really walk." Crispin tried to hide the happiness that thought gave her. He could not go away now, not for a month or more.

"I don't think I'll want to go away again," he said. "It will soon be autumn now and then the winter comes so fast. If I can find enough work here—but then, I don't know—"

He thought, she may find out any day who I am. There were pictures in the papers when the *Orsina* burned. Someone may remember, though God knows Abel Brown doesn't look very much like Brandon Phare. Gray coming in my hair now and my face looks old. Maybe—maybe I could stay here forever, for the rest of my life. And always he knew that it would be a worse hell than the hell of loneliness, to be so near to her, yet never dare to touch her, never seek to know her love. He was not the one to feed on dreams.

"I must go now." She stood up. "I hope you'll try to content yourself here." She looked down at him with a little wraith of a smile playing about the corners of her wide, sweet mouth. Old he might think he looked, and there were markings of gray in the crisp thick hair at his temples; but to her he was like a little boy, and one lost and frightened, thinking everyone against him, warring with Fate, tilting at phantoms. "We're all your friends here, you know."

"Do I make friends so quickly?"

"I think you do."

"Well, I have need of them, God knows."

"Have you no one who—?"

He shook his head. “Less than no one. I thought it would always be like that. And then I came here to this place and”—he looked at her gravely, earnestly, with a hint of defiance in his eyes—“I didn’t try to make you like me, did I?”

“Quite the contrary. You’ve been a bear, Mr. Abel Brown. You’ve growled and sulked and been as disagreeable as you know how.”

“And it wasn’t enough?”

“It wasn’t. Because you’re not really a bear. Something hurt you pretty badly, I think, and so you decide to do battle alone against the world. It’s hard to fight alone.”

He laughed. “Better men than I have fought alone and walked alone, lady. Sometimes you have to do it all by yourself. Suppose no man will stand with you or no woman cheer you on?”

“Has it been like that with you?”

“I could not say.”

But he could have said. Even she, who looked down so kindly at him now and helped him to settle the pillows behind him, would turn from him in a moment, leave him in horror as if he were one afflicted with some dreadful plague—if she could know the truth.

“Good night.” She felt an impulse to touch his dark head, to smooth that darker shadow from his brow, to rest her hand on his where it lay, brown and strong, on the white of the coverlet. But she knew it would not do. He would withdraw deeper still into the shell of sullenness from which he had begun to emerge. There was something about him that repelled any softness, any tenderness, even while it drew all that was merciful and loving in her heart; something that forbade the giving of comfort even while it cried for solace.

“Goodnight,” he answered. “You have been kind.”

He watched her leave the room. Cool and slender and lovely she was, and behind her there lingered something like a benediction. How empty the room seemed now that she was gone! Still, she was beneath the same roof. She was very near to him. He felt light and happy. Years since he had felt so. He had tried to fight this, for he knew it was a cheat and a delusion, but he could not fight now. He had done everything in his power—leaving her when everything within him cried out to stay near to her. He would have gone away and never come back, but the years ahead had loomed, this

morning, so bleak and empty and the grayness of the fog was no grayer, no more chill and impenetrable than the future he faced.

Now I can stay for a while, he thought. I can steal a few weeks, a few months maybe, of happiness and peace. That will be something to remember, no matter what happens. Food doesn't taste any less sweet to a starving man, because it's stolen. These days won't seem any less wonderful because I get them under false colors. She may never know. I'll see that she never knows. I'd crawl away tonight if I thought she would ever learn the truth—

Portagee William made a fine pair of crutches and brought them himself to Abel Brown. "There you are, shipmate." With pride he stood them against the bed. "Stout things to bear your weight. You'll be able to get around now. You'll get out to the loft soon and try your hand, eh?"

"The sooner the better. I can't stay here much longer. I never before spent even two days in bed and here I've lain for almost a week."

"It will do you no harm. It's better than walking the hard roads along the coast, better than sleeping under hedges or burrowing in haystacks, is it not?"

"So much better," agreed Abel Brown. "But it spoils a man for hedges and haystacks, William. I've had the bare boards to sleep on for too long and narrow rations for too many meals. I belong forrit, you see."

"Once though, my friend, you belonged aft, if I'm not mistaken. I sailed in too many craft to be mistaken about a man. Too much quarter-deck about you, sir."

"Maybe so." Abel Brown's mouth grew hard. "It's all done with now. We won't talk about it."

"It is nothing to me," said the old man. "I've seen many's the good one go; yes, and many's the bad one stay. I'd sail under you any day."

"Thank you, William," he said shortly, gruffly. "That, coming from an old salt like you, is a tribute indeed. I'll try your crutches now. I wish they were wings."

"Aye, an' you'd fly away again, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, I'd fly away again."

"There's no gratitude in that, mister."

"It would be kind. It would be the best way to show my gratitude. But I can't go. You'll always remember that I wanted to, won't you?"

Portagee William nodded. "I see what you mean," he said. "I do not forget."

Abel Brown went to the old sail-loft that had been opened scarcely at all in the years since Captain Wishart last left it. He found it very much to his liking. There was good wood about and fine, well-used tools. He went to work at once on the model of a full-rigged ship and even Portagee William, who had scant respect for any man brought up in steam, marvelled at the quickness, the accuracy and skill of Abel Brown. It was a proud and graceful thing he modelled, with every spar, every line, every last detail.

Crispin came often to sit in the loft and watch him at work—to sit there just as he had dreamed she would that first night when she had spoken to him about using the old shipmaster's workshop. She sat there quietly and the motes danced as he had dreamt they would dance in the long yellow rays of the sun that came through the dusty windows.

She said, "You're happy at this work, aren't you?"

"Happy as I'll ever be," he answered, looking up from the fine work of fitting a minute block to a tiny thread. "And happy enough."

"Happy enough to spend your life at it?"

"I could be."

"Is there nothing else—nothing bigger?"

"Not for me." He bent to his work again and, forgetting her after a moment, he sang—

> "It was of a sea-captain that followed the sea.
> Let the winds blow high or blow low O.
> 'I shall die, I shall die,' the sea-captain did cry,
> 'If I don't get that maid on the shore O,
> If I don't get that maid on the shore.'"

He thought of himself then and looking up found her eyes, big and bright and questioning, fixed upon him. "That's a lovely song," she said. "Was there a pretty maid on the shore? Or is that a fair question?"

He looked at her gravely and the smile he gave her was one from which all the old bitterness had gone. "It's a fair question," he said. "And it merits a fair answer: there was a pretty young maid on the shore."

"Oh! And you—do you—?"

He sat forward on the bench, his hands clasped in front of him. He stared at the floor littered with fragrant shavings and bits of wood. For a while he did not speak and she began to think the conversation was distasteful to him. Finally, though, he looked up at her gravely and said, "She's on a shore, Crispin, where I can never make my landfall. I'll just have to keep on sailing, looking for her, hoping I'll find her."

"Is she really that far away?"

"Farther even than that," he said. "Across uncharted seas."

Chapter IV

September came and the summer fading at its fullness and the reaching fingers of the autumn touching with their tips the spears of the willows, the quivering little coins of the poplars, the proud, brave shields of the maples. Now in the night the wind whistled strong and cool down the rocky shore and the shutters of the Burning Ship rattled and the old sign creaked and groaned on its bracket of iron. In the blue sky of evening the stars shone brighter and the great bosom of Fundy looked dark and cold.

Abel Brown had discarded his crutches now and could walk as well as ever. He spent his days in the old sail-loft busy at his wood-carving, his modelmaking. The full-rigged ship had been finished in record time. He had left its name until the very last and then one day he called Crispin and Portagee William and Robby Dalgleish to the loft. His face wore a look of boyish pride and he almost hurried them up the creaky stairs and into the dusty, sun-shafted dimness.

"It's a christening and a launching," he said as he pulled aside the old bit of canvas that he had rigged up to hide the ship. "There she is, as proud looking anyway as ever a Bluenose clipper that rounded Cape Sable. And there's her proud name."

Crispin Dean.

For a while none of them spoke. Crispin reached out almost reverently and touched the gleaming white keel, the long tapering bowsprit, the graceful spars, the maze of sails and rigging. There at her bow was the name, and at her stern was her port of register, St. Ives, New Brunswick.

She looked then at Abel Brown. Their eyes met and for a moment held, their glances locked. He it was who first looked away and something seemed to die out of his lean and handsome face and he gazed at his hands as if he saw on them something that no one else could see.

"It's for you," he muttered. "I—I hope you'll like it." He looked up at her with sudden pleading. "I hope you'll always like it."

"Oh, I will. Believe me, I will." Her voice was very low. She could hardly trust herself to speak. "But it is too much—far too much. You've worked so hard and so long at it. To me it's more than a precious piece of

jewelry. It has strength in it as well as skill. It's delicate but you would always know that a man made it. Thank you, Abel Brown. It will stay in the parlor of the Ship as long as I am there, and when I go it will go with me."

"I have two more to make," he told them. "One for Harmon Lake; another for that Mr. Schreiner who buys the pulpwood. They came here the other day, you remember, to see the *Crispin Dean*. They're both ship-lovers. And I'm going to buy a lathe and turn out a great fleet of little toy boats for the Christmas trade in Saint John. A man from one of the department stores there was up to see my work last Sunday. He said they'd take any number —" He stopped. It was the happiness in Crispin's face, happiness that was reflected in Portagee William's dark visage and Robby's rosy countenance, that stopped him.

"Does it—does it make you all so glad as that?" he said gruffly. "Does it mean so much to you—what I do—?" He turned from them and walked to the window and stood looking out at the sunny waters of the bay. He spoke over his shoulder: "If it hadn't been for your kindness, the way you helped me along, I guess I never would have got down to this. I'd have tried rum again and just gone on tramping until one night I'd lie down in a ditch and never see the stars—"

Portagee William limped over and placed a hand on the brown, muscular arm—a hand strong and capable that spoke with its mere touch, and Robby was crying a little and they two went softly down the stairs, leaving him and Crispin there together. He turned to her and smiled. "Sorry," he said, "I didn't mean to make a speech. But I've held back so many things so long that I just had to out with that. And I meant it—every word of it."

"I know you did. We're so glad for you and so happy that it's worked out like this. We're proud of you. It's—well, we sort of look on you as an adopted son at the Ship, you know—William and Robby and I. Pride of possession, you might call it. Now you won't be thinking about going away."

"But you—you won't be staying here always. You—"

"I don't know." She thought of the telegram that had come just before Abel Brown called them to the loft. It was from Piers Warnford. He was coming to St. Ives and he was going, he said, to take her away with him. He had always wanted her, before Bede Wallace came and after Bede was gone. Some day, she had thought, she would marry him. Now she didn't know.

She still stood by the ship-model. She touched it again caressingly. "This is the nicest thing that ever happened to me," she said. "I want you to know

that. I'll always love it and always treasure it."

He had been watching her face. He must have read something of what she had been thinking. She had never mentioned any man in her life other than Bede, whose part he knew. But there must be others. Suddenly he hated them, resented her, despised himself because they and she could affect him so.

"Well, may your ship never burn," he said.

She looked at him, startled, her hands dropping to her sides. "Why do you say that?"

"Because, if it burned, what pleasant memories you may have of this day and of me might go with it. Fire destroys so much more than the things it burns."

"I know that. But I don't think I'd forget you."

He seemed about to speak from some deeper font than any he had drawn words from before. He thought better of it. Crispin was ill at ease. She saw, by his sudden withdrawing of himself, by the far-off look in his eyes, that one of those black moods, not so frequent now as before, had again fallen upon him.

"I'll have William bring the *Crispin Dean* to the parlor. I'm eager to see how it will look there beside the *Flying Scud*."

"I'd like to see it too," said Abel Brown. And he watched her, the gold of her hair where the sun glinted on it as she went down the steep steps from the loft. He sat down on his bench then and lit his pipe and stared at the trim ship he had builded with such infinite care, such pride, such thrill of achievement as he had never before known. So different had been the work he did here from what his fettered hands had accomplished in the prison-workshop. This had been a labor of love and now that it was done, the last spar in place, the last back-stay drawn taut, there came to him a feeling of futility, of emptiness. There was no meaning in it all. His boats would be pretty things to look at, to grace a mantel-shelf, to please those with a vicarious love for the sea. But his ships would never sail and his dreams have no fulfillment. How should he dare to dream of Crispin?

He gazed at his sinewy hands. Strong and capable, and used now for the making of toy boats. Once they had directed great ships, held the safety, the lives of hundreds in their keeping. Now they made toys. Aye, he mused, and lucky for me that they can do that. They'll bring me bread, at least; and if

it's true that not by bread alone does man live, it's equally true that he doesn't live without it.

He could work no more today. It was late afternoon anyway. He went down from the loft and followed a path across the fields to the headland at the east of St. Ives that was known as the Devil's Back. Below him the beach stretched in a silvery tawny crescent. High up on the shingle, half buried in sand and rubble and bleached like the skeleton of some thirst-killed ox in the desert, lay the broken bones of an old ship. A schooner, he had figured, from what he could see of her keelson and her ribs. Longer than the memory of the oldest men, she had lain there.

They all come to it, he mused, one way or another. Some go to their proper resting, the fit burial ground for ships, the bottom of the sea; some are battered to pieces on rocks, some from their proud estate become coal-barges and drag out to a pathetic end; some are burned. He thought of the *Orsina* blazing in the tropic night, her vast bulk sheeted with flame, sparks and smoke shooting upward to the stars and the sea for miles around glaring like the floor of hell, and the little things like ants from a demolished anthill scurrying hither and yon, panic-stricken, demoralized, dropping off as the fire cut away their last finger-hold—

He climbed the Devil's Back and reached a ledge where he flung himself down among the ferns and the tall grass, rested his chin on his hands and gazed at the sea's rim, at the distant shores of Nova Scotia. A little tramp-steamer, her dark smoke a smudge over the brightness of the water, was creeping slowly down the bay, bound for the open sea. How he envied the men on her bridge, the very fo'c's'le hands; yes, even the sweating stokers in the inferno of her stokehold. The land was his prison, and always would be. He could build his little boats and sail them in a pond or a bath-tub, but the deck of even a hopper-scow was forbidden ground for the man called Brandon Phare.

And as Abel Brown he dared not go. Such as were tagged as he was tagged were doomed to discovery sooner or later. He was on the beach and on the beach he would stay. Well, he had found a little happiness here in St. Ives. He had found a measure of peace at the Sign of the Burning Ship—that name that always furnished him grim amusement, so fitting was it to mark the place where dwelt Brandon Phare. But this little of happiness could never be more. He dared not ask for more, yet he wondered how long he could be content with this little.

He felt an urge to run when he saw Crispin climbing the path from the beach. She had a basket of periwinkles which she had been gathering from the reef left bare by the ebb-tide. She wore a yellow sweater and white skirt and her hair was lovely in the mellowing light of the sunset. He watched her as lithely she climbed the steep, almost perpendicular path. He marked the length and symmetry of her legs, the sureness of her small feet. He stood up as she drew herself onto the ledge, breathless and laughing, her cheeks flushed with the hardness of the climb.

Unthinking, he reached out his hands to her and drew her up and when she stood facing him he did not release her. He could not. Her eyes—he could see only the blue-black depths of her eyes and he lost himself, lost all restraint, in his gazing. One of his hands held one of hers, the other was on her arm. Slowly, all the world shut out, all fears, all dark things forgotten, he drew her to him and his lips came down to meet hers uplifted, parted, willing, giving kiss for kiss, fuel to his flame. Life and wonder and warmth in that slender, softly molded body of hers; heaven in the fragrance of her, the silken softness of her hair—hell in the realization that came to him when he released her from his arms.

He stared at her, dazed, appalled at what he had done. Now he must go —go and never return. She was looking at him expectantly. She was not angry. God, why wasn't she angry! Why didn't she rail at him, strike him, hate him! Why, instead, did she look at him with that softness, that mist in her eyes. Didn't she know it was Brand Phare she looked at? Didn't she know what the world called him? A dead man walking the earth—

"I—Crispin, I'm sorry. I couldn't help myself. I don't know what made me do it. Oh, why lie to you! I do know, but there's no good in my knowing it and much less in my telling it to you. I had no right to do that—No right —"

Her cheeks were hot. "I could have stopped you," she said, "had I wanted to. Why do you say these things? Why do you humiliate me? You've done it since the first night you came here. You've made me feel I was forcing even my friendship on you. Every little kindness I tried to do for you —you made it seem like a sin. Now you make me feel as if I were to blame for this. Forget about it! I'll forget about it. I don't know why I ever bothered with you, ever let you have any little place in my life. I hate you. If there's a devil in you, as you seem to think, don't you know that devils can dwell only in hell, and if your life is a hell you've made it so. I—"

She ran through the tall grass and climbed swiftly to the top of the hill where the road to St. Ives passed close to the cliff's edge. He did not try to follow. He stood there without moving and all the poor ruins of the little structure of peace and happiness he had built came tumbling and breaking around him. Nothing now—less than nothing. Fool! He might have gone on, living near to her, seeing her each day, hearing her voice, feeling the warmth of her friendship. He had spoiled all that. They could never again meet on that same impersonal, friendly plane. He had wiped out all chance of that with his folly. He hated the hands that had touched her, the lips that had kissed her.

"Well!" he muttered. "That's the end of it; and end it had to one day. Better now than later perhaps. If I go now she may never learn who it was that kissed her. She would be spared that. Better go at once—go and never come back to these parts."

He looked at the darkling water, at the black buttresses of the Fundy shore, huge, grim and terrible. He felt like a pigmy before their immensity and knew why men worshipped vastness and made their God omnipotent and immense.

At his feet lay the basket of periwinkles she had gathered. Some of them were spilled and he knelt down and picked them up, every one. Then he took the basket and climbed to the cliff-top. Far down the winding road he saw her walking. He stood there for a moment, hesitant—he who before had never for a moment doubted what road he should take. Then, slowly, as one who knows he does wrong but cannot help himself, he took the road that she had taken.

He did not see her at supper that night. The model of the *Crispin Dean* was on the mantel in the parlor. He thought she must have told Portagee William to put it there before she went winkle-gathering. Good it looked too, with its clean white canvas and gleaming hull, its tapering spars and proudly sweeping lines.

Robby told him that Crispin had gone to visit Miss Jane Corscadden, the schoolmistress, at the other end of the village. "Funny, too," said Robby, "for there is a guest coming, a friend of hers, a Mr. Warnford from Montreal. Her sweetheart, I guess. She got a telegram this morning from some place up north. But when she came back this afternoon she seemed to have forgot about him. Did she forget the basket of periwinkles you brought back?" Robby's eyes were shrewdly speculating.

"Yes, I found them on the Devil's Back," said Abel Brown.

He sat for a while in the inn-parlor that evening with the old men from the village. They admired the ship-model. Seamen themselves, they appreciated the skill that had been put to its making.

"Only a man who's served his time in sail could do a job like that, eh, Jonas?" said Seth Meynal. "You'll have shipped afore the mast, Mr. Brown?"

"I made some voyages on the *Herzgovin Cecilie*—wool from Australia," said Abel Brown. "I always knew sailing-vessels and—loved them."

"Aye," agreed Seth. "Somethin' to love in a craft like that." He pointed at the model with the stem of his clay pipe. "Somethin' fine an' clean an' nat'ral an' right in a square-rigger. A man's ship. I sailed in many a Bluenose clipper out o' Yarmouth. I'm proud to think that a young man like you cares so much about the sailing ships. Most don't nowadays. Maybe ye never could get to like steam. Maybe that is why ye left the sea?"

"Maybe," said Abel Brown, and said no more. He went up to his room presently and lit his lamp and lay on the bed to read his books. He had Moby Dick, which he liked best, seeing in Ahab accursed, his own dark story, though his was no quest for the White Whale, but a flight from the flaming phantom. He had Moll Flanders and Bleak House, and Henry Esmond; he never wearied of them.

He found it difficult to read tonight. He tried hard but he was listening, he could not help but listen, for the light quick step of Crispin Dean. Also, he was listening for the sound of a motor. This Warnford—who was he, and what did he mean to her? Maybe he was the man she intended to marry. Some fellow with money and position, no doubt; someone who had made a go of things and something of himself; not a wretched jail-bird who made little boats, who was at odds with life, who could never get right with it again.

"I won't be in her way," he muttered. "I'll go tonight, and this time there'll be no broken leg to bring me back. Better if I'd broken my neck. I wouldn't feel this inside me."

This was a pain not physical but none the less real, the like of which he had never known before. Love it is, he thought, and it's hard to take and maybe the man who said "all other pleasures are not worth its tears" was exaggerating just a little. It comes to me late. It will hurt when it leaves me, if it ever leaves me.

Midnight struck from the old clock below stairs. He had not heard Crispin come in, but he thought she might have come quietly so that he would not hear her. She would not want to talk to him or see him again. Maybe she was staying away to give him a chance to go. He had very little money left, for he had paid his board each week, but he gave no thought to how long it would last him now or to where he would get more when it was gone.

He began to gather up his few possessions and pack them in his bag. He had very little more now than when he first came to the Ship. There was a pair of socks Robby had knitted for him; a pipe and tobacco-pouch that had been a present from little Mattie Lake. Then his books, which he always packed last so that he could easily reach them.

"That's the lot." He looked around the room. He liked it better, now that he was leaving it, than ever he had before. He liked the bright rugs, the pictures of ships, the seascapes, the neat blue-flowered paper, the gay cretonne curtains that Crispin had made and put there since his coming. A good room. The only thing like home he had known in several years. Probably the nearest thing to home he ever would know. Where would he go now? What could he do? Ah, well, he was strong. He wasn't afraid. Certainly not afraid of hunger or hardship: they were small things after the miseries he had known.

He had shouldered his duffle-bag and turned the lamp low preparatory to blowing it out, when he heard her step on the stair. He paused, motionless, his heart jumping and he feeling as guilty as a schoolboy caught in some wrong doing. Well, she would pass his door, go on to her room, and he would wait for a little while to give her time to get to bed. She wouldn't want to see him tonight or ever.

She had reached the landing now. She was passing. She had passed. He let his breath exhale, but it stopped midway in the exhalation for she had retraced her steps and her knuckles were beating the familiar rat-tat-tat on his door, and she could see the light through the chinks in the ancient wood. He dared not blow the light out now. He could not refuse to answer.

He coughed and she must have thought he said, "Come," for she opened the door and stood there on the threshold looking at him, her glance going from him to the duffle-bag to the turned down lamp. She came in then and closed the door. Resignedly he turned up the wick and the room grew brighter.

"I should have gone earlier," he said. "I—I thought you were in bed, Crispin."

"Something told me this was what you would do. You're a bit of a coward, aren't you—Abel Brown?"

His nostrils widened momentarily and his jaw grew hard and there was a look in his eyes that made her lose some of her assurance. She knew that if it had been a man who said that it would have gone ill with him.

"Well," he said softly, "and if I am?"

"You're running away, aren't you? I thought it was only cowards who ran away."

"That's a bit of a platitude. It depends on what one runs from, don't you think?"

"What are you running from then?"

"Myself."

She looked up quickly. "Odd! That's what Portagee William said about you when you first left us. I don't understand."

"We're plowing old ground. It's simply that I think it would be best for me to go. I thought so that first night, you remember? Yes, and I would have stayed away if it hadn't been for the broken leg."

"But the leg has been well mended this fortnight and more and you did not go."

"I was fool enough to think I could—"

"Yes?" Very softly.

"Could stay near you and not—"

"Yes?" Softer still.

"Love you."

"Strange love that makes you run away." Her voice was mocking now but still it held that gentleness, that expectancy, and her eyes were very bright.

"I don't want you to go," she said.

"But I—"

"There! I lay myself open to more punishment. I'm throwing myself at your head."

"Crispin! You're mad. You don't know—"

"Maybe I am mad. I don't care. If I am, then it's a pleasant way to be. I said I hated you this afternoon, didn't I? Then I got out on the road and cried. Then I said I'd go to Jane Corscadden's and send you a note and tell you to go away. I did write the note, then I tore it up. I stayed at Jane's, thinking you'd go away in any case; then I became frightened for fear you would and I ran all the way home."

He shook his head. "Perfectly and beautifully logical, Crispin. If I've seemed a beast—unkind, ungrateful, unresponsive—please believe it's not my fault. I've never been so happy as I've been here at the Burning Ship. I've never spent brighter hours than those I've passed with you. I know I'll never find anything like this again, no matter where I go or what becomes of me."

"Still you would go. You were going to leave here tonight."

"I am going to leave here tonight."

"You're not. Wait—!" She held up her hand. "If it's Crispin you're worried about, forget it. I won't bother you again, I promise. If you're so noble, or whatever it is, that you don't want me near you, I can fix that. Piers Warnford is due to arrive here any time now. He's been asking me for years to marry him. When he asks me this time, I'll say yes. Does that help your problem any?"

He sat down on the bed, staring at the rug, his face expressionless, his hands tightly clasped. Trapped. He felt a net about him, a net of a million light silk threads that were the looks she had given him, the smiles, the words she had spoken. Tiny silken threads, each one nothing in itself but which when woven together made a stronger thing than steel. He could not burst it, could not fight his way out of it. Where was his strength, his hardness, that iron that had been put into his soul, that had made him quite sure he would never again care for any living creature or scruple to give hurt.

"You don't need to go now." Her voice was unsteady, filled with a lovely huskiness. Her hands were against her breast. "Surely there's nothing now to drive you away?"

"And nothing to keep me."

"You said you had found some happiness and contentment here in St. Ives. Isn't that enough to keep you? Stay here and establish yourself. Get along with your work. I want that for you."

"I know you do. And you—you will marry this fellow, this Piers Warnford. Do you love him?"

"Has that so much to do with it? He is good, gentle, kind. He loves me. I shall have someone to look after me—a home, children of my own—"

"Yes." He nodded. "Yes, That is a good thing. It is your natural right."

"Have you never wanted those things?"

"You don't know what you are doing to me, Crispin. I can never have those things. Never. I thought I could do without them, that I could content myself with the sunsets and the beauty of the sea under the moon and the sound of the waves. And I could make my boats—"

"And, if you must, can't you be content with those things?"

"I've let myself dream too much of others, I'm afraid. But I can try. Yes, I will try." He stood up. "You'll go your way and you'll find happiness and I can be glad because things will be right for you—"

"That's bravely said, mister." She smiled, but her eyes looked queer. "That's spoken like a strong man, spoken the way I like to hear you speak. For you are strong, I know. You could face anything, yes, and best it. I don't like to see you trudging off in the night because of—because of—"

"Some silly little dream." He smiled too, but there was no mirth in it. "Well then, since you think I'm brave I'll stay. It can do no harm now. But I still believe it would be the braver thing to go."

Above the low keening of the wind outside the inn they heard the sound of a motor and a deep-toned horn blow a single note. They looked at each other and both knew what it was. They heard Robby, who had stayed up for the guest, hurrying through the hall below and opening the front door. Then laughter and a man's voice calling, "Crispin! Where are you, Crispin?"

She turned slowly away from Abel Brown, tearing her reluctant gaze from his face. One word, one look, one gesture of the hand. There was agony in her heart. Could he not see what he was doing to her, not realize that this love between them was greater far than anything else in all the world? That if he let her go now they both were doomed to misery?

He made no move. He did not look at her. “I have to go,” she said. “Goodnight and goodby.”

He looked up at her then. “Good night,” he said, “and good luck.”

“You won’t go now?”

“I won’t go. It doesn’t matter now.”

She went out, closing the door softly behind her. Yet another door closed in his face. Life would be always like that. He would be always like this, sitting, staring at closed doors that could never be opened to him. He could picture her downstairs and she would be in that man’s arms and her kiss would be given to him. Her kiss—but he had known that too. He had felt the wonder of her, the softness of her mouth; he had known the perfume of her hair. Nothing could take that away from him. And it was more, so much more, than he had ever expected to have, so very much more than he had any right to.

Wearily, he unpacked his bag and put his things back in the drawer from which so short a while ago he had taken them. His books he put again on the little table by his bed. He went to the window and looked at the night. It was pitchy black except where the great headlamps of Piers Warnford’s car cut through it. The twin tail lights were like evil red eyes glowering up at Abel Brown.

A dark chill autumn night to tramp the roads, the steep and winding roads that follow the shores of Fundy. A man would be a fool, he told himself, to leave a warm, snug room like this, to quit it forever, and plunge into that pit of mirk.

“I’m glad I’m not going,” he muttered angrily, defiantly, as if he were talking to some dark power that had tried to force him. “Why should I go? I’m earning my way here, doing no harm to anyone. I can earn more. I can be all right. Why shouldn’t I stay? She will marry this man. She will be safe from me. So I’ll stay. I’m no saint, no martyr and I’ve played Christ too long. It was a thankless business for Him and it’s a thankless business for any man who tries to be like Him.”

He saw the lights of the car go out, heard voices and laughter. He could hear Crispin’s voice and he smiled to hear it because he loved it and it made him feel all good inside, made him forget so many things in thinking of her sweetness and youth. And she likes me, he thought. Yes, if things had been different, I might have had her. If I weren’t a damned Quixotic fool I might

have her yet, but I've played the part too well and too long ever to forsake it now. So I'll go on with it.

He laughed. It had been one of the few things that had kept him sane in the years of his crucifixion, that he could laugh at himself, laugh at life. He could see clearly what he was doing. He had always been cursed—or blessed—he wondered which, with that power of detachment, of standing off and viewing things in which he played a part. And he had chosen the part and played it well. He did not know why. Some reasons there were, but not the sort of reasons the world would understand.

"Ah, well," he said, "tomorrow I'll go to work on my boats. It's a good thing to have work to do. Everything will be as it was before this afternoon on the ledge of the Devil's Back. We'll be friends as we have been and now that I know she's for someone else it won't be so hard being near her and hearing her voice. It will be—will be—"

Liar! He knew he was lying to himself. He knew in his heart it would be worse misery than ever it had been before. Now he would picture her in this other man's arms, giving her lips, her love, her beauty and warmth to some clod who could never awaken what was in her, never bring that misted look to her blue eyes, never put that seal of passion on her lips. He had known the truth in that brief moment when her heart had thundered against his, when their beings seemed to merge into one soaring flame of beauty.

"Crispin," he said softly. "Crispin. May your road be bright with sunshine all the way."

He blew out the light and stood at the window till he could see the little spear-points of the stars over the dark world of waters. He heard the low, sighing sound of the waves on the beach below St. Ives and, though he said no word, he prayed—the sort of prayer that God loves to hear, for no self entered there.

Chapter V

Piers Warnford was in the inn-parlor, standing, legs a-straddle, gazing out through the screen of lovely red and pink geraniums of William's careful tending, at the peaceful pageant of village-life—the baker's little cart, an old woman with a great basket of alewives, a boy leading a reluctant cow, a man in a rattly old flivver selling lobsters from door-to-door. Houses across the way had hooked rugs hanging from the verandah rails and Piers, who had a bit of an eye for art, shuddered at the fearful designs of orange lilies and bilious looking roses. He liked the pastoral peace of the little village—for a while. He was wondering, as he had always wondered, why Crispin Dean had come here in the first place and why she had ever stayed.

He felt surer of her now. There had been, in the way she greeted him last night, a hint of promise. She had let him kiss her and, even though there was no ardor in her response, it had made him very glad. He had known her since school-days, had often carried her books home for her, had fought with his fellows over her and always considered himself her valiant knight. Then Bede Wallace had come to Montreal on a cruise-ship. He had been at the Windsor the night she and Bede met at a dance given for the cruise passengers. He hadn't liked Bede Wallace from the start, even before he saw that Crispin was fascinated by the sailor's blond good looks, his great strength, the laughing, reckless way he had with women.

Well, Wallace was gone now and she had taken lots of time to recover from her heart-break, if such it was. Somehow, he had an idea she hadn't suffered so much. Something, he knew had hurt her, but it wasn't Bede's death on the *Orsina*. He felt sure of that. She had seemed to lose interest in life. She had begun to laugh at things that before she had reverenced. She had even made little of his love that she knew in her heart was earnest and sincere.

Eagerly, she had jumped at the chance to leave family and friends and take over the strange legacy that old George Wishart had left her. Piers had told her she would tire of it in a month or less, but the months had stretched into years and even now, he saw to his wonderment, she was very much contented here in this forgotten village among a lot of peasants and fisherfolk.

"Queer," he mused. "She looks younger, lovelier, than ever. If I didn't know better I'd say she was in love. It's not very likely she would find—"

He heard a step in the hall and turned quickly and his eyes met the dark and curious gaze of Abel Brown. He saw in that instant the answer to his wonderment about Crispin's freshness and beauty. Here was a man. He wore a blue high-necked seaman's jersey, old gray flannel trousers and heavy boots, but there was a strength and grace about his brown body that made Piers, a powerful man himself, feel a twinge of envy. Crispin had not mentioned this fellow last night. What was he? Porter, handyman, guest?

He nodded to Piers. He hadn't quite been prepared for such a clean-cut specimen as this fellow was. He saw the excellence of Piers' suit of Harris tweed, the expensive brown brogues, the hand-tailored shirt and tie. He had seen the tan convertible-cabriolet in the yard and liked it as all men like a great machine. Sure, this was the sort of man a girl should marry. Success and assurance written all over him. Abel Brown knew the type. He'd seen plenty of them on shipboard. Ten thousand a year or better. Good school. Good clubs. Good taste. Be a good man to his wife, if not much of a lover.

Piers said, "Good morning. I was just watching the rustic maritime scene and thinking of Gray's 'far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife.'"

"Yes, it's peaceful here."

Something in the way he said it made Piers look at him with still greater curiosity. Here, thought Piers, is a man who has set a premium on peace. He doesn't belong here, I'll wager. What is he? Tourist? Deep-sea fisherman? Someone who wants to be forgotten? I don't like to think of his being here with Crispin—

"Belong here?"

"Sort of. I live at the inn." Abel Brown was wary. "I build ship-models."

"Ah!"

Piers' brown eyes strayed to the mantel, to the beautiful silhouette of the *Crispin Dean*. "Did you build that one?"

"I did." Abel Brown's eyes were defiant, challenging.

"It's a swell job." Piers was honestly enthusiastic. He walked over to study the model closer. "Crispin buy it from you?"

"I presented it to Miss Dean. She was kind to me," said Abel Brown. "I was a stranger, you see, and she took me in. I had a broken leg. Now I work

in her uncle's sail-loft making ships."

Piers held back the thousand questions that burned on his lips. Here was something! What queer twist of fate had brought a man like this to Crispin's inn? What had put him at the work of making little boats when he looked as if he would have skill enough and drive to build ships like the Queen Mary. Here he was playing at life in a little seaside village. There was something in those strange dark eyes of his, some light like the reflection of fire.

"I'd like to see some more of your work. I'm not much of a ship-lover myself but I should like to own a model like that. Can you make me one?"

"Glad to. It's the way I earn my living. What shall it be—ship, barque, schooner?"

"Whichever you like to make."

"It's a matter of the rig largely. The one with the fore-and-aft rig on two masts there is a four-masted barque; the other's a full-rigged ship. I'll build you a ship."

"My name is Piers Warnford."

"Mine is Abel Brown."

Warnford gave him a sceptical look, but he did not bat an eye. He picked up his mail, a marine-journal and a letter from the toy-shop people in Saint John, and went back to the sail-loft. He hadn't seen Crispin this morning. He had been up even before Robby, who had given him his breakfast in the kitchen and spoiled his appetite by babbling about the new arrival, his clothes, his car, his good looks.

"I think," chattered Robby, "that he's the one she's a-going to marry. When he came in last night he gave her a big hug and called her darling and she let him kiss her. That means something. I bet she will have a grand house in Montreal and lots of servants and go horse-back riding and to a dance every night. That's what she should have. This is no place for a girl like Miss Crispin. Might as well be dead and buried as stuck here in St. Ives." She looked at him, stricken, then. "Still you don't seem to mind it. You seem to like it here and you must 'a' been all over the world. Portagee William says you have. He said he couldn't mention a seaport that you hadn't been to."

"I've been in some strange places, Robby," said Abel Brown, buttering a piece of toast that he knew would be quite tasteless. "There's as much here

in St. Ives as there is anywhere else. It all depends on what you're looking for."

"You mean to say, Mr. Brown, you'd stay here all the rest of your life? Never have any fun or anything?"

"Why not?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Robby, her brow furrowed. "It just don't seem natural, that's all."

He was thinking of that now as he went slowly back to the loft. It didn't seem natural for a girl like Crispin to stay buried here. It was a good thing Warnford had come for her, a good thing she had decided to marry him. Only darkness ahead for any woman foolish enough to love Abel Brown. She had done wisely and for her sake he was glad. Of course he was glad. So he lied to himself as he picked up his tools and began the work of building another ship.

Today he had no heart for the task, but he drove himself on, for he had been trained in the stern school that makes its pupils do first and do best the things they find hardest to undertake. Under his knife and chisel and file the block of wood took shape, changed slowly from an ugly thing all angles and corners to an image of grace and symmetry. And he loved it—loved the feel of it in his hands, the smell of it, the way it obeyed him.

Nothing can take this from me, he thought. This is mine and only God could deprive me of it. Man can take many things from his fellows but not the God-sent gifts. He felt exalted when he worked at his art. True, they were only little boats, toylike things, but his was the power to see them magnified ten thousand times and more, to see the shipwrights swarming about their keels like ants in the skeletons of mastodons, to hear the symphony of hammer and ax and saw and mallet, to see the tall masts stepped, the yards hoisted into place, to watch the riggers at their skillful work; then to see his ships glide down the greasy ways, making them smoke with the power of their going; to see the water dashed into foam and spray as his vessels felt the sea's first kiss.

Godlike work. He dreamed of yachts he would design some day, creations of infinite beauty, lovely, graceful, swift as gulls. He could see them, clean and white, their wings spread wide, skimming over the blue, white-capped waters, sending high the spray from their razor-keen bows. So he filled his soul with beauty there in the dim old loft—beauty to take the place of the beauty that was Crispin Dean, forever denied to him.

In the days that followed he saw little of either Crispin or Piers Warnford. One day they were away to Saint John, another day off on a picnic up the shore, another wandering on the beach below St. Ives. Sometimes at a distance he could see them from the window of the loft and at such times it was only with a terrible effort that he could drive himself to work. To watch them strolling along so close together, to realize that all the wonder and all the glory that was Crispin would be given to this man—

"I must not think of her. I did wrong ever to dream of her, to let myself go like this. I knew I was doing wrong, knew what it would do to me. Yet I reached for the forbidden fruit. I touched it, tasted it, and now I can never forget its sweetness."

Piers Warnford came up to the loft one afternoon to watch him at work. Piers looked brown and very fit, much more so than when he had come. He said, "A man should live forever in a place like this. I felt old when I came here, but it seems as if I'd lopped about ten years off my life. I couldn't blame a chap for settling down here and living out his days in peace the way you are doing. If I hadn't got into the rut of the work I do—investment-banking, buying and selling, money-changing— But what's the use? I have to go on."

"Your work has its compensations, I should think," said Abel Brown, squinting along a stick of wood he was shaping into a mast. "Money can make up for a lot of things, I've heard tell."

"You don't crave money, do you?"

"Not I. Money wouldn't do me any good whatever. Not all the gems from Samarkand or all the pearls of the Indies."

"You're very sure, friend."

"Very sure," said Abel Brown.

"But you have riches of your own."

"Yes. To do a job well and to like your work—that's wealth. I get a lot of pleasure out of this work."

"And you like it here?"

"Yes, I like it right well."

"Queer old place, St. Ives. Something mournful about these little villages along the Fundy shore. They're like the ghost-towns of the west. Once thousands of men built ships here; now there's nothing. An old man

said that when he heard the peepers in the spring he could hear in their peeping the sound of the caulkers' mallets striking against the iron to drive in the oakum."

"Yes, it's like that. The mallets are bored and give off a note with a definite pitch. A ship-caulker can tell a good mallet in a minute."

"Strange. They have some odd yarns. What about this ship all on fire they claim they can see offshore here sometimes? Do you think there's anything in that?"

Abel Brown, pretending to be concentrated on stepping the mast he had made, watched Warnford from the corner of his eye. He was wary. Maybe it was just a casual question; maybe it was leading somewhere.

"I saw something that looked very much like a ship on fire, the night I came here," he said casually. "Of course, there was an electrical storm and it may have been some sort of phenomenon resulting from that. Most likely it was. Then, too, they have the loom in the Bay of Fundy. It's a sort of mirage that comes now and then and you can see ships and houses and trees that are many, many miles away."

"But this ship story persists. Queer too that Crispin should own an inn with a name like the Sign of the Burning Ship."

"Why queer?" asked Abel Brown idly; though he knew very well.

"A ship that was burned played a great part in her life—a tragic part for her. Have you ever heard—but of course you have—of the *Orsina*, the big cruise-ship that burned some years ago off the Bahamas with a terrible loss of life?"

Abel Brown put down his tools and picked up his pipe. He tapped the dottle from it onto the palm of his hand, filled it and lighted it. "Maybe I have," he said. "What of it?"

"Just this: Crispin was engaged to marry the captain of the *Orsina*—man named Bede Wallace. I met him in Montreal the same time she did. Well, he was burned with his ship. There was a hell of a scandal about the whole business. Investigations, royal commissions, all that sort of thing. The blame for most of it fell on the mate. Seems he had a skinful and was having himself a time with a blonde, an actress named Gaye Fontaine, when he should have been on duty—"

"He went to jail for it," said Abel Brown dryly. "Two years he got, as I recall the story. Lost his rating, lost everything. They might as well have

hanged the poor devil."

"Hanging was rather too good for him, don't you think?"

"I wouldn't know," said Abel Brown, his fingers gripping tightly the blackened bowl of his briar, his eyes hard as agates, his mouth grim.

"Crispin was pretty well broken up about it all. Old Captain Wishart, her uncle, left her this inn when he died and she seemed glad of the chance to get away from Montreal. I think it's done her good too. But she can't stay here forever. I hope to make her my wife."

"Congratulations," said Abel Brown, aware that Warnford was watching him closely. "Yes, I think you're right. This is no place for a girl like her—not to spend her life in. She's missing too much. But it will be lonesome for us all here when she's gone."

"I can readily believe that. She's not so keen to go either, but I think I've made it clear to her that she has a duty to herself. This is not her world. She comes from a fine old family. She has a place in society. I mean to see that she takes it."

Sure, thought Abel Brown, you'll dress her in silks and ermine, diamonds and pearls, buy her a Rolls and a swell country-place, see her about two or three of your waking hours and think you've done a swell job of making her happy. But you'll never see in her eyes, my laddie, what I saw for one brief moment of eternity one afternoon on the ledge of the Devil's Back. No, I think you'll never see that.

He was weary of talking. He found Warnford shallow and prosy and too much of the type that can shuffle bank-notes like playing cards, and figure where to deal each one. He was glad there was a lovely sunset over Fundy. He watched it and paid little attention to Warnford's plans for developing St. Ives into a first-class summer-resort, calling it St. Ives-on-Fundy, building a great hotel and generally playing hob with all the things that made the little village so beautiful and unspoiled.

He was glad when Piers got up from the old chair made out of a molasses puncheon and said he must be going. "You can send my ship to Montreal, Brown," he said. "I'll leave you the address. Wish you luck with your boats."

"Thank you," said Abel Brown and he grinned slyly at the nicely tailored shoulders that were dropping below the floor of the loft. He went to the window and leaned on the sill and blew smoke out into the cool fresh autumn air. The bay was copper red. A schooner was hove-to offshore and as

he watched, her sails went up and the sunset made a magic thing of her as she moved slowly away. The gulls were noisy around the weirs, darting and screaming and quarreling among themselves. Two sea-dogs basked on the reef a little way offshore and dove and swam about. A fisherman came up from the wharf carrying a pair of oars on his shoulder. He was whistling and he saw Abel Brown and grinned up at him and waved, and Abel waved back at him. He felt strangely at peace tonight. After talking to Piers Warnford, he found out how little he had lost and how much there was to gain.

He turned from the window when he heard Crispin's quick step on the stairs. She hadn't come here since the day he had made her a present of his first model. He had been afraid, rather, that she would not come again. Always, in fancy, he could see her sitting there, in that same rude chair that Piers Warnford had used, her slim legs crossed, her hands busy with her knitting. And he had thought he would have to be content forever after with that vision.

She wore a tweed suit today, its color the brown of the autumn leaves, a tan blouse with a flowing black tie and stout tan brogues well-worn and well-kept.

They gazed at each other for a moment and all the loneliness of sea and sky seemed to descend on him. He felt forlorn, bereft, and in all his being an emptiness such as he had never known before. He knew what she had come to tell him and he realized that, like a man condemned to die, he had been hoping, hoping in his secret heart that for his love there would be a reprieve. Now he read the truth in her face, in the darkness of her eyes, the solemn look about her mouth. She was hatless and she brushed back the dark gold waves from her brow.

"How is the work coming, Abel?"

"It's—it's coming well." He leapt at the chance to postpone the sentence for even a few brief minutes. He went eagerly to his bench. "See, I have the hull all shaped and finished, the bowsprit in place and the masts stepped. It won't take me long now. This one is for Harmon Lake. He wants it to be named *Mattie*. Then I have one for Mr. Schreiner and your—and Mr. Warnford wants one too. I'm to send it on to him when I'm finished. Then I have a lot of work for the Christmas trade. I'll be going great guns for the next few months and—"

He had been trying to make it all sound bright and cheerful, but somehow it fell flat. He looked at her, sitting there, her hands folded in her lap, the last light of the sun on her face and hair. She seemed a creature all

golden and ethereal and he felt the bigness, the awkwardness of his body, the roughness of his clothes. His hair was long and unkempt and there was a black stubble of beard on his face.

"You're going away," he said. "That's what you came to tell me, isn't it?"

She nodded. "That's what you wanted, isn't it?"

"No. Oh, no. I—Well, what does it matter what I want? It's your life and your happiness. I hope—I know you will be happy."

"What makes you so sure?"

He could have said, "Because, by escaping me, my love, you escape much pain and misery." But he did not say that.

"You will have everything that brings happiness—a good man for a husband, a fine house, clothes—all that."

"Have those things so much to do with happiness? 'Better a dinner of herbs—'"

"Ah, yes, I know. Those things sound good. One soon would sicken of dinners of herbs, I'm afraid. Marriage should involve the head as much as the heart. You pick a good partner."

"And you make it sound like a business-deal."

"Perhaps it's best that way."

"Well—" She stood up dejectedly. "I came to tell you I'm going to Montreal with Piers tomorrow. Robby and William and you will look after the inn for me, I know. I haven't fixed my plans definitely yet. I just know I'm going. I'll say goodby now. I wanted to say it here in—in your workshop. I used to be so happy here watching you at work, knowing that you were happy too."

"It was you who made me happy, Crispin." His voice was low, his utterance thick. "You know that. What of peace I've found here I owe to you. I owe so much to you, my dear."

"Once when the Lakes spoke to you of their gratitude, you would not have it. You rebuffed them. Well, I won't be like that. I'll take what gratitude you have to give—yes, and treasure it—yes, and love it—"

She felt the rush of tears to her eyes and she had almost to grope her way to the stair-head, so was she blinded. He stood there helpless, fighting back

the mad impulse to run after her and take her and never let her go, to defy the world and heaven and hell for her. But he could not. He stood there and let her go, heard her running feet on the steps, saw the light go out of his life as from the raftered loft the last sunrays died.

He sat on the bench then, his head in his hands, sat there till the darkness came and the lights of the inn shone across the yard. Portagee William came to the stair-foot then with a lantern and called to him. "Supper's all over, Mr. Brown," William called. "Robby's keeping some for you. Aren't you coming to eat it?"

"Thank you, William. I'll come. I—I must have fallen asleep. I'll be right there."

He didn't want to go. He didn't want to see her or Piers Warnford again. He looked in the kitchen window to see that she was not about. Only Robby there, opening the warming-closet to look at his dinner.

Portagee William was at his elbow, the lantern extinguished. "She goes away tomorrow," said he. "Maybe for good. Maybe she never will come back." And he waited expectantly for Abel Brown to speak, but Abel Brown said nothing.

"What's wrong wi' ye, man?" William's voice was gruff and angry. "I'm a poor fellow, an old man, you're a gentleman if I know what one is. You're not blind and you're not a fool. Or are you?"

"I'm not blind, William. But a fool—well, some would call me a fool. I've often thought I was one. But I can't be sure."

"You could keep her here. You know you could. I know it. She knows it."

"Keep her here?" Abel Brown shook his head. "Not I. What have I to offer? You don't know what you are saying. You don't understand."

"What are you afraid of? What are you hiding?"

"I'll keep my own counsel," he said gruffly. "I'll mind my own affairs. And I'll thank you to mind yours."

William backed away. "You know best, sir. I have no doubt you know best. But it seems all wrong to me. It seems cruel wrong to me."

"Wrong it may be, but there are things a lot worse—a thousand times worse. She's doing right. I know what's best."

He left the old man there and went into the kitchen. He had no appetite for the food Robby set before him. Fortunately, she didn't have a chance to bedevil him. A noisy party of late-travelling tourists, Americans who had been hunting up in the Shepody district, filled the inn-parlor and overflowed into the hall. They were clamoring for their supper and Robby, who could develop several extra pairs of hands when she wanted to, was doing wonders with bake-pan and skillet.

"I do wish though," she said, "that Miss Crispin would come back and give me a hand. She doesn't know these people are here or she would come. She went walking with Mr. Warnford right after supper. Oh, dear, and that William has disappeared too. Always when you want a bit of help there's no one around. I told him to bring me wood for the fire in the parlor and he's gone off and forgot all about it."

"I'll fetch the wood, Robby." Abel Brown was glad to leave his tea, which had no taste for him tonight. "I'll be glad to help you."

"Oh, if you would, Mr. Brown."

Boots at an inn, thought Abel Brown as he got up from the table. Well, why not? Better men than Brandon Phare have worked at lesser tasks. He went out into the yard where the stars were bright in the cool night sky, and got a great armful of wood. There was no sign of William. The old man liked to wander down to the sea at night and sit on some old hulk and listen to the waves. He said they spoke to him.

Abel Brown was carrying his load of firewood along the hall to the parlor when he heard in the spate of noisy talk that came through the door of the warm, bright room, one name that made him stop in his tracks, that caused him to loosen his grip on the wood and all but let it go clattering and crashing to the floor. He heard a girl's shrill voice speak the name of Gaye Fontaine—Gaye Fontaine whose history was so closely bound with his, whose name coupled with his had meant disgrace and infamy.

He took a mighty hold on himself. He thought of retreating to the kitchen, but he knew Robby would wonder; and even as he vacillated there, the front door opened and Crispin came in with Piers Warnford. Caught now. He had to go on. If this girl who knew Gaye was one of those who had been in her party on the *Orsina*—

It will be the pay-off, he thought wretchedly. The end of this brief, lovely time, the beginning of more darkness for me. And why should it come like this, so unexpectedly, so casually? Suppose Gaye herself were there—Gaye who had spoken to him the day he went to prison, who had looked at him

with a hateful mocking light in her cold blue eyes. “See you when you get out, sailor. Don’t worry, I won’t forget you. Girls like me never forget men like you. I’ll be seeing you. Boy! Can you take it!”

He walked into the parlor before Crispin and Piers got to the doorway. There were three girls and two men there. He knew the type. How he knew it! Too much money, too few brains. Room in their minds only for what they called fun and what they called love. But Gaye was not there. He had never seen these girls. A vast relief came into his heart. He breathed easier. He knew the girls had stopped talking and were looking at him. Crispin was greeting the guests. One of the men, a swarthy fellow with a livid scar near the left corner of his lip, was staring at Abel Brown.

“Sa-a-a-y!” he said. “Haven’t I seen you some place before? Your face is as familiar to me as John Barrymore’s?”

Abel Brown’s somber eyes met his unflinchingly. There was silence in the room now. He could hear the clock in the hall ticking and Robby rattling dishes in the kitchen. He could feel Crispin’s wondering eyes upon him, see Piers Warnford’s lifted brows, the intent faces of the other men and women.

“You’re mistaken,” he said calmly. “You’ve never seen me before.”

The swarthy fellow kept snapping his fingers as if he would pluck what he wanted out of the air. His eyes were narrowed, his brow wrinkled. “Can’t think,” he muttered. “Can’t place it. But I know I’m right. It’s—” He shook his head in exasperation. “I’ll get it yet.”

“Don’t try too hard,” said Abel Brown. “You don’t know me. I live here. I carve those pretty ships you see there on the mantel piece.”

“No foolin’?” said the swarthy fellow. “Nice work, all right.” He kept looking narrowly at Abel Brown and in Abel Brown’s heart was a prayer. This fellow had seen him before—that was certain. Where or when, he did not know. Maybe the memory would return in an instant; maybe it would never come back.

“Excuse me.” He left the parlor. He passed Crispin and saw her eyes, wondering, questioning, upon him. She, too, had guessed that this fellow was right. She, too, was wondering where it was that he had seen Abel Brown.

He was glad to get out of the parlor, out of the inn, into the coolness, the freshness of the autumn night. The dark blue sky was sprinkled with stars and a crescent moon was up beyond the dark spires of evergreens on the hills beyond St. Ives. It had been a narrow escape for him. Maybe he wasn’t

out of the woods yet. It might come to that fellow before the night was over. He had a terrier look about him. Maybe he'd keep worrying at the business until he recalled the time and place and circumstances. Perhaps he had sailed on the *Orsina* or on some other ship where Brandon Phare in crisp white uniform and gold braided cap walked the bridge and sometimes mingled with the passengers. But Abel Brown, maker of ship-models in the little Fundy village of St. Ives, was a far, far cry from Mr. Brandon Phare, chief officer of the Crimson Star Line's proudest ship. Pretty hard to bridge that gap. And he, should it be bridged, could still deny.

He did not go back to the inn until he saw the lights of the strangers' car sweep down the hill and tunnel through the night. "God speed!" he muttered. "And God keep your kind away from me. I don't want to be remembered; all I want is to be forgotten. I don't want anything except to be left alone. That's not so much to ask—just to be left to go my way alone. That's all done with, finished, washed up. It's got to stay like that."

He went into the inn by the back door, and climbed the stairs to his room very quietly. Everybody had retired but he saw a pencil of light under Crispin's door and he watched it for a moment and thought of her behind those dark panels. Tomorrow night she would not be there. The place would seem empty, terribly lonely then. It had been so good just to know that she was sleeping only a little distance away, that he was near her, that in the morning he would see her smile, hear her gentle voice.

No more now. Through the long cold cruel days and nights of winter there would be only the memory of her, only the ghost of her footfall on the stairs, the echo in the dim and shadowy hall, of her low-voiced, throaty laughter. In the morning she would be gone—

Her door opened as he watched and she came out into the hall. She wore a green quilted dressing gown and little green leather slippers. Her hair was a glory, like a nimbus of aureate light above her pale, pointed face, and her eyes looked strangely dark. She stood for a moment, not speaking.

"I—I'm just turning in," he said.

"I wondered if you were ever coming back. Tell me—it didn't upset you—that fellow's thinking he had seen you before?"

"Not much," said Abel Brown.

"Had he seen you before?"

"How should I know? Many people have seen me before."

“He was so sure. Even after you went out he kept on trying and trying to recall you and he was pretty sore about it at the end. He was one of those fellows who prides himself on never forgetting a face.”

“So I gathered,” said Abel Brown. “Well, here is one he couldn’t place.”

“You’re glad, aren’t you?”

“Yes, Crispin. I’m very glad.”

“Why? Can’t you tell me why? You—you know it would make no difference with me—not in the way you think. But it might in another way.”

“I don’t want it to make any difference with you in any fashion. I’ve told you that before.”

She came to him and put her hands on his shoulders. Her face was uplifted to his, her gaze held and devoured his and he could not move nor put her away from him.

“Who are you, Abel Brown?” she whispered. “Tell me who you are. Or don’t ever tell me. But don’t send me away. You know it is you who are sending me away.”

“Does it rest with me then? Whether you go or stay?”

“Yes—yes, it rests with you.”

He bent and touched her hair lightly with his lips. Then gently, strongly, he loosed her arms and put her away from him. “Then,” he said, “if it does, I must tell you to go. That’s all I can say, my darling. I have no choice.”

“If—If I go I may not come back. You may not see me again.”

So like a little girl. He smiled at her, but there was torment in his eyes. “You’d better go,” he said. “You’d better go quickly.”

Chapter VI

From the dust-grimed window of the loft he watched her drive away with Piers Warnford. It was a golden autumn day and the sea glinted like nickel in the sunlight. The maples along the street of St. Ives were holding out their crimson banners in farewell. In front of the inn stood Portagee William, waving his hat, and Robby with her apron held up to her eyes like, Abel Brown thought with sad irrelevancy, the mother who stood on the Liverpool dock. A number of the villagers were there too and they raised a cheer as the long open car rolled away from the inn and climbed the hill down which, so short a while ago it seemed, Abel Brown had come.

A great cloud of dust hid them from sight and when it had settled down they were lost in the dark green forest and for him all the world was empty. He couldn't realize she was gone. So much the thought of her had filled his life, animated his work, given him hope and courage. So much she meant to him that her spirit would linger here and it would be days, weeks even, before he was fully sensible of what he had lost.

He went to his work-bench and picked up his tools. He began to work doggedly, stubbornly, knowing that work is a great panacea, knowing how lucky is the man who can find a task that absorbs all his talents, all his energy and skill. Work had saved him many times, but it didn't save him now. Try as he would, he could not keep his mind upon what he was doing, putting the finishing touches to the ship-model he was building for Harmon Lake. Clumsily he snapped off a slender spar and made a sad tangle of the web-like rigging. He gave it up then.

"Not today," he muttered. "There's not light enough today. There's not the heart to work. There's nothing."

Gladly he left the sail-loft and cut across the fields towards the towering height of the Devil's Back. He had not gone to the ledge since the day Crispin had come to him there and he had held her so briefly in his arms and kissed her. He had vowed he never would go there again. But today he went to it as one afflicted goes to a shrine at which marvellous cures have been performed. Perhaps there he would find some solace; perhaps if he closed his eyes and lay there in the tall grass and fragrant ferns, her spirit would come to him and her cool hand touch his brow.

Yes, he felt a little better here high up on the ledge above the curving miles of sandy beach, the gleaming waters of Fundy. Here it was very still, only the soft rustle of the wind that came rippling over the fading grass, only the slow distant surge and sigh of the waves on the lonely shore, the occasional eldritch cries of the wheeling gulls. Through the morning, through the noontime, through the long slow hours of the afternoon he lay there, his chin cupped in his hands, gazing out to sea, living his life over again, pondering on it, thinking of the things he should have done and hadn't, of those he had not done that it was his duty to perform. Living again each moment he had spent with her.

And strangely, for a man that all the world condemned, he found the retrospect not an unhappy one. He even smiled—and, oh, so different was that smile from the one that had greeted the Sign of the Burning Ship when he first came to St. Ives. He felt as if some purging draught had been administered to his soul. He felt the joy of denial, of renunciation. He felt nearer to God, here in this lonely spot above the sea, than he had felt in many years. He knew that the loneliness would come upon him again, that the months ahead would be hard, that he would be tried many times and that dark thoughts would come to shake his faith and that evil voices would whisper, "What's the use? Why go on living this stupid life? Why pretend to be noble when you're only a poor bit of jetsam whom no one in all the world gives a thought to?"

It's not so, he answered himself now. It can never be so. She has given a thought to me and she will not forget and if someday she knows why I acted as I did, it will make her feel less bitter towards me and make her despise me less. But she's given me something that nothing can take away. She was, of all the people in this world, the one who least should show me kindness, and she was so good to me. I like to think that, even had she known who I was, she wouldn't have been cruel, she might even have shown me some mercy.

Yes, he liked to think that, but bitter experience had taught him that for such as the world thought guilty of crimes like his there was very little of kindness and less of mercy. The mob had reviled him. Coming from the courtroom that had been the theatre of his shame, he had seen the fury of the mob and felt the horror of it. The clenched fists brandished at him, the screams of women changed by hatred from gentle wives and tender mothers to evil harpies who lusted to rend and destroy him. Yes, they had tried, those who were close, to spit upon him. He knew, he knew how little the world had changed in two thousand years. The Wallaces, mother, sons and

daughters—they who had been so near, so dear to him—in their faces more contempt, more scorn than in all the others. No pity for him, no quarter for this man through whose sin so many had suffered.

He shook his head. He rubbed his eyes. There was cold sweat on his forehead and a trembling in all his body. It was always like that when he remembered the hour of his condemnation. Often in the night he would awaken, sit bolt upright in bed and fancy he was facing that tide of scorn, of rage and contumely, and he would find his lips shaping the words he had spoken then—"I have nothing to say—nothing. You can do what you like with me, do you hear! I have nothing to say."

Of course he had nothing to say. They knew. God, it was a miracle that the power of speech was left to him. Why was he not stricken dead! Where was justice that he had not long ago been torn limb from limb! What of those charred corpses, those maimed and ruined bodies, the hellish torments men and women had suffered through his neglect! Nothing to say—of course he had nothing to say—

"All over now," he whispered. "All over and done with. They've forgotten me now. The world soon forgets—its hatreds as well as its loves. I'm all right now. I can stay here and find peace and contentment. She's gone and now I don't have to worry about her, about what any association with me would do to her. Love—I never dared to think of love—not really. I told her I loved her, yes, but all the time I knew how hopeless, how impossible it was. God was kind to take her away from me. He wouldn't let her good life be tangled up with anything so marred and ruined as mine."

The crimson sunset was fading when he left the ledge and climbed to the road down which he had followed Crispin. Almost, in the twilight, he could see her slender figure down there among the trees. It would always be like that. She might never come again, but at every turn he would meet her and he would hear her voice in the rustle of the wind, the whisper of the waves on the sandy shore.

The lamps were lighted in the Sign of the Burning Ship when he walked through the yard. The place looked deserted and forlorn. In the kitchen supper was over and Portagee William, sitting in the corner, was drawing doleful music from his old accordion and Robby was sitting listening to him, the dishes neglected. They looked up, brightening, when he came in, and Robby hurried to get his supper.

"We were afraid you had gone too. William—it was William—he said you were likely to vanish as quickly as you had come. See, you were wrong,

old black Portagee, he didn't go. Here he is now."

William nodded. He kept playing softly that same tune he had played the night Crispin had come to Abel Brown's room—

"He is dark, my lover,
Dark of eye and dark of hair;
At his voice my heart awakens
'Neath the stars when soft he whispers,
'Be my love, my loved one be—'"

"It's good, William," said Abel Brown when it was finished.

"You know what it means?"

"Yes." Abel Brown smiled, thinking of how whitely he had lied to Crispin that night. "Yes, I know what it means quite well."

"It means nothing to you," said the old man. "Nothing."

Abel Brown did not answer. He ate a little, drank his tea and got up. He said, "I'll go to the workshop now. I feel like doing something. No day without its chips should be a wood-carver's motto."

"It's awful lonesome without Miss Crispin," said Robby. "I don't know how I'm going to stand it, and all William does is sit there in the corner and play his a-cordeen and his music is drivin' me crazy, it's so sad."

"It's not easy for any of us," said Abel Brown, stopping at the door to fill his pipe. "We'll find it mighty dull sailing for a while, but, after all, we have to think of her. She is going to a better life than she could ever have here—"

William's music, sadder, more plaintive now, like the voice of the wind in the deep caverns along the shore, seemed to give him the lie. "She will be very happy, you may be sure. There's so much to do in the big cities. So many new faces, so many places to go. Music and parties and dancing—"

"I don't think she cares for any of them," said Robby dismally. "She was crying fit to break her heart up there in her room this morning before she left. Not like a girl who was going to find great happiness, not at all like a bride."

Abel Brown fumbled for a match and lit his pipe with unsteady hand. "Brides cry, Robby. It's—well, it must have been that she was making such a great change and—and—" He felt the pressure of Portagee William's sharp black eyes, little probing eyes, set deep in the tortoise-like head. Impatiently he flung the spent match in the stove and went out to his workshop.

Strange shadows haunted the vast old loft. The wind was mournful around the eaves. He found himself looking over his shoulder from time to time and it became so bad finally that he stopped work and sat down and laughed. "What is this?" he said. "I'm not getting fey, I hope. I could have sworn there was someone over in that corner by the sewing-machine. I could have sworn too that I heard—heard her speaking to me. She will be miles away by now. It will be pleasant riding under the moon and stars. Oh, she will be happy. I want her to be happy."

He drove himself to work. He stayed there till almost midnight, till his hands got clumsy and his eyes tired. Then, with a sigh of sheer exhaustion, he gave it up. But Harmon Lake's model was almost finished. And it was good. He knew how good it was. He had been able to squeeze in a few years of marine architecture before he went to sea. He had always had a flair for design. He thought, wistfully, how wonderful it would be if men built great sailing ships these days. He cared little for the steamers in which he had sailed. He had never become attracted to them. Too much like robots. No heart in them, no soul, nothing that a man could talk to. He had always wanted to build yachts. He had spent long hours designing the boats he'd like to build. He had dreamed his dreams. Here tonight, alone, friendless, as he always would be friendless, he brought out again his cherished, half-forgotten dreams and found them still bright, still good, still able to warm his heart and give a lift to his spirit.

"Yes, yes," he said. "I may do it yet. I'm not beaten yet. I won't give it up. Men still sail yachts, still spend fortunes on them. I may get my chance."

And when he went back to his room, through the silent halls and up the silent stairway of the Ship, he dug out an old volume on marine architecture and studied it until he could keep his eyes open no longer. And in the darkness he let himself yield to rose-colored visions, picturing a day when, under the name of Abel Brown, he would be hailed as a great designer, and Crispin would know of it and be proud of him. He could win fame and wealth and build another life for himself—

She has done this to me, he thought. She has given me new hope, new courage, new ambition. Thank God that I met her, just when life for me seemed at its lowest ebb and it looked as if the tide would never turn. What was it the old ones said about the vision of the burning ship—that it portended a great change in the lives of some of those who saw it. Maybe—maybe that meant me—

He would not tonight admit the futility of his dreams. He told himself he never would again. He would put some trust in them, follow them, whip them into reality, make them come true. He thought of other men, older men, who had emerged from darker clouds than the one that rested upon him, who had beaten their past and built life anew, built strongly a new life on the ruins of the old.

"And so can I! So can I!"

Weary in mind and body he slept well that night, but with the dawn he was awake and out of the inn, striding along the dew-wet paths by the roadside, drinking in the frosty freshness of the morning, loving it, feeling its cleansing power in his soul. Good to be alive. Good to be young, for he was still young. Good to feel again that he wanted to go on living, that he could make something of the years ahead.

And through the quickening autumn and into the bitter days of winter when the wind roared and blustered out of Fundy and the trees crashed to the ground uprooted, when frost was thick on the window pane and the land was covered deep with snow, he guarded his dreams and worked and studied to bring them to reality. No day too stormy or too cold to keep him from his workshop; no task too arduous for him to undertake. The models ordered by Harmon Lake, by Fritz Schreiner and Piers Warnford had long since been finished and he had orders for five more. Hundreds of little boats to gladden the hearts of children had come from the workshop where he spent his days. And he had worked too on designs for a yacht that he could already see, all canvas spread, leading all her sisters. He found joy in his work and forgot his loneliness, his isolation from the world, when he stood at his bench and lovingly handled the tools of his trade. He was a god then. He was supreme.

Letters came from Crispin, addressed simply to the Sign of the Ship, which meant they were for any of the three to read. Nearly always it was Abel Brown who read them to the wide-eyed Robby and to old William as they sat in the kitchen by the comfortable fire.

She spoke of places she had visited, of great hotels, of balls and parties. She had been to New York for a week. She had bought grand clothes. Her married sister, with whom she was staying, was very kind to her and Piers went everywhere with her. "We haven't yet fixed a date for the wedding," she wrote, "but we think it will be in the spring. I will let you know.

"And how goes everything at the ship? Does William still play his accordeen and forget to fill the woodbox until you scold him and threaten to

box his ears, Robby? And have you learned yet how to make that short-bread that had you beaten for so long? And you, Abel Brown—are you building bigger and better ships? I know you are. Piers is simply delighted with the model you made for him. He boasts about it to everyone and you may expect a flood of orders. It seems that these old fogies of lawyers, doctors and bankers all have a frustrated sea-complex. You can see their eyes grow wistful when they look at a ship.

"I can see you all there this winter-night, sitting by the fire in the kitchen. I can hear the wind and the crash of the waves against the Devil's Back. I can see the old signboard swinging in the gale and hear the old clock striking out the hours. I can close my eyes and imagine I am there—"

Was it a faulty pen that blurred the ink there or was it—Abel Brown looked and felt a stab in his heart—the dropping of a tear? Surely not. She would have got over tears by now. No place for grieving in the gay life of Montreal. One could forget there. She must long since have forgotten. But the letters came at least once each week and the three took turns writing to her, though it was Abel Brown who had to edit the compositions of the other two and help them with what they wished to say.

His own letters were brief and impersonal. He studied to make them so. Often and often he wanted to pour his heart out on the paper. Often and often he tore up a filled page because, willy-nilly, some telltale word, some phrase of endearment would creep in. The letters she never received were more in content than those that reached her. But he had to keep so much locked up in his heart. He had to keep to himself the pain, the heartache and the longing. The nights he had lain awake in the darkness thinking of her, the nights he had awakened from dreams of her, fancying he heard her voice, her footsteps on the stair, her light knock at his door.

"It is always the same here, Crispin," he wrote, "Except for the one presence that counted most. Robby cries regularly every time she tries to make the short-bread and it may be that the batter is getting too much brine. Portagee William's music was a combination of Irish keening and Scotch lament for at least a month after you had gone. It's getting a bit more cheerful now, but only a bit. Yes, I'm working hard at my ship-models and I like my work better each day. Everything goes well with the Ship. Guests are few, of course—the odd commercial-traveller now and then. But Robby can tell you all about that. It's blowing a howling nor'easter tonight. That big cedar across the road at Almon's house blew down last night and took the telephone wires with it. The mail hasn't got through for two days and the

train from St. Martins to Hampton has been stuck in snow-drifts for over twenty hours. Aren't you glad you're in Montreal?"

She sent back that page with the notation, "I am not." It made him glad, it made them all feel better, to think that she still loved St. Ives, still felt lonesome for the old quiet life at the Sign of the Burning Ship.

"Oh, aye," said Portagee William. "Come spring she'll be back again. As a bride it may be—" He glanced slyly at Abel Brown—"and only for a little visit. But she will come back."

Spring! The days grew colder, the snow piling deep and ever deeper, with twenty-foot drifts in places, with great white scallops of it hanging from the dark cliffs around St. Ives. Never such a winter in the memory of the oldest men. Snow-plows battled the clock around, days on end, but as fast as a road was cleared it would drift in again or a new fall would come and the weary men and groaning tractors would have to start the work all over again.

Still Abel Brown stuck to his bench and sang and whistled as he worked. He was content. There was a loneliness, a hunger, in his heart for that which he knew he could never have. The loneliness would always be there, the hunger go forever unappeased. Memories he would have, that were pleasant, that made him smile fondly even now, that made him think how fortunate he had been even to know her.

He wasn't so much the hermit now. He had lost something of his strangeness, his dread of going among men. He had come out of his shell. In St. Ives he didn't have to be afraid. Right now, beleaguered by the great ramparts of the snow and by its eternal cliffs and the gray stormy sea, it was more than ever a little world by itself, a world of which he was part.

They made him one of them, these simple fishers and woodsmen who ordinarily were shy of strangers. What he had done for the Lakes, in saving deaf little Mattie from certain death under the wheels of the pulpwood truck, had given him status amongst them. He was accepted, greeted kindly, even welcomed, and if they wondered about his past, as they most certainly did, they respected his silence and made few efforts to question him. He worked hard, minded his own business, lived a life above reproach. He was the kind of man they liked.

So he went to their socials and card-parties and played a good hand and enjoyed himself. He knew them all by name, and through their talk, supplemented by the encyclopaedic knowledge of Portagee William and Robby's tremendous fund of gossip, he knew as much about them as they

did themselves—their loves, their hates, their fears, the joys and sorrows, and if their lives were small, constricted, narrow and ignoble, he did not for that despise them. He grew to have a better knowledge of his kind, grew wiser in understanding, more ready in sympathy.

Christmas came and with it gifts from Crispin. For him a set of wood-carving tools that in themselves made his heart as happy as a boy's, that pleased him more because of her who had sent them, because they spoke so eloquently of her trust, her faith in him and in his work. For William there was a concertina of gorgeous color and with a maze of little pearly keys. William edified the Ship by playing the two instruments at once in an improvised and ear-splitting duet. Robby got a silk dress and a fur-jacket that made her weep with joy. It was a grand Christmas at the inn, and if, as the three of them sat down to dinner that day, to the smoking turkey and all the good things Robby had provided, there was a moment of sadness, it soon passed, for they knew that she was with them in spirit and that, above all things, she wanted them to be happy.

Abel Brown had sent her a wood-carving, a fresco, that showed the front of the inn with Portagee William sitting on the bench by the great spruce tree and Robby in the door. He put himself into it walking towards the inn with his duffle-bag on his shoulder, gazing up at the sign. It was a lovely thing, authentically colored.

"It's the next best thing to being there," she wrote, "just to look at it. I have it hanging in my room and I never tire of gazing at it. Thank you, Abel Brown, for this and for so many things."

Perhaps, he thought, by now she is ready to thank me because I told her to go. No doubt by now she realizes the truth. Her place is there, happily married, leading a good and normal life. She was bewitched by the sea down here. It does strange things to those who live by it and can hear its murmurings in their hearts. Aye, she is well away from it.

Now from bitter pale gold dawns to angry crimson sunsets the slow winter dragged itself into the blustery days of February, with no let-up, no surcease. The ancient timbers of the Ship creaked and groaned in the iron grip of the frost; at night, under the glassy stars and the ice-cold moon the forest trees cracked with noise of rifle-shots. Great cakes of ice were scattered along the shore, capped with deep snow, and the waters of Fundy looked like the seas of Ultima Thule of which Tacitus said they were so thick they impeded the oars of the rowers.

Out of one terrible night of blackness and storm a wild light shone on the reef below the Devil's Back just east of St. Ives. Abel Brown was working in his loft that night, busy with the rigging of a model that was almost completed, that was destined for one of Piers Warnford's friends in Montreal. He was facing the window that looked out on the bay when he saw the lights go shooting up into the sky; then above the horrible cacophony of howling wind and thundering water, of thrashing trees and rattling sleet he heard the wild bellowing of a steamer's siren.

He dashed out of the loft and met Portagee William coming from the inn carrying a storm-lantern. It was late. Most of St. Ives had been long abed, but lights were being lit everywhere now and voices and shouts rose above the storm, above the awful, stricken sound of the steamer's whistle.

"I thought it was the ghost ship," yelled William grasping his arm, "when I see those rockets go up! Well, she will be ghost ship all right before long! She is piled up on that rock below the overhang of the Devil's Back, three hundred feet of hell between her an' shore that no boat could cross, suppose you could la'nch a boat tonight!"

They hurried along the snow-banked street, meeting others with lanterns, hearing William's dictum verified on every hand. At the lifeboat station the crew were standing by, but even the most foolhardy among them knew there was no hope of getting their boat into the water. They could see the lights of the stranded steamer and now her searchlight stabbed a short way into the driving snow and sleet and the spray that flung itself upward like the lashing manes of wild sea-horses.

"It's that Danish tramp, the *King Olaf*," said Martin Boyle, the lifeboat captain. "She went up to Alma last week, 'y God, you'd think they'd sheer well off from a lee shore on a night like this. It's all up wi' them now. She'll break in two inside an hour. God help them all."

Abel Brown and Portagee William stood with the crowd, that huddled together there on the wind-raked beach. An awful hush fell on them all. No one there but had seen other vessels smashed to splinters on these rocks, no one there but felt a deep sorrow for those unfortunates fated to a frozen death so far from their own race and place.

Abel Brown had seen men die. Aye, he had seen them die like flies a more ugly death than this. And he hated death. He hated its power, its implacable will. He was militant against death. His great hands were clenched now and there was a wild look in his eyes. He knew exactly where the *King Olaf* lay spitted on the razor-edged rocks of the reef. He knew the

cliff above. He knew what a man with great strength and the help of God could do.

"We'll get a line aboard her and bring them off in a breeches," said he, and several of the men standing around lifted their lanterns so that the light shone on his face. They wished to see if he were drunk or crazy. What they saw made them lower the lanterns. The glowing, almost fiery eyes of Abel Brown were fixed on the dim lights of the ship and his face, his jaw had the set of iron.

"I said," he repeated, "we'll get a line aboard her and bring them off in a breeches. I said we would and, 'y God, that's what we'll do! Get your lines, Martin, and a hundred and fifty feet of rope and we'll climb to the overhang on the Devil's Back and you'll lower me from there. I'll get a line aboard her."

"You're daft, man," said Martin Boyle. "You couldn't do that. No one could. Suppose we can lower you down, the wind will smash you against the cliff face. Suppose the wind didn't kill you, still you'd be a goodish distance from the wreck."

"I can swing aboard the wreck," said Abel Brown. "I can push off from the cliff face and swing right onto her fo'c's'le. I know what I can do. This I can't do—I can't stand here, hands hanging, and see men die. I've seen—seen too many die in my time. Will ye come?"

Wordlessly, awed, they got their gear and followed him. Old William hobbled at his side, saying never a word, trudging along bravely, scrambling, wooden leg and all, up the slippery path to the ledge that overhung the stricken ship, the hell of black rocks and furious water. He it was who made the lines fast about Abel Brown's great body and he gripped Abel's hand hard before the word was given to lower away. But never a word said William nor did any of the rest. Stout hearts all, men of iron and courage unquestioned, men who had faced death in many guises—they had no word to say.

"Lower away!" called Abel Brown. "Lower away!"

And they lowered him down towards that yawning pit of demons unleashed—down and down until they felt the line begin to swing as a pendulum swings, slowly, slowly at first, then in an ever increasing arc until they saw the dark blot of his body in the sickly radiance of the *King Olaf's* searchlight.

Men cursed, prayed, held their breath moments on end. He was so far, so far from reaching that upflung prow. When he did reach it wouldn't he be smashed to bits? They could see lanterns bobbing on the steamer's forepeak now. "They've thrown him a line! Maybe they'll get him—maybe—"

Still that frail rope with its human pendulum swung back and forth, back and forth, oscillating in the raving wind. "Best pull him up! Pull him up afore he perishes!" said one. But, "No!" said William. "No!"

Then the line tautened, slackened and from a score of throats a roar went up that drowned out the howling of the wind. "He's made it! He's made it! He's got aboard."

Now they descended the cliff holding with fingers of steel to that faint cord that was the life-line for a score of men and more. Now from the shore they began to pay out the lines for the breeches-buoy. They were alive now, they were stronger, surer. A man had shown them how to defy death, how to fight it, struggle with it, best it. This, Abel Brown had done for them—that quiet, slow-spoken man who spent his life modelling little boats, who had the courage and strength of a mighty god. Portagee William sat in the thwarts of the lifeboat and wept. He loved Abel Brown, loved him as a son, yet it was he who had forbidden them to pull him back.

Now the breeches was rigged and across the boiling sea that plucked at them with death-cold fingers, that roiled and snarled up at the prey of which it had been cheated, the wrecked seamen were drawn to safety. One, two, three, a dozen, a score, and last of all came Abel Brown. His hands were raw and bleeding and blood dripped from a gash in his forehead.

No man spoke to him, but many touched his arm, his shoulder, and many a hard mouth trembled and men felt better and had a better insight upon the power of God that He can give to his children.

"All off," said Abel Brown, and his voice was hard. "All hands except the captain. He was a young Dane. He was part owner of the ship they tell me. His first big venture. He shot himself."

He was glowering at the wreck. Its lights had gone out now. He was thinking of that young captain, remembering times when death had beckoned to him, had whispered, "This is the easy thing for men who face what you have to face. This is the way out."

Tonight he thanked God he had turned a deaf ear to that soft cold voice. Tonight he felt good and strong and he knew he would never be afraid again, that he could face up to life hereafter and take no backwater from it.

The drenched and shivering seamen were being hurried up from the beach now to snug houses and hot rum and warm blankets. Most of them came to the inn with Abel Brown and William and some of the lifeboat crew. Robby and a half-dozen of the village women were there to attend to them, to give them food and hot coffee, to make little of their pathetic words of thanks, to comfort them and scold them. Scarcely a home in the village but had given, at one time or other, succor to ship-wrecked men. It was part of the heritage of these people, part of the splendid tradition of their kind.

Most of these men were young. Danes for the greater part, a sprinkling of Dutchmen, the little Cockney who seems to be a fixture in every fo'c's'le, a big negro—a motley crowd.

"That was brave man," said a big blond fellow, mate of the *King Olaf*. "I never see one braver than that. Who is he, that man? One of you?"

"Aye," said Robby proudly, exchanging looks with William, who was bandaging a sailor's wounded arm. "Aye, sir, one of us is Abel Brown."

"We must thank that man. Yah, we would all be dead if he had not got to us."

"A well-plucked 'un!" said the little Cockney. "A man, that's wot 'e wos. When I saw the spot of 'ell we'd landed into this night, I says to myself, 'Bert 'Icks,' I says, 'you'll never agin see Lime 'us 'Ole, or your old woman Maggie. It's Dyvy Jones's locker for you, me boy.' And, lumme, if this 'ere Mr. Abel Brown don't come swingin' aboard the old kettle an' syve us all."

They talked of Abel Brown, all of them, as they drank their coffee and warmed themselves by the great fire that William had built on the hearth. They did not notice him come into the room and he stood in the doorway for moments watching them. He had put on dry clothes and but for the bit of sticking plaster on his temple, he looked the same as ever. His hands were behind him.

William, who was watching him, saw too the sailor who sat by the door, saw the queer look come into his eyes as he stared at Abel Brown, saw him spring up and speak, but did not hear his words. Then he spat in Abel Brown's face.

William's hand flew to his mouth. He saw those mighty shoulders stiffen, the dark eyes grow darker and the mouth turn grim. But nothing happened. Abel Brown could have broken that man across his knee, but he did nothing, said nothing. Someone called out, "There he is! There's the one who saved our lives!"

A great cheer went up, the sailor who had spat on Abel Brown seemed to slump, to shrink into himself. His face wore a stricken, penitent look. But he did not go to Abel Brown and shake his bandaged hand as the others did. He said no word of praise. He went back to his seat and hunched himself up there, staring at the fire, a far-off look in his eyes. And all the time he was at the inn—it was almost two days before the men could be taken to Saint John—he did not say a word to anyone.

Reporters and camera-men crowded into the Burning Ship. Bits of the story had filtered through to the world outside. The heroism of Abel Brown was spread across the continent. They talked of medals, of funds, of honors to be bestowed. They waxed lyrical over the humble wood-carver, the quiet-living young man who led the life of hermit in the little Fundy village of St. Ives.

They got pictures of the inn, of the models he had made, of his workshop. But they got no picture of Abel Brown. He would not have it. He asked them not to take his picture and they did not. All except one fellow who caught him unawares. And that one had his camera smashed—by the sailor who had spat on Abel Brown.

Chapter VII

After the survivors of the *King Olaf* had gone—they were taken to Saint John by the tug *Ocean Osprey*—William came to Abel Brown, who had kept pretty much to his room all the time they were there, and handed him a sealed envelope. He saw question in the swift narrowing of the black eyes, uneasiness in the way the bandaged fingers took the letter.

"I read in the Good Book," said Portagee William, "that they spat upon the Man of Nazareth."

"You saw, then?"

William laid a gnarled hand on the blue-jerseyed arm, and patted it. "I alone saw, and perhaps, too, I understood. You could have killed that man. He didn't know it was you who plucked them all out of the sea's cold fingers. He didn't realize that until after he had done what he did. You went into the inn by the back door. He did not get a look at you. Well, he left this letter for you."

"Thank you, William." Still he did not open the letter. He held it as if he had forgotten its existence. He sat staring at nothingness. He wished, he who shunned the limelight, who had good reason to shun it, that it had not been his lot to be thrust forth into its crudest glare. Of course, it was Abel Brown the world hailed as a hero, who would get the purse of gold, the medals, the glory. But Abel Brown would have been just as content without them, for they were all a menace to Brandon Phare. Yes, they might bring Brand Phare back from the oblivion, the limbo to which he had been consigned. They might rake up the old ghastly story. What if he had saved a score of lives? He had destroyed three hundred. Nothing could make up for that. Such crimes cannot be expiated.

William said, "I don't think anything should be able to hurt you now. I don't think anything ever could have hurt you, if you hadn't let it."

"You don't know, William. Anyway, I'm not so sure that I was hurt—very deeply. I'm not sure that I haven't got a kick out of being kicked. That sailor knew me of old—you guessed that of course."

"He never knew you," said Portagee William. "Young fool! Who is he to set himself up to judge a man like you? Who is anyone?"

Abel Brown smiled down at the bent old fellow with his queer stretched neck and tortoise-like head. "Even you, William, may one day be called upon to judge me. Don't forget that. And to judge a man you have to come to the judgment with no preconceptions, no prejudices."

"I have judged you already."

"Yes, you have judged Abel Brown."

"Men don't change," persisted William. "Men are always the same. Names don't matter. You are always the man you are now."

He went stiff-legged away. Abel Brown, sitting at his bench among his tools, his work in progress, looked after him with a gentle smile. It was something—it was indeed something, to have the loyalty of such as William. He prized it. But William had the stern, unbending code of the men who followed the sea. There was no compromise, and much as the old Portuguese might admire Abel Brown, he could have no kind word, no warm and friendly touch of the hand for Brandon Phare of the burned *Orsina*.

"Well, we've escaped so far," he said, as he slit open the letter Jan Petersen had left for him. Petersen, seaman on the *Orsina*, had been one of the best men in his watch, one of his staunchest admirers—Petersen, who spat upon him.

The letter said:

> Dear Mr. Brown: When I was a seaman on the *Orsina* I was in the mate's watch. He was a man named Brandon Phare. The night the ship burned, when he was supposed to be on duty, I was one of the two who helped carry him, dead drunk, from the cabin of one of the women passengers, a dame named Gaye Fontaine, who had been making a big play for him. I went through the hell on the *Orsina* that night. I can never forget it. I can never forgive the man who was to blame for it, who could have averted it if he'd been there with a clear head. I'll always want to spit on that man. But for Abel Brown I have only admiration and only the best of wishes. I hope you understand. Jan Petersen.

"Yes"—Abel Brown tore the letter into a hundred little bits—"Sure I understand. You were always a pretty good guy, Petersen. Can't blame you for feeling the way you do. But thanks for the kind words about Abel Brown. Too bad you haven't Portagee William's belief that men don't

change, that Abel Brown and Brand Phare are one and the same person, not Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde."

Petersen had been one of the witnesses at his trial. And Petersen had not tried to spare him. There hadn't been one single voice raised in his favor, not one word spoken in extenuation of his guilt. He had had to stand there and take it. He grinned now, thinking of Gaye's words and hating her black soul as much as he could hate anything. "Boy! Can you take it!"

Well, Petersen had been decent enough not to blow the gaff on him, not to give him away and rob him of the little joy of life he had. Petersen knew how to keep his mouth shut. There was nothing more to be feared from him. Two close escapes so far—first the American with the scar and the bulldog memory, then Jan Petersen. There would be a third time and he might not be so lucky. For a while, however, he would have a respite. He laughed to himself grimly, thinking of the furore that would have arisen if his picture had got into the press with the word Hero for a caption. Why, only a few years ago it had been in all the papers with the word, Murderer, underneath it. Queer world!

He went back to his work. February was over now and it came mid-March. He kept busy. He had taken on some cabinet-making for the woodworking factory. He had plenty to keep him going all summer, and he had made a bit of money. There was a purse of gold, two hundred and fifty dollars, which the Danish consul presented to him. He was very proud of it. He sent it to the widow of Captain Thoraldssen of the lost *King Olaf*. Thoraldssen, he learned, had sunk his last kroner in the steamer. Hard for a man, mused Abel Brown, when his wife and kids suffer when he has tough luck. You don't mind it so much when you're alone.

April came, bringing rare warmth with it. In Crispin's garden the crocuses poked their bright heads out of the snow that the sun was devouring in great gulps each day. He saw a flock of wild geese winging north, heard in the night the voice of the waters unleashed from their bonds of ice. Then one morning the air was balmy and it was spring in the fair Canadian land—spring that means so much more than the springs in softer, warmer climes, that seems like a release from prison.

He drank the air into his lungs. He got out the great roll of blue-prints he had made for his yacht. He worked on the drafting-floor at the end of his loft where he had drawn a full sized cross-section of her keel. He sang as he worked and his heart was light and gay and his pipe had never tasted better. Only when he thought of Crispin Dean, from whom they had not heard for

over a fortnight, did he feel sad. But the pain of loss, of renunciation, though still acute, brought him some deep peace now along with its discontent. He knew he had done the right thing, the wise thing. When she came back, if she did come back, she would be married to Warnford, she would have forgotten the strange, brief interlude in which she had fancied herself in love with him. If she did ever recall it, she would laugh.

Then, as he worked with chalk and ruler and compass on the smooth floor where the keel of his ship was drawn, as he pictured all these timbers, these trusses, strongly in their place, saw the cabins finished, the fine teak wood and mahogany that would go into her building, and thought of her mighty mast and sail-plan, a shadow fell athwart the drafting-floor—a slender, graceful shadow, that he knew in a moment.

He stared at it for a long time without turning his head. He said, "I know you're only a shadow and that you're not cast by anyone who is within five hundred miles of here. Yet I know who you are and I am glad—so glad to see you!"

Then he sprung to his feet and there she was smiling, radiant, her eyes bluer than the sparkling sea, her hair with lights of golden fire, her mouth soft, red and alluring. She wore a fawn polo-coat, a little blue hat that set proudly on her head. She held out both hands to him and he took them and clasped them hard.

"Crispin!" For a while they couldn't talk. He could just stand off and look at her; she at him. He had not changed. If anything, he was browner, more fit looking than ever. His face had serenity and in his eyes was a look of peace. It came to her that he had been better off without her, happier, better able to do his work.

"It's wonderful to be back—to see you—to see them all. I just had to make it a surprise. Robby almost threw a fit and William danced a jig, wooden leg and all."

He was looking at her ring-finger. She had taken off her glove. "Your husband—"

She looked at him gravely. "I have no husband."

"But you will have. I thought—"

"I know what you thought." Her glance was appealing. "I lied to you. I never did become engaged to Piers. I—well, I tried to care for him, tried to bring myself to marry him. I couldn't. That's all there is to it—I couldn't. I had to come back here. I—I can be content to have things go on as they

were before. I was happy here, happier than ever in my life, and I'm going to be happy again." She looked at him stubbornly. "Scold me now! Look black at me! Tell me you're going away! Tell me you don't want me around! That you do better without me. That I'm a nuisance and—and—"

"I can't tell you that." He held out his arms and she came to him, eager as a child, and hid her face against his chest. "You know I can't tell you that. I have done well, I think, but it was for you and because of you—" His lips were in her hair, almost touching her small ear. "All winter I had only my dreams of you, but they were wonderful and some of them I can make real —"

Her voice came, muffled, up to him. "And was this—was this one of them?"

"I never dared dream of this."

"But you know I love you?"

"Even as you know I love you, God help us both. What have I to give you, Crispin?"

"All that I can ever ask. The miles seemed so long that I travelled since yesterday. It was so good to see old Fundy, to smell the salt of it, to feel the cool, sweet wind from the sea. Home—this is my home always. And now—you do love me, don't you? And you're not angry because I didn't marry Piers? I couldn't marry Piers when I don't love him, when it's you I love."

He touched her cheek, traced its contours with his finger-tip. "Strange girl," he said. "Foolish girl."

"Why foolish?"

"To love me."

"When I read about what you did—the way you rescued those men from that Dane."

He smiled at her 'longshore speech. With St. Ives people, with all Fundy folk, a vessel was a Dane or a Norwegian, a Dutchman or an Italian as the case might be.

"Was it that which made you think you loved me?"

"You know better—much better."

"Well, if it's any news to you, darling, I love you too."

She stood on tiptoe and kissed him and he held her very close for a moment before he let her go. “It’s not going to be so simple as all that,” he said. “It’s not going to be simple at all.”

She looked at him sternly but there was fear peeping from behind the blue curtains of her eyes. Her hand was tight on his arm, its pressure urgent. “You—you’re not going to run out on me again!”

He hesitated. “Not without telling you,” he said at length. “No, I won’t run out on you. Oh, let’s not talk about it now. Let’s be happy. I have a lot of thinking to do, but it can wait. Come on—tell me about yourself, what you’ve been doing, how you’ve been—”

“You don’t really want to know. You can guess that I haven’t put much heart into what I’ve been doing. I’ve been well enough. But you know, you must know, that I never really did leave the Sign of the Burning Ship. Most of my thoughts and all my dreams were here. I used to cry over the letters I got from you and Robby and William. I used to cry when I’d write to you. It was exile—an exile that I hated. They’d ask me why I was so silent, why I didn’t join in the fun, why I didn’t snap out of it and stop mooning—

“They didn’t understand. I was listening to the waves, to the sea wind, to the gulls, the voice of the tide. Always hearing it. Always being called by it. In the end I had to answer. I had to come back. Here I am; and so glad, Abel Brown, so glad that I could cry.”

And cry she did against Abel Brown’s big shoulder, and clumsily, tenderly he comforted her and smoothed her hair. He loved her, loved this heaven she brought to him. Nothing else mattered in this moment. He could fix it so that nothing else could matter at any time. Sure he could. Nothing was impossible. And for this wonder, this ecstasy, this precious thing he held in his arms he would fight the whole world, yes, and the powers of darkness too. Let her go—he would never let her go.

No, the sharp voice whispered, but something stronger than you will drag her from your arms, something will change the look in her eyes, poison what is in her heart. If you think she loves you so much, tell her—tell her the truth. Say, “I have something to confess to you, Crispin. I know you won’t mind: it’s just that my name, as you well know, really isn’t Abel Brown. It’s Brandon Phare. I’m the fellow who was found guilty of gross negligence and blamed for the deaths of three hundred innocent persons, among whom were many women and little children, also your lover, Bede Wallace. These arms that hold you so closely have worn the convict’s dress for two long years. The stamp of the prison is on me and the stigma of what has happened

will be always with me. Of course you won't mind that at all. You'll just laugh when the world finds out, as find out it will, who I am—You'll just laugh and say, 'It doesn't matter to me, dear. You see I love you—'"

"You never would!" He had been so intently listening to the voice that he spoke to her as if she had really uttered those words. She looked at him in wonderment.

"Never would what?"

He started. "Oh! Nothing. I was thinking of something else, I fear."

"You hold me in your arms and think of something else!"

"It had to do with you. All my thinking has to do with you, Crispin."

She smiled then. "Even when you think about your boats? What is this you have laid out here on the drafting-floor?"

"It's the yacht I'd like to take you away in!"

"Away where?"

"To some island where men never come, where there would be only you and I until the end of the world, which would be the end of our love."

"I think I'd like that."

He thought, It's the only way we could be sure of happiness. The only way in which I could keep my secret safe from you. And even there—I'd be afraid.

"It's a yacht I've been working on all winter between the building of model-ships. I think it's a great design. If I could interest some builder or some of the men who buy yachts—This boat would walk away from anything in her class. I know she would."

Crispin's eyes were shining. "Well said, sailor! And well done. You'll get your chance. You have what it takes."

"I thought—" He wanted to tell her of his hopes, his dreams, those splendid visions that had come to him here in the loft during the long winter nights when there was only the rattle of the wind and the crackle of the big old wood stove to keep him company. "I'd like to build her. I'd like to build her right here."

"Here at St. Ives! But they haven't—"

"Oh, I know! They haven't done any boat building along these shores in the last half-century. That's no reason why it can't be done. They build

yachts and schooners and cruisers, any number of them, along the south shore of Nova Scotia. I've been there and seen them, at Lunenburg, Shelburne, Mahone Bay. It could be done here at St. Ives. There are a few old ship-carpenters left, I know. I've talked to them."

Crispin caught some of his enthusiasm. "Well, there's a chance. The summer people will be coming soon. There are quite a few big houses along the shore here. Men with lots of money. Sometimes they come to the inn here for a lobster dinner. They're all keen on boats and it might happen that we could get one interested in your yacht."

"If we don't," he said, "I'll build her myself. I've saved a bit of money. I can't think of any pleasanter way to spend it. Trouble is, if I once sailed her, I'd never want to let her go, supposing I had a chance to sell her."

"You love ships, don't you?" she asked a bit wistfully. "They mean more to you than—than ever a woman could."

He shook his head. "I love them, yes. I've tried to make them take first place in my life, but—yours is the face that launched them all, Crispin."

"Am I to believe it?"

"You must believe it."

She smiled, touched his hand lightly. "This is a wonderful homecoming. It's all that I dreamed it would be. I'm so glad, so very glad. It's the first time I've really felt good in months. This is where I belong. I was foolish to think I could ever content myself any place else."

"I had the same delusion," he said. "Somehow, I'm glad now that it was only a delusion. I told myself otherwise, but I think I must have known in my heart that you would come back to the Ship some day."

"I never want to leave it again. I must go now, Abel Brown. I have to get the keys of my castle from Robby. I have a thousand questions to ask her and a thousand things to do. But it's all so wonderful—"

She sang his song as she went down the stairs. Her full, rich voice floated back to him, lingered in his ears as she crossed the yard and entered the inn—

"It was of a sea-captain that followed the sea.
Let the winds blow high or blow low O.
'I shall die, I shall die,' the sea-captain did cry,
'If I don't get that maid on the shore O.
If I don't get that maid on the shore.'"

Abel Brown looked solemnly at his hands, the hands that had held her, touched her so tenderly. "Aye, he got his maid on the shore O, and precious little good it did him. What am I to do? What can I do? We love each other —there is the fact. But if I tell her, will it be the same—No, no, she couldn't love me then. It wouldn't be right. I can't tell her, can't bring myself to it. I can't live through that horror again. I dare not run the risk of seeing that warmth in her eyes turn cold. God help me, but I did a wrong thing in coming here and made it worse by staying. Now I can't give her up. I can't think of life without her."

There was nothing he could do. He had to let himself drift with the current, something he had never done in his life before. Always, he knew, such drifting ended in disaster. He could hear the roar of the breakers on the lee shore, see the dark rocks hidden behind the mist. But he could lay no course now or steer none. He gave himself to the joy of loving her, of knowing that he too was beloved. He kept his ears closed to the warning voices. When they forced him to hear what they had to say he countered with his own wishful thinking: "Why can't we go on like this? Why should I not love her and take the love she offers me? Why should I not in time marry her—"

He knew why not. He could never argue that dark thing away. Hopeless —it was all a mockery, an emptiness. He could see no way out of it. Here he was trapped, imprisoned, in a net that he had watched her weave. Yes, that he had helped to weave himself. Now try to get out of it! Try, short of flight, to escape from it! And he had promised her he would not go away again— not without telling her that he was leaving.

She sat at table with him that night and it was a new Robby who waited on them and William peered in at the door, his face broken into a hundred new wrinkles from the width of his smile. How happy they all were, and she the happiest. They laughed. They talked. The old men, Seth Meynal and Jonas Mudge and Barnaby Snell, fixtures nightly of the Ship's front parlor, came in to pay their respects and bid her welcome home.

"To think of all the wonderful nights I was away from here," she said looking at Abel Brown, at his thick dark hair, his muscular brown throat revealed by the open collar of his white shirt. "I'll never forgive myself for going away and I'll always find it hard to forgive the one who sent me into exile."

"He was punished enough, believe me," said Abel Brown miserably. "And maybe his punishment isn't all over. The gods have special doses for

people so full of presumption. And here I thought, all the time, that you were forgetting about St. Ives, about all this, and learning again to live the life you really belong to."

"You know where I really belong," she protested. "You can't have any doubt about it now."

"It is not for me to doubt, Crispin. As long as you're happy, as long as you have what you want, it's all right with me. I thought the other thing, life in the city, life as Piers Warnford's wife, would be the best thing for you— But what right have I to prescribe for you? After all, your happiness is not in my keeping."

Her mouth drooped. She looked down at the tablecloth that her nervous fingers plucked. "But it is," she said softly. "I tell you it is and you know it is."

"Then God help you," he said sullenly. "Now I've told you this many, many times. We can get nowhere, you and I. I've told you that you are not for me. You never could be for me."

"Yes, you have told me that. You almost made me believe it. If I went by you, I would believe it. But something tells me to go on—to go on thinking —"

"You're storing up a lot of grief for yourself. If I didn't really love you—and love you better than my very life—do you think I could tell you this? Do you think I could say these things to you. I love you, I want you with all my heart and soul, but more than that I want your happiness."

"Then you are very blind, very stupid, if you think my happiness can be found anywhere else— You don't want me—that's it, isn't it? You're trying to tell me very politely that you don't want me, trying to let me down easily so it won't hurt too much."

"Have it your own way." His eyes were dark, glowering upon her. "One day you'll know better and maybe then you'll thank me for telling you these things. Believe me, it's harder for me than it is for you. I have nothing, Crispin, and you offer so much. I never can have anything but the memory of what was denied to me."

"Must you be so noble?"

"Noble. Oh, God!" He laughed wildly. "If Don Quixote had had his adventures on the sea, I could have doubled for him any time. Noble is not the word, my girl. Believe me, I am anything but that."

She looked at him wonderingly, at the bitter twist of his mouth, the hand clenched on the table. When he looked as he did now she was afraid of him, and afraid for him. What fire burned in him that her love could not quench; what devil in him that her prayers could not drive out!

She said, "We won't quarrel this first night, Abel Brown."

He grinned then. He said, "No, there'll be lots of other nights, Crispin. Tonight I could be happy just sitting near you, not saying a word. Let's have it like that. Better still, let's take a walk out under the stars. Do you know I've never walked with you?"

"Yes, I know." She stood up. "So tonight we'll begin."

That was the first of many walks, of many long and lovely hours. Between them was a truce and there was no talk of love. She was busy now preparing the Ship for the influx of summer guests, he with his work in the loft. They did not see too much of each other, but she was always in his thoughts. He could never lose her now. The memory of her, no matter where he went or what he did, would be always with him.

There were times when he thought he would risk everything and marry her and guard his secret from her, hoping to guard it forever. Times when he wanted her so much, when the wonder, the beauty of her, was like a madness in his blood, when he thought no chance would be too great to take. But reason always came to stay him, to tell him that this would be a greater crime than any he had been punished for. He could not endanger her happiness, her future; he could not ask her to join hands for good with a man the world had scorned and reviled.

It was, for him, an impasse. There was no way out. There never would be a way out. Yet they could not go on like this forever. To leave her was the only solution and now he had lingered so long, she had become so dear to him, that he had neither the heart nor courage to cut himself adrift.

The summer people came back to St. Ives, to the little villages along the Fundy shore. One night William called him to the parlor and presented him to a gray-haired man who had been admiring the model of the *Crispin Dean*. His name was Paul McEwen, his house the largest and most impressive along the shore. He did not know Abel Brown but he had sailed once or twice in the *Orsina* and Abel Brown knew him.

"I've been admiring the model. Dropped in for dinner and it was the first thing I saw. You've got something there, let me tell you. Where'd you learn to do that sort of thing?"

"Here and there. I studied some marine architecture. I've always loved ships."

"Ever design any yachts?"

"Have I! If you've finished dinner—"

"I have."

"Then I'll show you something if you'll come out to the sail-loft. I think I've heard of your boats. You've won a few races, I know."

"And lost a damned sight more. It's the boats. The design is all wrong. You can't get the stuff in them now. Men don't take the pride in their work they used to. I hope you have something."

"I have something," said Abel Brown, and he took McEwen up to the drafting-floor, lit the lamps and spread out his blue-prints. He had made a model of her, not quite complete. But in his mind's eye she was already racing with her lee rail under. He had no doubts about his boat, and after he had talked a while Paul McEwen had none either.

He was a man of quick decisions. He said when he had finished with the blue-prints, with an exhaustive study of cross-section and model, "I'd like to build that boat. I'll buy the design off you."

"Sorry," said Abel Brown. "It's not for sale. When she's built, I will build her."

"Okay. Where you going to build her?"

"Here in St. Ives."

McEwen looked at him shrewdly for a moment. "All right," he said. "Get on with it. She's too good to lose."

Crispin all but wept when she heard the news. Somehow, she had got the idea that money and success would help to remove those things that kept Abel Brown away from her, that were darkening his life and hers. Now his chance had come. This would mean a good bit of money for him and, if the yacht lived up to expectations, there would be much more to follow.

There was great excitement in St. Ives. There were some few there who had worked on the great ships in the glorious days of sail; many who remembered when the yards had been alive and humming, when a ship was launched one day, a new one laid down the next. Below the Sign of the Burning Ship there was a yard, where some of the old stocks and timbers

still stuck up out of the mud and sand. Here Abel Brown planned to build his yacht.

Here was the work he had dreamed of; the chance to realize so many of his hopes. Perhaps if he could become a success, if he could make a great new name for himself—He didn't dare think of what it might mean. But he was gayer now, full of life and more ready with laughter. And Crispin shared in his happiness. So did Robby and so did Portagee William and they loved to talk among themselves of that first night he had come to the Burning Ship. They looked upon him as one of their own and his success was theirs.

In St. Ives, he found skilled carpenters, some of whom had worked on ships, and several old men, long since retired, whose watery eyes sparkled at the prospect of seeing their ancient art revived. They were rich with advice and suggestion and he was ever ready to listen to them.

So the building of the yacht got under way. All day long in the old shipyard the hammers pounded, the axes thudded, the mallets gave out their ringing sound. What ghosts of long dead builders and shipwrights must have gathered there to see the strong, clean work begin once more! No time was kept. From peep of dawn to the blue-gray twilight Abel Brown was there, working like a man possessed, like a man inspired with a great vision.

Swiftly the long graceful keel was laid down, the ribs shaped and fitted, the brow-stage built—To him it was a dream come true. It was one of his own delicate models magnified a thousand times and more. In it, on a grand, heroic scale, went all the delicate joinery, the watch-like precision, the loving care that he put into the building of the little boats.

Paul McEwen haunted the yard. He was every bit as interested, every bit as keen and excited as Abel Brown. He had always been a yachtsman, always loved the boat better than the victory, always dreamed of a boat like this.

"She's going to be a wonder, Brown. I can see her already leading the fleet, spanking along. I can feel her wheel in my hands. We'll sail her, you and I. And we'll give her a good snappy name too." He grinned. "I've had a new yacht for every new wife. I just got the fourth last year. So we'll call this baby after her—Gaye Fontaine—what d'you think of that?"

He wasn't looking at Abel Brown, wasn't listening for an answer. And it was just as well.

Chapter VIII

Outside Abel Brown's bedroom window the maples all in leaf rustled in the light breeze of afternoon. The day was warm and sunny—a great day for work, a day to drive ahead with the building of the yacht, to exult in the swift progress he was making; yet, he felt sure, sitting here in his room, in his worn old red-leather chair, hand shading his thoughtful eyes, it was one of the darkest days of his career. He had set so much store on this new structure of life he had begun to rear. It had meant so very much to him who, for a while, had all but abandoned hope. And he had begun to build this new life strongly and well.

But this he knew: in it there could not, must not be any of those ingredients, any of those perverse elements which had made such a catastrophic wreck of his past. He had believed himself free of them. Escaping twice from recognition that would have destroyed him, ruined him even here among these simple folk who had learned to love and trust him, he had begun to believe that he could go on forever, unknown, unmolested.

Fool, a thousand times fool, ever so to delude himself. You couldn't escape your past—not most certainly a past like his. It was bound to come back, fated sooner or later to rise up and confront him, to destroy, to mock at this pleasant little bit of newness, of beauty, of hope, that he had found. And out of all the things that had gone to make up that past this that faced and threatened him now was the worst and the most fraught with danger; of all the people who had moved across the troubled, tragic stage of his life, this woman had played the darkest part.

High overhead he heard the pulsing drone of the plane from Halifax passing above l'ile Haute, on her evening run to Saint John; in the kitchen below Robby was making a great clatter with pots and pans; William, in the yard, was splitting firewood and singing a doleful Portuguese ballad as he worked. Crispin was in her room down the hall. He had not seen her since Paul McEwen exploded that bombshell in the shipyard. He dreaded the moment of meeting her; she was so quick now, so much quicker than ever before, to read in his face the things that pleased or depressed him.

She would know at once that something of major import was bothering him now. Not since the work of building the yacht had begun had he left the yard so early. Today he had to go. He couldn't work, couldn't put his mind

to it at all. Times there were when he felt a terrible urge to pick up an ax and attack the lovely thing of his own creating, to smash and hack and ruin it, to leave it a wreck of broken beams and gashed timbers. What was the use of it? What the use of anything? It would be a good boat, a splendid piece of work, sturdy, swift, sea-worthy; but more surely than he with sharp ax and mighty sinewy strength could reduce it to matchwood, she with just a drawling word, a tigress smile, a sneer, could ruin and destroy his dreams.

Could and would. He had no illusions about her. She never forgot. She had assured him of that several times. Once on the *Orsina*, again before they took him off to serve his term in prison. She had said, on the *Orsina*, "You don't know women until you have known me, Brand; and if you don't know me, if you think I'm lying to you, believe me you're making the greatest mistake of your young life. I never forget anything. You know there have been plenty of men in my life, but you're the first that ever mattered to me —"

He had laughed at her then, laughed until he saw the look in her eyes—green fire there, baleful, more terrible than in the eyes of the tigress in the dark of the jungle when the firelight glints upon them.

"You'll pay for the laughter, Brand," she said softly. "You'll pay and pay and pay."

Then those few brief words, that hateful, gloating smile, the same smouldering fire in her eyes when she had spoken to him last: "See you when you get out, sailor. Don't worry, I won't forget you. Girls like me never forget men like you. I'll be seeing you, Boy! Can you take it!"

He had feared her. Strong as he was, he had no weapons to match hers. Cold, ruthless, calculating, she had yet that one spot of sheer woman in her. She knew the man she wanted and she'd go through hell and put him through hell to get him. When she couldn't get him she made him pay.

She had been on several cruises of the *Orsina*. She had been surrounded by men always. Recently divorced, she had lots of money. She had glamor, a cruel fascination. She had singled Brand Phare out at once and he, at first flattered by her interest, had presently begun to fear it. She was dynamite, and not the kind he cared to handle. He had told her so, and he had paid for it in blood and sweat and torment, paid willingly; and now he would have to pay again.

She had not come to St. Ives yet, but he had gathered from McEwen that she was motoring from New York and was likely to arrive at any time. "Gaye's a great girl." McEwen was at the age where men become either

cynical or maudlin about women. "No illusions about anything. Knows what she wants, goes after it and gets it. If anything stands in her way—well, it's just too bad."

Abel Brown wondered if McEwen knew the scandal that had been attached to her name the time the *Orsina* was burned. Probably he did and just as probably thought little of it. Gaye, with that slim blonde beauty of hers, with those strangely deep green eyes and warm languorous voice, could make a man forget almost anything, particularly a man like Paul McEwen, who was no longer young.

She had married him for his money, of course. That was Gaye. She had always done well by little Gaye, always kept an eye out for the main chance, yet Abel Brown knew—and knew it as surely as he knew he breathed—that she would have thrown up all the luxury, all the good times, the easy life, that was her credo, to marry an obscure ship's officer named Brandon Phare. "I'd scrub floors for you, Brand," she had said once. "I'd tackle anything, go through anything, wear rags and like it, if I had you."

She had meant it, every word of it. She would have lived up to it. She was strong. But it is not good to love like that, he knew, nor is it good to be so loved. Men or women who have that terrible capacity for love and loyalty, have a power of hatred, of revenge, equally great. She had proved that up to the hilt. She had sat in the courtroom, smiling, defiant, long silk-covered legs crossed, and smiled a feline smile, wicked, implacable, while he was quickly crucified. A word of hers would perhaps have saved him, would have made him a hero and taken from Bede Wallace the undeserved martyr's crown. But she would not speak that word. Yet, if she had known why he kept silent, why he offered nothing in his own defence, if she had guessed that he was thinking of the happiness, the peace of mind of Crispin Dean, the girl Bede was to marry, as much as of the Wallaces, she would have told the truth.

She had sat there and smiled, watched an innocent man go to prison for two years, seen him broken, disgraced. She had told him he would pay and she had seen that the payment was made. She would not be satisfied. There was more due, still more. Let her find out that he loved Crispin, that Crispin was interested in him, and she would wreck them both in a moment, gladly, ruthlessly. She could do it and she would love to do it.

Crispin knocked at his door as he was thinking these unhappy thoughts and for a moment he sat quiet, debating with himself whether or not to answer. He didn't want to face Crispin now. She would see the misery that

was in his heart. But he could not send her away. He got up and opened the door and she came in, putting her hand on his arm as she passed, drawing him with her.

"I thought you were in here." The deep blue eyes looked hard into his. "And quiet as a mouse too. What's the matter—boat go wrong?"

"No—oh, no; the boat's all right. I just—well I was a little tired, a bit fed up. I've been going it pretty hard, I know."

"Not for you. I never before saw a person with such drive and energy and sheer doggedness as you have. Sometimes you frighten me. You remind me of those people who let wild beasts tear them and still kept their lips sealed, who were burned and tortured and still would not talk."

"Sort of a Christian martyr," said Abel Brown with a mirthless grin.

"Something like that." Crispin's voice was solemn and she gave no answering smile. "You have been through a bit of hell at one time or other, haven't you?"

"What makes you think that?"

"Oh, you have a look about you suggestive of the rack and thumbscrew. A lot of the lesser things that belong to a man have been sweated, squeezed out of you—most of the dross."

"Let's not talk about me. I'm nothing at all like what you think I am, Crispin. Rather a poor fellow, puzzled, troubled, groping, asking myself what it's all about."

"I've thought that too. I never know what to make of you. I'm beginning to learn now though. There is something troubling you today. Oh, you can deny it"— She had seen his hand go up protestingly. "You can swear up and down it's not so. Still I can tell."

"I wouldn't lie to you, Crispin. I only lied to you once."

"When was that?"

"The night William was singing that song that I told you I had heard long ago in Lorenzo Marques. I told you, when you asked me, that I didn't know what it meant. But I did."

She colored. "So you knew even then that I—that I thought of you as a lover, and I had begun to—"

"I didn't dare let myself think. And I was right—how very right I was!"

"How is that? Tell me, please."

"You will probably know soon enough," he muttered. "Well, I suppose I'd better go down to the yard and see how they are getting on with the yacht."

"Mr. McEwen is still there. I could see his car from my window. He's a nice man. I just found out today from Robby that he's married again. And the girl he married—"

"What of her?" He was punishing himself, like a man pushing with his tongue on a sore tooth.

"Her name is Gaye Fontaine. Used to be a chorus-girl, then an actress of sorts. She's had as many divorces as McEwen, but that's about all they have in common. You must have heard of her. She was mixed up in that terrible tragedy when the *Orsina* burned—she and a fellow named Brandon Phare —"

Crispin! Oh, God, Crispin, if you only knew! Inchoate, inarticulate prayers in his heart. What did she know of Brand Phare? What did she think of him?

"It was a pretty sordid business," she went on. "I've never talked about it and I've tried not to think about it. You remember the first night you came to the inn?—I spoke about my happiness having gone when—"

"When a ship was burned." His voice was low. "Yes, yes, I remember."

"It was the *Orsina*. I was engaged to marry Bede Wallace. He was her captain. He was—he died. This man Phare was with Gaye Fontaine that night. They found him with her. They had been drinking. It was his neglect that made the tragedy what it was. It all came out in the investigation. They sent him to prison for two years. I often thought he should have been hanged."

These words from Crispin's lips.

"Yes—a good many people thought the same way. Maybe it would have been more merciful to—to have done that with him. And so McEwen's wife is Gaye Fontaine!"

He did not tell her that he knew already, that it was this knowledge that had sent him to his room, that had thrown him into this blackest of moods. He knew now her opinion of Brandon Phare. It was what he had expected. How could she hold any other? It was the opinion of all the world. Well, it didn't matter now. Nothing mattered. Let her learn the truth about him. Let

everybody know it. He was sick of subterfuge. Let Gaye tell the story if she wanted to.

Crispin was watching him. "I'd like to know what's going on behind that dark façade of yours," she said teasingly. "I wonder if I'll ever get to know you. Perhaps you don't want me to?"

"No," said Abel Brown. "No, I don't want you to get to know me ever—not any better than you do now. You like me now, you see—you told me that. If you got to know me better, if you found out what was going on behind what you call this dark façade, why you might not like Abel Brown any more."

Her mouth trembled. "I don't think anything could make me dislike you. I think—well, you've always been a bit of a God to me, you know, ever since the first night you came here. There's something about you—something that makes you different from other men, that puts a sort of distinctive mark on you. We've all noticed it—"

He shook his head. "I don't know what you mean, Crispin, but I know it's kindly meant. You've always been kind, you and all the rest." He touched her hair. "There, I must go now. There's work to be done."

Work to be done, for which he had no longer any heart. The boat that he had loved, that had sailed so proudly, so bravely, flying a bright pennon of hope, through all his dreams was only a few pitiful sticks of wood now. A poor, pathetic thing, symbolic of his own life. Still, he had set out to build her and build her he would. She might be his swan-song, the last good thing that would come from him. Well, no man should be able to say he had fallen down on this final job of work. He'd see to that. He'd make her something that they'd have to admit was good. Yes, and they'd have to admit Brandon Phare had built her.

McEwen said, before he left that evening, "I wish Gaye was here. She's keen on boats too. She will go wild about this one. I'll bring her over just as soon as she arrives."

Sure, thought Abel Brown—sure, you'll bring her over and you'll see what happens. You'll see her smile in that funny, sleepy way of hers. She will look like a big tawny gold cat that has cornered the mouse. She will sit down and play with the poor devil for a while before she gives the death-blow, before she pounces.

He said, "I hope your wife will like her, Mr. McEwen. She's going to be good. I'm sure she will live up to all we expect of her."

He went ahead with the work, driving himself and his men harder even than before, trying to forget in the utter fatigue of his body, the fear that possessed his soul. It wasn't himself he cared so much about now, though he had begun to love this quiet, work-filled life of his here in St. Ives, had begun to see how fine, how worthwhile it was and how happy he could be if left alone to live it. No, it was of her he thought, of Crispin; of the horror, the repugnance she would feel when she knew the truth about him.

Oh, God, he prayed, if only she could be spared that much; if only she could go on believing in me, keeping this idea she has of me. If only Brand Phare could stay dead and not be resurrected to walk the earth again.

He thought of going away, but he knew that was not the answer. It would solve nothing and wherever he went he would carry the same thing with him. Whenever he tried to start life anew the same terror would hang over him. No, it must be settled and settled right here once and for all. Even Gaye Fontaine, hard and cruel as she was, had to admit that he could take it.

"Yes," he said, "yes, I can take it once again. But it will be harder this time. I thought then that I was losing all that any man could have to lose. I didn't know Crispin then. Now there is so much more."

He thought of writing to Gaye, of seeing her before she came to the village, of pleading with her—He saw the folly of that. She would only laugh at him, only take a greater satisfaction in exposing him. No use to look for softness, for humanity, in her. She would size up the situation here in a moment. She would see what he had been trying to do, his poor, valiant efforts to make a new life for himself, his love for Crispin, all his foolish little hopes and visions. And as with the tip of her small shoe she would demolish a sand castle, so she would wreck whatever he had builded.

It reminded him now, as the night hours dragged by and no sleep came to him, no peace, no surcease from the dark anticipation of tomorrow, of the days before his trial. In those days he had fought with himself. Should he speak in his own defence? Should he tell his story—the story that she alone could verify? He had known then that they would not believe his own testimony, that she would never tell the truth. He had realized, too, that even if she did speak the truth it was hardly likely they would credit her. No, they would say she was merely trying to help him, heaping opprobrium on a dead man to aid this one who had been her lover.

And if now, at this late day, he spoke in his own defence, all would wonder why he had not come out with these things before. No use. He would not talk. He had kept it all in his heart too long. It had become part of

his life, his philosophy, that dark thing that was locked up inside him. It would die with him and it would die with Gaye. Bede Wallace, the third person to know the truth, was gone forever.

She came two days after McEwen had told him about her, and she came alone to the Sign of the Burning Ship and asked William, who was pottering about the garden, where she could find Abel Brown. He was in the loft, working on the drafting-floor. As with Crispin the day of her return, he did not hear the footsteps on the stairs. He did not know of her presence until her shadow was before him where he knelt. To this shadow he did not speak, but his heart said, "It has come now. It is the end—the end of all these bright and sunny hours, of the good winter nights, of the peace I'd found, the end of my dream of Crispin."

He stood up and faced her, his dark eyes searching that hard, too lovely face, probing into the jade green depths of her eyes, seeking, hoping to find there some change, some slight gleam of kindness and mercy.

He saw none. The scarlet lips were parted, smiling. Her hand, even as Crispin's had been, was at her breast. He saw the swift look of appraisal she gave him, saw and hated the old gleam of admiration, the slight lifting of the pencilled brows, the quick lowering of the long gold lashes. Her hair, yellow as wheat, fell in a bright cataract to the nape of her neck. She wore the pastel shade of green she loved so much, green bracelets on her long slender wrists, sandals on her small feet. Lovely—yes, fit to make men mad with her loveliness, lovely with the hues of a snake.

"Hello, Brand." Her voice was mellow, husky, caressing. "I told you I'd see you some time again. You did get as far away as you could, though—didn't you? I've been looking forward all winter to seeing you. A fellow named Cerutti was here last fall—fellow with a scar. He had seen your picture in my apartment. He has a memory for faces. He said, 'Why, I saw that guy down in a little fishing-village called St. Ives, in New Brunswick. He makes toy boats.' I never let Paul see the picture. It's a good one of you—in your uniform. It's one I always treasured."

"My name," he said slowly, "is Abel Brown, Mrs. McEwen."

"Really." She lowered her lashes, her mouth smiled a very little. "How unusual! What was the matter with Brandon Phare?"

"You know there was nothing the matter with Brandon Phare."

"Sure, I know. But who else does? Don't be a fool, Brand. You always were something of a sucker." She looked pensive. "And it would take a

sucker to make one out of me."

"My name is Abel Brown."

"Why not? Maybe I'll give you a break. Maybe I'll let you go on being Abel Brown." She took a step towards him, looked up at him provocatively, with the old challenge in her eyes, in the seductiveness of her body. "Have I changed very much—Abel Brown?"

He looked at her, his expression unaltered; he made no effort to keep the scorn out of his eyes, out of his voice. "You know what they say of leopards, Gaye. It holds true of snakes—as regards their colors."

She stepped back, her nostrils twitching. "Thank you, Brand."

"I told you—"

"I know what you told me. I'll tell you this: You'll be Abel Brown as long as you're nice to little Gaye. Once you start saying things like that, why, you at once become Brandon Phare. That's the way it is."

"We don't have to talk."

"Don't be a fool!" Her voice was harsh. "The only thing I looked forward to in this godforsaken hole was the prospect of seeing you. I told you I wouldn't forget you. I never have. You've been about the only thing I ever met up with that wasn't phony. I fell for you hard. It still hurts. Can't we—?"

"We can't." He looked out the window, down at the yard where the yacht was a-building. "You know we can't. You know we never could. It wouldn't work. How do you think I feel about you—you who sat by and let me take the rap for a heel like Bede Wallace! Maybe that's your idea of love. I think you used to talk of love."

She laughed. "Sure I did. They wouldn't have believed me anyway. They'd have said I was just trying to give you an out. Why didn't you talk yourself?"

"Same reason, I guess." His voice was weary. "It's all over now. I—I've liked to think it was all over. I didn't care what happened to me when I got out. I just went tramping around. Then I landed here and started making ship-models. I've found a bit of peace."

"I'm glad of that." There was a hint of gentleness in the husky tones, but he did not trust it. He did not for a moment trust it. He knew her too well.

"You're building a yacht for Paul, too, aren't you? His letters have been full of it."

"Yes—yes, it's down there." He pointed out the window.

She came and stood beside him, close, her slim shoulder touching his arm, pressing against it. He remembered the perfume of her, thought of nights he had danced with her under the bright stars, the great round moon of the tropics.

"It's—it's lovely, Abel Brown. It's going to be called *Gaye Fontaine*, isn't it?"

"Yes." He moved away from the pressure of her shoulder. He saw the swift venom in the flash of green eyes.

"Don't be like that, Brand."

"Like what?"

"You know—stand-offish. You've always been like that with me. Do you know, you've never kissed me. I kissed you—the night you lay unconscious in my cabin. I kissed you a lot."

"You have the soul of a—"

"Gently, Brand. I happened to love you. Funny, isn't it? I think I still do. I loved you that night."

"Sure, while hell was raging around us. And you were too—"

"Yes, I was pretty high, I guess. So was Wallace. He sobered up fast though when he found out what he was up against."

"Let's forget it—forget it, I tell you. It's all done with now. It's all finished. For God's sake why start to live it all over again!"

"I'm willing to forget it. You know that." Her arms came up and went about his neck, drawing his dark head down to her kiss. Her mouth was asking, eager; her eyes half-closed.

He put her away from him roughly. He lifted his hand as if he would strike her and his eyes would have frightened anybody other than Gaye.

"So that's the way it is!" Her mouth was sullen now and the green flames shot up back of the curtains of her eyes.

"Yes," he said, "that is the way it is. Let's get it straight right now. I'm Abel Brown, boat-builder. I work for your husband, Paul McEwen. That's the way it is and that's the way it's going to be."

"Oh, you wouldn't—"

They both heard the step on the stairs. He knew whose step and his heart was heavy, heavier than it had been in many, many years. Crispin—it was Crispin—

He saw Gaye's questioning look go from her to him, saw the smile, beatific, diabolic, that curved her lips. "Oh," she said, "you must be Crispin Dean. I'm Mrs. McEwen. I've just been talking about boats—and things with Mr.—Mr.—"

"Abel Brown," said Crispin.

"Ah, yes—Abel Brown."

Chapter IX

He stood there between them, in a position, he thought, symbolic of what his life had been in these last few tortured years. The long golden sun-shafts streamed in there, bright beams in which the tiny motes performed their eternal dance. A cool wind blew through the windows, open at both ends of the loft, and ruffled Crispin's hair, since she stood in its path. From the shipyard below they could hear the ceaseless tap-tap-tapping of the hammers, the droning buzz of the crosscut saws, the clatter of timber striking on timber. Out beyond was the sea, blue and sparkling, the Nova Scotia shoreline loomed up in the hazy distance.

So still, so peaceful, so far away from all the world, walled in by the dark-wooded coastal hills, moated by the mighty reaches of Fundy, yet what play of emotions was here—love thwarted, love denied, love forbidden. He saw it all. He stood there as one apart and watched these three beings—Gaye who loved him, in her fashion, with a wild, savage, frightening passion, with a love that could punish and destroy, a love that took no count of any obstacle, that would trample down and kill anyone that stood in its way; Crispin who loved him with the pure love of her young heart, who wanted only to give, who was puzzled, hurt, rebuffed, because he must deny the very thing his own heart craved. And he himself who knew where his real happiness lay, who saw the bright light just a little beyond his reach, who knew it must be denied him.

Crispin's happiness in his rough hands; his own happiness and hers in the coral-tipped slender hands of Gaye. Yes, it was Gaye now who could make or break them, who with a word could shatter everything or by her silence bring new life to him, new hope, new courage.

But he looked at her and knew the answer. There was a half-smile on her lips, but there was no smile in her eyes; only a cruel, ironic light of amusement. She was the cat now, with two mice to torment. She looked from Crispin to him, then out at the sparkling water. She was thinking; probably, he decided, working out swiftly a course of action. Here was such contretemps as she loved, as pleased the sadistic heart of her. In an instant she had seen how the land lay, seen it in the look Crispin gave him, a proud, possessive look; in the way his eyes strayed from one to the other, the slow movement of his brown hands as he fumbled for his pipe.

Ah, yes, she would know what to do now. She had him right where she wanted him. She could pull the strings that controlled his love, his fortune. Both she could take away from him with one gentle tug of those potent threads. A word to Crispin, a word to Paul McEwen. And she would speak that word. He knew it was only a matter of time.

"Pleasant here," she said to Crispin. "Idyllic, I think is the word."

"Yes," said Crispin. "It's lovely in St. Ives. We're out of the world here and we don't miss it."

Gaye's brows went up. She smiled drowsily. "Ah, yes! What is it?—'the world forgetting and by the world forgot.' All very lovely." She looked hard at Abel Brown: "But I wonder if the world really forgets. There must be some things that linger long in its memory. Its heroes, I believe, soon pass from sight. Judas has been remembered as long as Christ—"

She made the first move. She went to the wide window that looked out on the yard, on the beach of St. Ives and the sea beyond. Crispin, with a questioning look at him, walked over to stand beside her.

"I've never seen anything I liked better," Crispin said. "I come from Montreal but I've been here for some years. Last winter I went back to see if I could adjust myself to the old life again, and I couldn't. I was glad to come back to St. Ives."

"I should think it would be dull," said Gaye. "Still—" with a glance at Abel Brown, "It might have its compensations."

Crispin flushed. She did not like this girl. Despite all she had heard about Gaye Fontaine, she had been prepared, as was her way, to take Paul McEwen's wife on face value. But there was something hard and cruel and cynical here that she did not like, there was a barrier between them that something in her told her at once she could never hope to surmount. What that barrier was she could not even remotely suspect. But Abel Brown knew, and his heart ached for her and suffered for the happiness they were about to lose; and Gaye knew and felt a wicked triumph in the knowledge.

"My husband has gone fishing today," she said. "I sneaked in on him. He will be disappointed that he wasn't around to show me the yacht. Perhaps Mr. Brown—"

He knew there was no escape. He saw Crispin's mouth stiffen and he did not try too hard to hide the misery in his eyes when she looked at him challengingly. There was nothing he could do. Gaye had begun to play her little game already. He saw the fleeting smile, the swift flicker of her eyelids.

"Gladly," he said. "Will you come too, Crispin?"

"Thank you, no." She did not look at him. "I have work to do in the inn. You two run along. I hope I'll see you again, Mrs. McEwen."

Gaye smiled, looked at her with eyes, sleepy-lidded, their malevolence hidden by the length of her lashes as well as by the strange color of their irises. "Thank you. I'll be around all summer, and you'll see me again. You must come over to Seabright for dinner some evening—the two of you. We'll have some fun."

She was laughing inwardly, he knew—the kind of laughter she loved, the kind that no one else can share. She and Crispin went down the stairs ahead of him. He lingered to take a look around his workshop—his well-loved place, to think of the many happy hours he had spent there, to picture Crispin, so sweet, so defenceless, sitting there in the rude old puncheon-chair, watching him as he worked; to gaze on the tools of his craft. His world—all his good, clean world that with her help he had made. And he prayed to God that he might not lose it now, that, through the caprice of a woman like Gaye McEwen, it might not be taken from him.

He had fought too hard for it, worked too hard to build it. It represented all his hope, his toil, his travail. Was it to be ruined by a woman like this, one who in all her life had done no single, worthwhile thing? The unfairness of it twisted and tortured something deep in his heart and his arms were hard and taut as if he were readying himself for physical combat. But here, he knew, was no foe you could fight with strength of arm. Here was cunning and cruelty, merciless and without scruple.

She was silent as they walked down the path to the grassy place near the little creek where the yacht was a-building. She was silent but he knew what she was thinking, knew that she was still enjoying her unholy laughter, and he hated her and despised himself for walking by her side.

Once, on the day of his Golgotha, he had thought wildly that death would be small punishment for the putting of this woman out of existence. His hands had hungered to close about her throat and choke the lying life out of her. Times there were, too, afterwards, when he had felt the same. And even now— Yet here he walked quietly, in docile fashion, by her side.

"So love has come," she murmured finally. "I might have known there would be some explanation for this lonely exile of yours. Of course she doesn't know. Come to think of it, isn't she the girl Bede Wallace was supposed to marry? Of course, she is. Well, well, what a small little world it is!"

"You—surely even you haven't it in you to hurt her. She's not—not your kind, Gaye. She's helpless, defenceless—"

"The poor thing! And she's not my kind. What kind will she think she is when she finds out who has been making love to her—"

"I've never made love to her."

"Every time you looked at her, you caressed her. I'm not blind. I could see the whole set-up in a minute."

"You have it wrong. There's nothing between her and me—nothing that can ever matter. I—I haven't told her. I don't want to have to tell her."

"But you can't tear yourself away." Her eyes were storm-filled; there was a tightness about her mouth. "So you'll go on being the self-denying lover. I know you. I can see exactly how it's been. It's a wonder you didn't run away from her once you found out you loved her—"

"I left the place after the first night, as soon as I found out who she was. I met with an accident, broke a leg—"

"And darling, darling Crispin nursed you back to health. Then, to save you from yourself or something, she went away. And that didn't work. What do you do now?"

"I'd like to wring your neck."

"I dare say." The look she gave him was baleful. "Even that wouldn't solve your problem. Maybe I can do something about it—one way or another. Brand Phare, the hard-boiled, the man of iron, falls for the little maiden of the inn and goes all noble over her. You—what has she that—"

"That you haven't?" He laughed softly. "You've been blind from birth, if you can't see that. She has a woman's heart—something you've never had. She can look up at the sky and see the stars and see beauty in them and not want to put them all in her hair. She could know love, and realize that love is a thing to be shared not snatched—"

"Very, very pretty. Are there really girls like that?"

They had come to the yacht. She closed her lips tightly. She pretended an interest in all the things he showed her, but he knew she was seeing none of them. She was thinking of him and Crispin, hating Crispin, hating them both. When she stumbled over a bit of timber he knew she had done it deliberately but she held out the hand she had tried to break her fall with.

She leant heavily upon him and said, "I think I've strained my wrist. Awkward of me. I wonder if you'd drive me home, Mr. Brown?"

The workmen were watching her sympathetically. He couldn't refuse. He walked silently beside her back to the inn where she had parked her car. It was a beautiful cream-colored coupe and in spite of himself, in spite of the cheap little trick by which she had manoeuvred him into the job, he thrilled to the touch of the wheel, to the instant, purring response of the great motor.

She was watching him with mockery in her eyes, in the set of her scarlet mouth. "Quite a treat, I suppose. It's a wonder, after a long period of ox-carts and the like, that you haven't forgotten how to drive."

His eyes were fixed on the winding road. He said, "Oh, I used to drive the prison-van quite a bit. It sort of kept my hand in."

"Touchée!" She frowned. "Do you really hate me so much, Brand?"

"Hate is hardly the word. I think I've lost the capacity for hatred. I had to take so many things from so many people."

"But you haven't lost the capacity for love?"

"Thank God, no. I've lost the right to love. I forfeited that along with my rating and the other things they could take from me. I kept, I hope, my self-respect and, yes, the capacity for love. I'm not altogether destitute."

"What do you intend to do? You won't stay in this place all your life? You're too young to—"

"I was young." He laughed. "You know I'm not young any more. You had a hand, quite a big one, in making me old before my time. Now you tell me— But what's the use? And yes, I did plan to stay here, to keep on with the work I'm doing. I like it. I can be happy at it."

"You're not fooling me, Brand. Maybe it is the work, but if I'm not mistaken, it's also the red-headed Venus at the inn."

"Leave her out of it, do you hear!" His voice was harsh. "I don't want to hear you talk about her."

"My lips, I suppose, are not pure enough to speak her name. Crispin. Pretty name, isn't it? Neat, like her—clean cut, sweet and wholesome—all the things a man wants in a wife, all the things I never had. I come from New York's East Side, a pretty tough school."

"You learned your lessons all right."

He knew that thrust, too, had gone home, pierced in some tiny vulnerable spot the hard brittle armor that she had donned in childhood, that had grown with her and grown in its strength to resist the warmer, sweeter virtues of life, that made her laugh at such outmoded things as love, truth, faithfulness, that had its crudest strength around her heart, shutting out from it all that might have softened it and awakened the woman that slumbered there; that lowered a visor over her eyes so that they saw only the glittering and superficial and might never glimpse beyond to the real and worthwhile. She had fought all her life, fought all the way, asking no quarter, giving none. He knew he need expect none now—knew it from the quick, malignant look she gave him.

"Don't forget, Mr. Abel Brown, you're working for my husband. You have to be civil to your employer's wife. A word from me, you know, and the sweet little song is ended and you'll have to get out of even this little village. Everybody would remember Brand Phare, and these Canucks, I understand, don't readily overlook the fact that a man has done a stretch."

He said nothing. He couldn't fight her, couldn't use the weapons she was so adept with. His heart was sick. He would get out of St. Ives tonight, he told himself savagely—leave it all, go anywhere, starve, beg—anything rather than this. He had boasted to her that he had kept his self-respect. Where was it even now that it let him sit beside her, let him listen to the things she said?

"There!" He braked the car hard on the gravel in front of Paul McEwen's gray stone house on a terrace overlooking the bay. "I've done what you asked. I'll do no more."

"Won't you come in and have a drink or something? Please do. I don't want to lose you yet. You have no idea how much I looked forward to this reunion. And it's been fun—a lot more fun even than I thought it would be."

"You always had queer ideas of fun." They had got out of the car and stood facing each other, scorn in his eyes, wicked amusement in hers. "It was fun for you to make a fool of Bede Wallace when it didn't work with me. Fun to wreck his life and cause the death of some hundreds of innocent people. Fun to let me be blamed for it. Fun to let me go to jail for it. And it's still fun because I can keep my mouth shut and still give you a chance to jibe at me. Go ahead. You can't do any more mischief than you've done."

"Oh, can't I? Just watch me. And surely you wouldn't be such a coward as to run out on the girlfriend there who believes in you and trusts in you so

much! Her eyes light up when she looks at you. Surely you don't want to break her heart."

He looked at her steadily, quizzically, as at some rare specimen that baffled and amused him. She spoke a language he knew he could never learn to understand and she, he realized, could never speak his, which was the language of decency and denial. More than he despised her, he pitied her, yet he thought of his own great strength, of his hands that could break that frail, too-perfect body of hers, yet were powerless to fight her in the things that mattered.

"No," he said slowly at length, "I don't want to break her heart. I hope it's not in my power to break it and I hope to God it's not in yours."

"You're not fooling me, sailor. Maybe you're trying to kid yourself, but you must know the girl has fallen hard for you. The big strong silent man, the simple wood-carver of St. Ives. Sure it's in your power to break her heart and she's the kind who would have a heart to break. I hold a few good cards myself and I'm the one to play them. What's wrong with you? Don't you ever get tired of being noble? I thought you'd be all over it by this time. What's it ever got you?"

"Little enough," he said bitterly. "But I'll cling to that little."

He walked quickly away. He saw nothing, paid no attention to where he went. It was a long walk back to St. Ives, but he was in the village before he even realized it. His mind whirled, the thoughts piling madly one on top of the other. He had expected much of what he had got from her, but now that it had come it sickened him. His very muscles ached with the desire to rend and destroy. There was a flame in his brain, a madness. For himself he didn't care. But Crispin—Crispin was going to be hurt, cruelly hurt and it would be his fault, all his fault.

"I'll have to tell her tonight I'm going. That is all that's left to me. And she will know why I'm going. It won't be hard for her to see the connection between Abel Brown—and that's a laugh—and Brandon Phare. Maybe she's guessed it now. Well, it had to come some time."

They were at supper when he slipped into the Ship and went up to his room. He sat down on the bed, elbows on knees, and ran his fingers through his hair; his eyes, unseeing, fixed on far-off things that were real and ugly, on other far-off things, so dear but so vague, so hopeless, that now they had no form. Dreams of Crispin, dreams of peace and a good life and a time when he could perhaps forget. Fool, he, ever to hope for such a day. It would never come. Gaye would see to that. With her small pointed toe she would

kick his castles of fine spun glass into a million little shards and splinters, and would laugh in the doing, laugh at him and laugh at Crispin Dean.

He didn't want any supper, but Robby came to the foot of the stairs and called him and before he could think he said, "All right, Robby, I'll be down."

Still he loitered, hoping there would be no one in the dining-room, but Crispin was still at the table. She looked at him with a queer, pathetic smile that did things to his heart, that made him long to take her in his arms and hold her tight, tight, and hide his face in the softness of her hair. He loved her—how he loved her! In this moment, as never before, he knew how much she had meant to him, how much she would always mean.

He hungered for her. If he took her in his arms, he knew, all things would seem right, the wonder of her would make little even of the things he had fought for and it would be easy to forget the hurt his love might cause her, easy to lose all scruples in the ecstasy of having her close to him, of feeling her heart beat against his and the warm pressure of her lips on his mouth.

But he would not. She would never be for him. There were too many things against them, against this love. Ill-starred from the beginning, it had come now under an influence most malignant. It had no chance.

Crispin waited for him to speak and, when he did not, said, "Was her wrist hurt badly?"

He shook his head. "I don't think so. I don't think it was hurt at all."

"Then—then it was just a trick to get you to drive her home. I thought it was that. She's lovely, isn't she?"

"Lovely! I see nothing lovely about her. Oh, I suppose one can admire a python for some things."

"You didn't seem to mind her very much. She was leaning on your arm when you came up from the shipyard."

"I work for her husband," he said bitterly. "She reminded me of that."

Crispin's face was white under its pale golden tan. "Was it—was it love at first sight?"

He pushed aside his plate. "You too!" he said, and before the look in his eyes she averted hers. "I won't talk about her. I don't want to hear her name. Oh, Crispin—"

"You do have a way with women." Her voice was cold. "I suppose one can't blame you for that. I—"

"Nothing!" he said harshly. "I tell you she means nothing to me."

"It's easy to say. There seemed to be something between you. I could feel it the first moment I saw you together. She was playing with me, laughing at me, telling me as clearly as if she said the words that she could have you if she wanted you. Well, let her. You're free. You've always kept yourself free. I don't even know if—"

She got up from the table. He followed her, but she went quickly up to her room and closed the door. Another door, still another, closed in his face. And he knocking, uselessly, hopelessly, at the staring panels. She would not answer him.

He went to his room and sat there in the twilight, sucking on his empty pipe. He felt life, all its injustice, its cruelty, its meanness, closing around him, making a prison around him stronger than the one of brick and iron from which he had been released. No release from this prison—none. Crispin now—he knew what she thought, what any girl would think. And you couldn't fight that, you couldn't argue with a woman when she felt that way. The more you said, the more you tried to explain, the worse matters became.

Why didn't he get out of here? Leave the place and never come back? Leave everything? It would come to that anyway—just as soon as some whim of Gaye's moved her to say casually, "This man you call Abel Brown is an ex-convict named Brandon Phare. You all know about him—"

Yes, he could hear her saying that. He could feel the hearts of all these people he had learned to look upon as friends, turning against him. He could see their smiles, their warm glances becoming dark and cold until finally their silent hostility would drive him away. He could see Crispin—

"I'll face it," he said quietly. "I never was a one to run away from anything that would hurt me. And I am the one who will be hurt now. Let her have her fun. I've gone through worse things than this. I'll stick it out. Yes, if it's the last thing I do, I'll see it through. And if I'm driven out of here, I won't give up. I'll go some other place and start again. I always have my work. Yes, and I always have my God, far away as He seems to be right now."

He felt stronger, surer of himself, than he had for a long time. Perhaps, he thought, one can endure just so much, reach a certain point of pain, after

which comes a numbness that brings relief. He had suffered just about as much as any man can suffer. He had thought, when he saw the world again after the gray life of the prison, Now I shall find some peace. And he had tried hard for peace and found it, only to have it menaced once more. Let it go again. Let everything go: he had for so long been used to nothing.

He went out and walked for miles through the warm, scented night, under the stars and the pale gibbous moon. The wind from the sea cooled his burning face and brought some little of calm to the turbulent tide of his thoughts. He could see now that it was his own secretiveness, his desire to escape the unholy past that had led to all this. You couldn't get away from it. He saw that clearly now. You could never escape it. Best to make a stand, make it now, and have it all over with. Peace came to him with this resolve. He felt a great quiet in his spirit, a lightness that was blessed, and a load seemed to have gone from his shoulders. "It won't be so bad," he assured himself. "It may not be so bad as I feared."

And that night he slept and was early up for his work in the morning. Crispin had breakfast with him. Her eyes looked tired, wan, her face was pale. She said after a silence had succeeded his brief "good morning," "I'm sorry about last night, Abel—sorry I acted the way I did. Schoolgirl stuff, wasn't it? When I got to my room and took time to think it all over, I saw how foolish I was."

His smile was good to see. Her relenting was all he needed. Yet, he thought fleetingly, wouldn't it have made everything easier if she had continued to treat him coldly. No, no, he must take everything of light and kindness she could give. Soon there might be nothing.

"I'm glad to hear you say that, Crispin." There was worship in his eyes. "You're all that makes life worth living for me. If you turned against me, despised me—"

"I never could."

"You do not know. We can be so sure of things one day, then the next all our sureness is gone. You were quick to condemn me because I went with her. Believe me, I did not want to go. It was one of the hardest moments of my life. But I—"

"She—this woman means nothing to you, does she?"

"Less than nothing. Believe it, Crispin. Whatever happens, I want you to know that."

"What do you mean?" There was swift alarm in the way she jerked her head up. "What can possibly happen?"

"Oh, I don't know. She—she is full of caprices. I work for her husband and—"

"But you don't work for her."

"It's all very difficult. There's something—" How tell her now? He couldn't speak now. It was one of those days when the fog is thick over Fundy, when the bell-buoys have a most mournful sound, when the gulls seem like the ghosts of drowned sailormen. The grayness, the chilly damp seemed to come into the room where they were sitting, seemed to get into their hearts. Why did it have to be such a day? Moisture drip-dripped from the eaves; in the garden the flowers drooped with its weight. Far out in the leaden mirk that was Fundy a steamer's whistle hooted at dismal intervals—whoo—whoo—whoo—

Fit day for such thoughts as were his. Life was all gray again: the sunshine had been brief, illusory. Perhaps it never really was bright, just a paling of the grayness that surrounded him. What use to go on like this, to postpone for such a brief while the inevitable showdown? This was the sort of thing that took toll of a man, that broke him, that did things to his spirit. Why not tell her the truth? Why not say, "I'm not the man you take me for. I'm Brand Phare. All the world despises me and it was the wrong thing for me to love you and seek your love. Better be done with me now."

Later, he thought, slowly stirring the strong black tea—I'll tell her later. I can't now. He knew himself for a coward, knew it was his place to make the truth known and not give Gaye the cruel chance she was waiting for. He tried to steel himself, to force himself to talk when they got up from the table and walked out to the inn-parlor to look at the mail that William had brought.

But she came to him and took his arm and put her head against his shoulder. So small, so slender, so warm. There was a pain in his heart, a choking in his throat. Tell her—he could never tell her; that would destroy this happiness of hers, a happiness founded on her love for him.

He would rather die than say the words that would banish the warm light from her eyes, drive the gentle smile from her lips. He wanted these things so much. He clung greedily to each moment of this time, savoring it, squeezing each last drop of sweetness from it, as a man at the foot of the gallows hoards each sip of the drink they give him, husbands each whiff of

smoke from the final cigarette. Her smile was his, the tenderness in her eyes —all for him—all for Abel Brown.

"You're not angry with me?" she asked in a small voice. "You—you don't hate me for the way I acted last night? It was wrong of me, I know—utterly silly. But when I saw you with her, the way she looked at you and took possession of you, I—it did something to me. Women like her can sometimes make quick work of men like you, Abel Brown."

"What am I like, Crispin?"

"Honest, square, incapable of double-dealing, of deceit."

He was staring at the model of the *Crispin Dean*, thinking of the happy day when he had finished it and given it to her. He said slowly, "So that is what you think of me—honest, square, incapable of double-dealing, of deceit." He shook his head slowly. "I wonder if you'll always have that idea of me, if nothing will teach you differently. I'd like you to have that opinion of me always."

"But you are like that."

"I'm a coward and worse—where you are concerned, Crispin." He turned away from her. "You turn all my strength into weakness. And I'm afraid—so much afraid—"

"Can't you tell me—?"

"I can't, heaven help me. I can't do it. I want to go on like this, happy with you. It's been so good, this life I've known here in St. Ives. I'd like nothing to spoil it."

"You're thinking of this woman, of Gaye—that's it, isn't it?"

"Women can do so much mischief—if they choose."

"And so much good—if you'll let them."

"I know." He smiled at her from the doorway, looked fondly at her, tenderly. "You have done so much good for me. You gave me hope when I had none, courage when my own was failing. You made me believe when I had begun to doubt even in God."

"More," she whispered. "So much more I could give you, if you'd let me."

"If I only could." He looked at her for a moment longer as if to impress her image deeper on his mind, then he went out and she saw him pass the

window, a tall blurred figure in the shifting whorls of the mist. She felt beaten, frightened, completely at a loss. In her heart she knew he loved her, craved for her, even as she loved and desired him. She knew her love, if he would have it, could make him free, rid him of those dark, formless fears that were always with him. But he would not have her love nor let himself yield to his love for her. He had the strength of steel. She knew it from the way he had put her from him, loosed her seeking arms from about his neck.

"You don't know what you do to me, Crispin," he had said. "You can't know."

What was the dark thing that troubled him, that spoiled his highest moments, that was with him when he worked, when he ate, when he slept, that gave him no peace ever? What was there between him and Gaye McEwen that made him fear and hate her? He had been different, so different, since Gaye's coming. He was afraid, and it pained her to think that fear could ever dwell in that strong heart. It made her pity him. It made her burn with something near to hatred for that smooth, smiling woman who was laughing quietly at her and Abel Brown, who saw their little happiness, their poor dreams, as something ludicrous.

Wearily, without heart she went about her household tasks, the endless work of the inn. Were they to go on like this forever—wanting, hungry, frustrated at every turn? Could a man and woman grow old like this, loving each other, never having each other, yet meeting constantly, living under the same roof, and fully aware, each of them, what was in the heart and mind of the other?

Abel Brown, striding through the thick wall of fog, was thinking much the same thoughts. But he knew it could not go on. If they did not make the break, it would be made for them. He thought of Gaye. He knew how she would hate this morning, she who was a creature of the light, who throve and bloomed best in the brilliance of the sun, of many lamps. She would be in a wicked mood this morning.

"Thick afog this morning, mister," said William as he passed down the path to the shipyard. "Not a good day for work at all."

"Any day's a good day for work, William."

"Aye, work makes you forget things, doesn't it? Sometimes the devil takes the form of a woman, Mr. Brown."

"Most times, William."

"She's a wicked one, that. I was there when she tripped over the deal. She didn't need to do it."

Abel Brown shrugged. "Who knows?"

"Oh, I know. She just wanted to keep you with her. You'll be careful of that one, eh? Sailors are easy for women like that. Funny, funny, that a sailor should not be easy for one like her." He jerked his little head towards the inn, where they could see Crispin in the back door, shaking out a rug.

"You talk of two different things, William." Abel Brown looked at him kindly. "You talk of two different persons. You talk of night and day."

"Aye," nodded William. "I have thought that. Women, I once believed, were all the same at heart. I had never before seen one like this stranger. She is the night, yes—and Crispin Dean is the day. You do not love the night."

"I don't love the night, William. You need not be afraid for me."

"There's something, sailor—something I don't know."

"Perhaps a lot of things."

"Things you'll never tell, eh?"

"Things I dare not tell."

"Better out. Such things are better out. Don't you think she"—He jerked his head towards the inn—"don't you think she would understand?"

"I don't know. I can't risk it. You don't understand, William. I have so little. I can't risk losing that little. I may have it for such a short time."

Portagee William shook his head. He could not follow this line of thought. It was not like Abel Brown. He knew that Abel Brown was strong and fearless. He knew men, did William. Women—it was women that did this to a man. Damn women, thought Portagee William.

For three days the fog hung low and thick over the Fundy shore and the bell-buoys tolled, muffled in the mist, and the fog horn's dismal voice was never stilled. Ships groped their way through the grayness or hove-to, waiting for the pall to lift. Still Abel Brown pushed ahead with the work of building the yacht. Mercilessly he drove himself and the men under him, until they looked at him with wondering eyes and began to think him a man possessed.

He welcomed the fog. It shut him into a world of his own—a world where there was just Crispin and the work he loved. Gaye and all the ugliness he had known lay outside the mist. When it lifted he would see her again, see his life as it was, not as he had hoped to make it. And work was a relief, work was the thing. It kept him from thinking, from brooding over all that might have been, all that most certainly would be. The work of his hands and brain. He could lose himself in the contemplation of the boat that grew surely and steadily, plank by plank, a thing of grace and beauty. Some of his heart's blood, some of his soul in her.

Crispin came often down to the shipyard and watched him as he worked. He loved her with the mist beaded on her hair, on her long lashes, loved the look of pride in her eyes as she saw the fruits of his labor. It was for her he worked, all for her, even though he worked in vain. It was she who had inspired him, filled him with new hope and high courage.

"I wish it was ours," he said, standing beside her in the mist, their shoulders touching. "I'd like to sail away with just you, Crispin, over uncharted seas to an island that would stay lost forever to the rest of the world."

"Is there such a place?" Her voice was wistful. She, too, had begun to feel some of his depression, to share some of the fear that haunted him. It was there with her, that fear, no less real for being utterly without form. She could sense that there was something menacing her happiness, something hovering near that threatened her and Abel Brown.

"There must be," he said. "But I would not know where to find it."

"And suppose you could, are you sure you would want to stay there always, with just me?"

"So sure," he nodded. "It's a fairer dream than heaven—and just as far off."

"But don't you think two people who love can find their own island, no matter where they may live?"

"Others will find it too. Others will see how lovely it is and try to spoil it. That's a fact. It's always that way."

"You're talking about her now."

He did not answer.

"You're talking about Gaye now, aren't you?"

"Yes—about her."

"How can she spoil things for us? Are you afraid of her?"

"It might be that. She's dangerous."

"Why must you talk in riddles, Abel Brown? Tell me, what is this woman to you? No—I won't ask that, for you'll assure me she is less than nothing to you. Well then, what place has she in your life? You can't tell me it's just the fear of losing McEwen's favor that makes you act like this. There's something else."

"Yes, something else. You'll know it soon enough, I dare say. I won't talk about it now."

"You'll leave it for others to tell. You'll have me hear it from someone who talks through spite, through hatred of you."

"It will be the same story, Crispin." He turned to his work. "Spite or hatred can't make it worse and love couldn't improve upon it."

"I can't believe—"

"You will believe."

Paul McEwen came over. He said, "Gaye is delighted with the yacht. I have never seen her take a keener interest in anything. I'm damned glad too, I can tell you. Pretty dull life for a girl like Gaye, being married to me. I can't go it the way I used to. I was kind of afraid to bring her down here but she says now she thinks she will enjoy the summer."

"Good," said Abel Brown, knowing well that Gaye had said this just to have it relayed to him, just to remind him that she was there, that she did not forget. As if he needed reminding!

He liked McEwen, marvelled that a man so strong, so purposeful, could care for a woman like Gaye. Perhaps, though, she was to him just another expensive toy like his yacht, his plane. She had grace and glitter and it satisfied something in him to see her wearing costly gems and furs of fabulous price. Love didn't enter into it. Certainly, McEwen was far too astute to think that Gaye cared anything for him. He knew she was interested in Abel Brown. He could always tell when some new star rose on her horizon. He merely smiled and shrugged: there had been so many. But he owned her.

She came to the shipyard with McEwen a few times in the weeks that followed. She left Abel Brown alone, but he knew that she was laughing

inwardly, savoring to the full his uneasiness, his uncertainty, rejoicing in the misery she was causing him. It was the old cat-and-mouse game, the one she liked best to play. The kill was certain, the prey could not escape and she could bide her time.

But it was hard for him. He was facing an enemy whose movements could never be foreseen. You couldn't count on Gaye for anything except treachery. She was never idle. She would not rest until she had brought mischief to him. And she would want a good audience, a proper stage-setting. She loved the theatrical. To her it would be merely a play. What matter if a man's happiness, his hard-won peace, were to be sacrificed? What difference if a young girl's heart should break?

The invitation to him and Crispin came from McEwen, and this, he guessed, was done so that he could not refuse. A dinner, quite informal—dancing—maybe a moonlight sail. Some friends of theirs had arrived from New York. Jolly crowd, he said; lots of fun. "And you look as if you could stand some fun, Brown." He looked curiously at the man who was building his boat. "You know, I can't figure you out. I'm not trying to pry into your affairs, I assure you, but it has often struck me that this is a queer sort of place for a man of your calibre."

"I like it here," said Abel Brown quietly. "It's peaceful here."

"Yes, peaceful, I'll grant you. But you look to me like a man used to being in the thick of things."

Abel Brown said nothing.

"My wife," continued McEwen, with a peculiar smile, "seems interested in you. Perhaps I'd better warn you—"

"I need no warning," said Abel Brown.

"Good." McEwen's voice was dry. "Gaye is sort of a problem child. I know her, I think, about as well as any man could: still I never know what to expect. She's deadly in a place like this—a place that is so quiet and peaceful."

That was, Abel Brown thought bitterly—was, until she came. There's no peace now. It's an outpost of hell now, and she's going to make it worse. She's starting right in to make it worse, bringing Crispin and me together in her house, sticking us into a testtube so she can pour in a bit of the acid of her hate and get a laugh out of the reaction.

But he went to Seabright with Crispin, drove her over in the inn's station-wagon; and he was gay. He was livelier than she had ever before seen him—young, full of life and spirits. And she wondered, and despised herself for it, if it was the prospect of seeing Gaye that made him so. After all, what did she know about him? About his past? He had lived. He had been used to things like this. The great rooms, the leather and chrome brilliance of Seabright didn't impress him at all. Nothing seemed to bother him.

A party of six had come from New York in the racy-looking cruiser that was moored at the McEwen's jetty—a gay crowd, three men and three women—men of McEwen's type, girls with the platinum hardness of Gaye.

She watched Gaye, in a gown all blue and silver, take instant, unquestioned possession of Abel Brown. Gaye's hand lay lightly on his sleeve, yet to Crispin, watching, she held him with a grip of steel. He did not seem to resent it. His smile was ready and she did not see the hard, cold glint in his eyes. She was too miserable to look for it. Tonight, she felt, he was not hers. And she asked herself if she had ever really owned him, any of him.

"This is Abel Brown." Gaye's voice was smooth, drawling, silky. There was a purr in it. Crispin saw the swift appraisal in the eyes of Gaye's friends, guessed at the quick conclusions reached in those few moments. Here, they were thinking, was another of Gaye's men, an interesting conquest, this. And they were pitying her, perhaps laughing at her. If Gaye wanted a man, she got him. Nothing could stop her. Crispin felt small and helpless and afraid. She wished she had never come here. It seemed to her that Abel Brown had gone too swiftly over to the enemy.

"Abel Brown builds boats," Gaye continued. "He is building me a yacht, a beauty. You can all see it tomorrow. He loves boats, loves the sea. I believe the sea was his first love. Maybe she done him wrong. She must have, for he seems to have given her up."

The others laughed. They were a bit puzzled. Knowing Gaye, they were quick to see that there was something here, something deep and dangerous. It concerned Gaye and this tall brown sailor and the quiet lovely girl who had come here with him. It was bright with danger, this thing. They guessed that from the sudden thinning of his lips, the narrowing of his eyes, the depth of his laughter, the way he said, "Mrs. McEwen is right about the sea's being my first love. She is wrong about the rest of it. The sea never lets a man down; it takes humans to do that. The sea did me no wrong."

"Oh, but you gave it up," said Gaye sweetly.

"Yes, I gave it up. I just haunt its shores now. Sort of a beachcomber."

The other women were intrigued. Gaye, smiling, turned on the radio. They danced. Crispin watched Abel Brown dancing with those girls, with Gaye. There was pain in her eyes and in her heart a great fear. Had she been wrong about him? Had he all the time been deceiving her? He who was so steady, so earnest, so occupied with the serious business of life—how could he act the playboy now; how go out of his way, for so he seemed to be going, to put himself over with this crowd?

He was doing it—doing it in a big way. He talked their language, danced the same steps, took drink for drink with them. She could hear where she sat by the piano with Paul McEwen, his deep voiced laughter. She heard a girl say, "Where'd you find this one Gaye! Darling, you've pulled a fast one on us. You've had him salted away down here."

And Gaye said, in her deep, drawly voice: "You never spoke truer words, baby. You hit it right on the nose."

Paul McEwen leaned close to Crispin. She could feel his eyes upon her face, sense the pity he had for her. She didn't want it. She didn't want anything from him, from any of these people. She could think only of Abel Brown. And this man she watched, dancing, laughing, having, it seemed, the best time of his life, was not Abel Brown. He was a changeling. He seemed to have forgotten her, forgotten his work, the good, solid things that made up his life. She couldn't know of the dark tempest that raged inside him.

"Our friend seems to be enjoying himself," said McEwen. "I suppose it's the reaction. He works so damnably hard. It's all work and no play with him. Tomorrow, he'll feel bad. Who is he anyway? How did he come here?"

"I don't really know," admitted Crispin. And she thought, I've never cared who he was or where he came from. I've just taken him as he was, and I found him a bit like God. This isn't he. I wonder why he's acting like this. He has Gaye puzzled too. She's been watching him, trying to figure him out. It seems to me she expected something different. Things aren't going the way she thought they would.

That was so. Gaye was puzzled. She had expected him to be sullen, withdrawn, afraid. He knew she had chosen tonight for the showdown. She had set the stage carefully. She had looked forward to seeing him squirm. She had hoped to taste each moment of his torment, to roll it on her tongue and savor its sweetness. She looked from him to Crispin Dean, and smiled. She would still have her fun.

"I can't figure him out," continued McEwen. "He knows more about boats than any other man I've met. And he's ambitious. Why then did he bury himself here? Or are you the answer to that, Miss Dean?"

"Does it seem that way?"

"Not right now, I'll grant you. You're not too happy about this."

"I have no strings on him. He didn't stay in St. Ives on account of me. I think he wanted to get away from things, away from the world. And now it looks as if the world had found him out."

He was dancing with Gaye. Over her shoulder his eyes met Crispin's briefly. He looked away. He said, his lips scarcely moving, "When do the fireworks start?"

She laughed. "So you think there will be fireworks tonight?"

"Oh, yes. You have a wonderful set-piece you know. It will depict a ship all on fire. It will be quite a sensation. One of those men is head of a big news syndicate, isn't he?"

"Why, yes," said Gaye, as if it was the first thought she had given that fact. "Roger Ballou. Odd, isn't it, that he should be here?"

"It would be, if you hadn't made a point of asking him. I danced with his wife, you see."

Gaye shrugged. "You're an awful fool, Brand. Why can't you be human?"

"Do you ask that?"

"Yes, you've always treated me as if—"

"So I did. Now you're going to put the finishing touches to what you began on the *Orsina*."

"You can stop me." She pressed close to him. Her eyes, green as the sea's depths, looked up, seeking his.

"Let her burn," he said. "I'd sooner burn too."

"All right, big boy—you asked for it."

The fun grew faster and faster. Crispin could not keep pace with it. He had scarcely come near her all evening and when he did come his eyes avoided hers and he talked nervously, jerkily, and seemed to want to get away as fast as he could, seemed glad when some girl or other came and pulled him by the arm and said, "Let's dance."

Once she said, "You're a different person tonight, Abel. I never saw you like this before. I didn't know—"

"Lots of things you don't know, Crispin. But you're going to learn soon—in fact I think you're going to learn tonight."

"But what is there to learn?" She tried to still the rapid fluttering of her heart, to fight down the fear that was almost panic. "What is it? And why should I have to learn it here? If it—if it is something against you, I'd rather hear it from your own lips, not from hers—it will be hers, won't it?"

He nodded. "Yes. She's the one. I can't tell you. I'm too much of a coward to tell you, but please believe that I kept silent for no other reason than that I was greedy for the happiness you gave me. I knew I could only have a little, such a very little, and for so short a time. Perhaps I was wrong to want even that much. I don't know."

"But do you think it will make any difference with me—what she says? I would not believe her—"

"Oh, you'll believe her," he said harshly. "She has the facts, you see. Nobody can deny the facts—not even you."

There was almost pity in her eyes, but he did not see it, for he could not bring himself to look at her. How, she thought, could he be so blind? Did he think anything could matter more to her than this precious thing she had in her heart? She couldn't let it be destroyed. Let him condemn himself with his own words, let him try to destroy it himself, still it would be there.

Abel Brown did not think so. It was the showdown, the pay-off, the end. He knew it in his heart and he had been putting on an act—for Crispin, thinking that he could lessen the sting of it by preparing her, by making her think he wasn't at all what she had thought him. He hated every minute of it—the liquor tasted like gall and the women he held in his arms were just a laugh to him who had held Crispin Dean once and kissed her.

It was coming. It would come any minute now. Gaye was in great spirits. He could see the laughter in her eyes. She loved a sensation. She was tasting this one already. Soon she'd sound off. She was smiling at him in that queer, slant-eyed way of hers, a green light in her eyes.

He didn't even hate her now, didn't begrudge her this mean triumph. He was rather glad that the time for telling had come: the burden he carried had become intolerable. It didn't matter that her words would put an end to this brief happiness, would drive him forth again even from this humble place he had come to love. What did matter was that it would be the end of all things

between him and Crispin Dean, and that hurt him beyond all telling. It was that which caused this pain, this bitterness, that made the future darker than ever it had been for him, even in his darkest hour.

He wondered how Gaye would go about it. Subtly, of course. She would prolong the agony as much as possible. He knew how these people would take it. The burning of the *Orsina* was still fresh in their minds. Some of them had lost friends, relatives in the holocaust. He could already see the scorn, the horror in their eyes. But he was used to that. Men had spat upon him, women reviled him. Let Gaye do her worst. He was ready.

But Gaye didn't get the chance to talk. Into the party walked Cerutti, he of the livid scar and the swarthy skin. He had a girl with him. Abel Brown saw Fate in his coming. Gaye had had no preconceived design in asking him, but he was the one who would steal her thunder.

"Just drove down for the house-warming, Gaye." He was swaying a little. "Nice dump you got here, McEwen." He greeted them all, laughing, till he came to Abel Brown. He stopped and stared hard and a slow grin over-spread his face. He snapped his fingers and laughed.

"Got you, boy!" he said. "Told you I would! Saw your picture in Gaye's apartment—good lookin' guy in your sailor suit. Yes, and I saw you on the *Orsina* the night she burned. You were Mr. Brandon Phare then, first mate. You got drunk and let her burn, didn't you?"

Silence in that room, a pulsing, terrible silence, but some ears there could hear, as from the flaming abyss, the cries and shrieks of the dying, the wild wailing of the ship's siren, the pound of running feet, the curses, the shrieks, the prayers to God. And all looked on this man with that in their eyes which he had foreseen and against which steeled himself.

He saw only Crispin—only Crispin's eyes, in all that room of startled, haggard faces. He looked in those stricken eyes only for a moment, then he said, "Thank you, Cerutti. You're a pal. You stole the show too. Good night, all."

And he strode out of the room, out into the starry darkness and he could see only her eyes, those blue eyes that had been so soft, so trusting, so tender for him.

"Not now," he muttered. "Not ever again."

Chapter X

Abel Brown was no more. Brandon Phare lived again. Yes, this was Brand Phare who walked now, hatless, the wind ruffling his hair, his black eyes wild, his mouth hard and sullen yet still, somehow, boyish and hurt, down the narrow white and winding road to St. Ives. Abel Brown was dead. Abel Brown had never really lived. Oh, there was a fellow—a simple, lost, pathetic sort of chap who had walked this road long, long ago with a duffle-bag on his shoulder, who had come to the Sign of the Burning Ship and found warmth by its fire, who had looked in the caverns of the glowing coals on its wide hearth and dared to dream some silly futile dreams.

A man was a fool to dream. Life had a puckish way of knocking all the lovely dreams into a cocked-hat. He for a while had let himself think that some bright and wondrous hours might yet be his after the darkness he had known. Better had he never let himself be fooled, better had he gone grimly on, looking for nothing, hoping for nothing. The crowning folly had been his love for Crispin. He had exposed himself again to the fire and he had been burnt.

But, oh, he thought, its warmth was good and its light was fair and it was a taste of beauty that I may never know again. She has the truth now. What will it do to her? Will she hate me? Will she forget that I tried to do the decent thing, that I fought myself and my desires every inch of the way? Or will she think that I have done no baser thing than this accepting of her friendship—yes, even her love?

Abel Brown was gone—gone now the man and the dreams. Not once did Brand Phare look back at the lights of Seabright. In his life there would be no more looking back. He gave no thought to those he had left there—except Crispin, and all his thoughts were of Crispin. He didn't think of Gaye or McEwen or Cerutti or the rest of them. He had never liked their kind. It wasn't the first time—oh, by no means the first—that his hopes, his happiness, his very life had been shattered and ruined by drunken words or a fool's laughter.

Strange and bitter the thought that a woman like Gaye Fontaine, useless, selfish, giving to life not one worthwhile thing in exchange for all her greedy taking, could have the power to spoil the splendid visions he had let shine again on his horizon. The unfairness of it maddened him, even more than did

his helplessness to fight against it. You couldn't fight a woman at any time, and certainly never one like her, who fought always unfairly with weapons he could not use.

He did not blame Cerutti. Rather, he was glad it had come from the Italian instead of from Gaye. Maybe it had been better to hear it put so clearly, so succinctly, by this man rather than for Gaye to have said it with her poisoned tongue. Cerutti hadn't known what he was doing, hadn't thought it mattered very much, hadn't dreamed what it did to Crispin Dean.

What had it done to her? He thought he knew. Yes, he was quite sure he knew. It had killed something in her heart. There had been a flower in her heart, well-rooted, of vigorous growth, of rich, rare beauty. It had struck that flower, destroyed it in a moment, killed it down to the very roots. Coldness was in her heart where warmth had been; pain in her breast where there used to be love for him; in her mind, doubt and suspicion of this man she had trusted.

Would she understand why he had never spoken of his past, why he had kept up with her this dark deception, and left it in the end for a stranger to throw the truth in her face? Would she know how many times he had tried to bring himself to speak, to tell her everything and hope she would understand? How, each time, the fear of losing her, of being robbed of the little peace, the little happiness he had found, had held him back, put a seal on his lips, made him lock his secret still deeper in his heart?

No, he thought—no, it is too much to expect her to know those things. She will see now though why I did not at first want to stay at the Ship, why I ran away. But in the end I stayed, yes, and let her care for me and let myself love her. I couldn't help it. No man could have done otherwise, loving her. Perhaps that will count for something with her. Honest, square, incapable of deceit—those were the things she said of me. What will she think now that she knows I lied to her, to everyone, from the very beginning? What will Old William and Robby think of me, and the people of St. Ives? Well, I'll never know perhaps. I won't stay to find out. It's the road again for me and maybe, some place far away, some little forgotten village where no one shall ever find me.

But the loneliness that loomed ahead of him depressed and disheartened him. Nothing—there was nothing for him. He had sought a little bit of warmth and it had been denied him. So little—he had asked so little. Now he would have to fare forth again, an unhappy pilgrim, with his few possessions in a sack, to drift, to wander, to find no sure resting anywhere. Always

friendless, always alone, always walking, it seemed to him, against a flaming backdrop that was the reflected light of the burning ship. Much better, he thought, if I had gone down with her. Much kinder of them to have left me there to die. There are worse things than death. They say love is stronger than death—

Love, that had made this hour so cruel for him and for her, could never find him again. He would leave his love at the Sign of the Burning Ship—his love and so much of himself, so many of the shreds of the youth and hope that remained to him. He would leave there, too, some memories of himself that would not be, in the days to come, unpleasant. There had been many happy hours at the inn and he had shared in them. Bitter for Crispin to think that she had shared her laughter, her happiness with a man like Brand Phare; and yet he had never had to act for her, or for the rest; he had never had to pretend, never to try to be anything other than himself.

He passed the inn. The parlor was brightly lighted. The old signboard creaked in the wind from the sea—the Sign of the Burning Ship. He could see Portagee William there in the corner, and old Seth Meynal was there and Jonas and Barnaby. He stopped to look in at the cheerful scene. William was talking and waving his hands as he always did when he had a point to bring home. The ancients were sitting, mouths open, pipes suspended, giving him all their attention. On the mantel, his ship, the *Crispin Dean*, sailed a race that could never end, with old Captain Wishart's model of the *Flying Scud*.

For a little while he watched them; then walked along. Tonight he could not face their curious eyes, their unvoiced questions. They knew he had gone to the McEwens' with Crispin. They knew how it was between her and him. They would marvel now why he had come back without her. And he could never tell them. He wondered if she would or if, when he had gone, she would ever mention his name or tell of this night's happenings.

Somehow, wistfully, he hoped that she would not. He had liked these people, liked the way they took him on his own valuation, minded their own affairs and left him to mind his. They had thought well of him and it would be a consolation to him if they might go on so thinking, recalling him only as the dark, quiet fellow who had stayed for a while at the Ship and followed the art of wood-carving.

He walked, slower now, towards the Devil's Back. He would go to the ledge, he decided, where of old he used to lie in the long grass and the fragrant ferns, where that day Crispin had come to him and he, lost in her beauty, in his love for her, had taken her in his arms and kissed her. He

would never forget that day. Perhaps she never would. But she would hate the memory now, she would feel sullied that his hands had touched her. But she would know why he had said he was sorry, why he had driven her away from him.

He gained the ledge. It gave him joy that hurt, brought to him memories that seared and rejoiced, just to sit there, just to think of her. Summers would come and go, the grass would fade and die and be born again and no one perhaps would ever tread this that was hallowed ground to him. Maybe some day she would come there and perhaps remember and perhaps think not too badly of the man she had known as Abel Brown.

He would always remember that day, always treasure the few moments she had been with him. Even now, closing his eyes, he could smell the fragrance of her hair, feel the remembered softness of her mouth. I have that, he thought, and I'll always have it. Nothing can ever rob me of that. I'm glad—glad that I kissed her, glad that I let myself love her. I'll always love her.

Spread out below him were the twinkling lights of St. Ives and a great moon, deep gold in color, sailed over the silvered waters of Fundy. How they danced and dimpled and glanced and sparkled in its light! How wide and clean and clear was that argent roadway across the waters to the moon. Good to follow that path, he thought, wistfully; no inns along the way, no place where a man could pause to rest and, pausing, find himself bewitched and unable to travel further. No song along that road to bemuse a man's ears, to make him forget all things in listening—

He had vowed never to go to sea again, but now he thought it would be a good thing, a satisfying thing, to feel once more the pitch and roll of a deck beneath his feet, to let the salt spray sting his cheeks and hear the whistle and rush of the wind. Perhaps if he went up the shore to Alma or Harvey Bank, he could ship aboard one of those tramps that were always loading pulpwood or timber there. Yes, he would set out for there this very night.

In the long, brightly-lighted drawing-room of Seabright, its wide doors opening on a broad sweep of terrace that overlooked the Bay of Fundy, the silence that Brand Phare had left lingered until, to Crispin and to Gaye, at least, there was something of hysteria in it. No one seemed able to speak. McEwen saw the whole thing clearly now, saw, as if the final pieces of a jig-saw puzzle had been fitted, the picture of what Gaye had set out to do. He despised her for it; yet he loved her. This destroyed none of his illusions

about her: he had none to be destroyed. He looked at Crispin Dean. Her face was white under its golden tan. Her fingers clutched the little ball of her handkerchief. She wore green and there were deep golden lights in her thick hair. She was lovely, he thought, and he felt for her a sympathy unusual and profound.

She had made a move to follow Brand Phare. She had wanted to follow him, but something told her it would be better right now to leave him alone, better to give him time to think, to orientate himself, to realize perhaps that all this was not so dire, not so final, as he thought. Strangely, the revelation had not shocked her—not too deeply. She could understand now so many things about him that had puzzled and rebuffed her—his silences, his withdrawals, his shyness, his struggle against love. He had played the man, right to the very end. And there was a great pride in her heart and a great wish to console him, to give him the strength of her love, to take that dark head and press it against her woman's breast and comfort him.

She had him now. She knew he was nearer to her now than he had ever been or ever could have been, if the truth had not been told. Nothing now to keep him from loving her—surely nothing. She did not believe—not for a moment—that he was the callous wretch they said he was. She, because she loved him, knew better. In him was no meanness, no cowardice, no treachery. Only fools could think him guilty of the crime they had crucified him for.

Cerutti, his face, with its little bright serpent's eyes, for once moved out of its masque-like inexpressiveness, whistled softly. He looked around at the company and shrugged his slim shoulders. "What the hell!" he said, picking up his glass and taking the drink in one swallow. "Mean to say none of you knew that guy?" He stared at Gaye. "Why, you—he used to be a pal of yours, didn't he, before you married Paul? You knew him all right. What was the idea?"

"The idea"—Crispin's voice was low and clear and accusing—"was all arranged since the day she came here. This was the night of the big show, the night that was to take away from a man the peace he had found, that was going to wreck again the good life he had fought hard to make for himself. I don't think he was ever a friend of yours, Mrs. McEwen. I think the whole trouble arose from his refusal to be anything of the kind."

Gaye's lips were white. She managed to laugh, but it wasn't at all a success. She had lost for once her icy calm, her mastery. She found that her hand was shaking. She saw no friendliness in any of the faces about her. In

her husband's there was pity—and she could not endure being pitied. In the others was bewilderment, question; in one or two of the women's faces a mean sort of triumph. They knew she had lost this battle.

"Let's forget it," she said shrilly. "Sure I knew who he was. Didn't I testify at his trial? Wasn't I on the *Orsina*?"

"How could you have such a man in your house," said Crispin, "if your testimony was true? I read it all. The trial made him out the sort of man that all decent people would shun. He went to prison, didn't he? He lost everything. He was trying to get a little back: you wouldn't even let him have that little. Why?"

"I don't wish to talk any more about it, Miss Dean." Gaye tried to meet Crispin's blazing eyes, for a moment succeeded, then looked away.

"I've told you why." Crispin would not stop and no one tried to stop her. This, somehow, was between her and Gaye. "You hated him. You've always hated him and that was because he always acted the same way towards you. I know in my heart that you lied at his trial. You can't deny it."

"You—" Gaye's eyes were wild. She took a step towards Crispin as if she would strike her. Paul McEwen took her by the arm.

"Take it easy," he said. "It's done now. The best thing we can do is forget about it. I'm sorry"—His words were for Crispin—"Sorry it had to be like this, Miss Dean. I would have given anything to have spared you this."

Crispin smiled. "You are wrong. I'm glad, so very glad, that it happened. No one who knows Abel Brown will ever believe for a moment that he did the things that Brand Phare was accused of. I am in a position to talk. Mrs. McEwen knows, but I don't think the rest of you do, that my fiancé, Bede Wallace, was master of the *Orsina*."

Gaye's smile was not good to see. She had been drinking quite a bit. Her lips were loose. At times, it was all she could do to control them. "I've had enough of this. Come on. Let's do something. Let's go for a sail. There's too much smoke in the air here. I can almost smell it. Let's get out on the water."

"That's a thought," said Cerutti. He grinned at Crispin. "All you say about this guy may be on the up-and-up, but it's not the way I read it in the papers. Maybe you—"

"All right, Cerutti," McEwen interrupted him. "I don't think Miss Dean wants to hear anything more."

"Thank you." She looked at him gratefully. "I don't."

The rest of the party had gone in search of coats and wraps. Crispin said, "I'll go now."

"You're going to find him, aren't you?" McEwen's eyes were kind. He was thinking, Here's a woman. He saw the miserable contrast between her and the one that he called wife. He felt no pity for himself, though: that was not his way. "He's lucky to have you," he went on. "And somehow I think you're lucky to have him. Tell him, if it matters, that this makes no difference with me."

"Thank you." Crispin gave him her hand. "You've been most kind."

He walked with her out to the crescent of white gravel in front of Seabright where her station-wagon was parked. He watched her drive away and then went wearily back to rejoin Gaye and his guests. He felt old and tired and beaten. He stopped for a moment to gaze at the moon, at its glittering light on the water. Cold, beautiful and remote, symbolic of Gaye's part in his own life. He thought of the look in Crispin's eyes, and he envied Abel Brown.

Crispin did not drive to the inn. She did not even follow the road Abel Brown had taken. She, too, wanted time to think, to let the cool cleanliness of the night drive away the dark and heavy vapors that seemed to have filled that room. There was gladness in her heart. She had no fear of the moment when she and this man they called Brand Phare would meet again. She cared nothing for Brand Phare. She had never known him, but Abel Brown she knew and loved.

She knew he would not go to the inn. Like her, he would seek the solace of the night and the stars. She thought of the ledge where he had kissed her and, though he did not know it, made a sure place for himself in her heart. Perhaps he would be there. Perhaps if he were not there, he would come.

He saw the bright sheen of her dress half-way down the path to the shore. He thought it was a trick that his eyes had played him in the moonlight. But it moved, that cadent shadow, slowly up the steep and tortuous way. She was coming as she had come on that long ago day. But did she know he was there? Could she, knowing, actually come to look for him?

And as on that day he wanted to run, and found himself rooted there. Yes, found himself, as she neared the top, going to the rim of the ledge and stretching out his hands to her. And, as on that day she took them and, as on

that day, she came into his arms and lifted her parted lips to his kiss. But this time he did not release her, did not put her from him; this time he buried his face in her hair and his hand moved slowly over the soft contours of her face.

"You fool, Abel Brown," she whispered. "You dear, hopeless, helpless fool! Did you—did you think that would make any difference to me, to my love?"

He could not speak for moments. He was looking into her eyes, losing himself in the starry depths of her eyes, feeling all his chains, his fears that were fetters, stricken off and dropping away from him. She did not hate or despise him. She loved him—and this he knew was a wondrous thing—this love of hers.

"Crispin," he said at last. "You mean you still—you can care for me, for Brand Phare, even after—"

"You'll always be Abel Brown to me," she whispered, her hand against his cheek, "Always. I never knew this Brandon Phare they speak of. And yet I feel sure, I know in my heart, he was not what they say he was."

He looked at her steadily. In the face of such blind trust, such clear belief in him, he could not speak. He bent his head.

"You'll never leave me now?" she said. "Never, never. Say it!"

"I'll never leave you. Oh, be sure of that. You don't know what you have done for me tonight. You can never know. I love you, Crispin—love you and that love could never change, no matter what might come."

"I know," she said simply. "It's that way with me."

"Did you"—His voice was hesitant. "Did you care very much for Bede Wallace? It was through him, you know, that I first heard of Crispin Dean. He had your picture in his cabin. I saw it often. From the very first I felt as if I knew you. I felt sure we would meet one day. I never dreamed what that meeting would be like, what I would go through before I met you face-to-face. That night in the inn when you came in out of the storm, I could not believe—"

"It seemed to me, that night, that I had been waiting for you to come. I never loved Bede. I knew that before he died. We would not have been married, even had he lived."

"I am glad to know that, Crispin. It means more, much more to me than you'll ever know. He was my friend. The Wallaces were the only family I

ever knew. They were kind to me."

"But they did not stand by you when all the world condemned you. Not one of them—"

"Could you blame them? Bede was their son, their brother. They thought I let him down—badly."

"But you didn't!" He marvelled at the conviction in her voice. "And you didn't tell the truth of what happened, did you?"

"I—I told what I thought should be told. Rather, they told and I kept silent."

"You might have saved yourself."

"Not at the price of their faith, their belief in— There, I've said enough."

"And I can guess the rest. Not that it matters now or could ever have mattered to me."

"If I had only known this—"

"If you had only believed."

"It's—it's all right now. It's going to be all right for us now, eh, Crispin? I can stay here. I can go ahead with my work."

"It's all right now, Abel Brown. Paul McEwen said it made no difference to him. You can go on with the yacht."

"It'll soon be finished. There will be others. One day there'll be a boat of our own, Crispin, and we'll find that island in the uncharted sea."

"We've found it," she whispered. "You know we have. We are alone in all the world. Anywhere is our island."

"Yes." His voice was eager. "Yes, I remember you said that once; that if two people love they have a little world of their own."

"And you said that someone would find them out and come to spoil it. But no one can spoil this. They have tried and failed."

As they stood there, silent in the wonder of the night and of their happiness, the sky to the west burst into crimson glowing flame, a pillar of flame, leaping and dancing, that shot towards the stars, that flooded the water with lurid light.

"The ship!" she said and clutched his arm hard. "Is it—"

They both knew in an instant. It was not the burning ship; it was the cruiser that had been moored at Seabright. It was off from shore now, a mass of flames from stem to stern. It was sheathed in flames as in a fiery shroud.

"Oh, God!" She shook his arm. "Look—look—they went on her. They were going for a moonlight sail. They wanted me to go. They were all—"

"I can guess," he said. He covered his eyes with his hand for a moment, but only for a moment. "Strange!" he muttered. "It doesn't hurt to look at it now. It doesn't do to me what it used to do. I—Crispin, do you understand—tell me you understand!"

"Yes—yes, Brand, I think I understand. It doesn't hurt you now, that memory, because there is someone who believes in you now, who knows you did nothing wrong—"

"Come!" he said, taking her hand. "We'll climb to the cliff-road and go there to Seabright. She's only a little way off shore. I think I see them trying to launch the boats. They'll never do it."

They hurried up the steep and rocky path and down the road to the spot where Crispin had left the station-wagon. She drove, pressing the pedal to the floor. Neither of them spoke. For a while they had forgotten their own happiness in the fear of what might await them when they got to Seabright.

Many boats had put off from shore. The jetty was crowded with villagers and fishermen. Portagee William was there and Robby Dalgleish and the old men from the inn-parlor. No one spoke much. Many of them had thought it was the flaming phantom. They were no less awed that it was a real ship. They speculated on whether all hands had escaped.

"So sudden she went," muttered Portagee William, looking from Crispin to Abel Brown with eyes that saw a great deal. "I was afeard that you two might have been on her. But you weren't, eh? You knew better. I am glad. See, the boats are coming now. Ah, they were lucky to get off in time. Very lucky. They could not launch their own boats. A good thing the fishermen were so handy. I saw them jumping from the yacht into the water. It was not good to see."

Crispin felt Abel's arm tremble beneath her hand. She pressed it. She said, "Forget—forget it all."

The boats were coming into the dock now. Paul McEwen was the first one ashore. He answered her silent question with a hopeless, weary lift and droop of his shoulders. Men were carrying something from the boat, a body covered with a garish rug.

"Gaye," he said. "She was the only one. There was an explosion. It all happened so fast, and she—"

"I'm sorry," said Brand Phare. "Sorry."

"She was alive when we got her. It must have been hell for her. She fought so hard to live. She spoke of you, Phare—she told us in the boat—"

"It doesn't matter." Brand Phare's voice was harsh. "It doesn't matter now." His arm was tight about Crispin's shoulders.

"They all heard. The world shall hear too. It was Wallace who was with her in her cabin that night, until you came and told him the *Orsina* was burning. He brained you when you turned to leave the cabin. She gave you brandy to try to bring you to, and when the sailors found you they thought —"

"It doesn't matter," repeated Brand Phare. "He sobered up fast, I guess. I was left there. They thought I was the one."

"Why didn't you speak, man? Why did you let them do to you what they did?"

It was Abel Brown who spoke now. Crispin knew it—and loved him, his strength, his goodness. "I was only one," he said. "There were many who loved Bede, who liked to think he died a hero. Somehow, now, I'm glad I did it." He smiled down at Crispin.

"I, too," she said softly. "If you hadn't I'd never have met you, Abel Brown."

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 *The Sign of the Burning Ship* by Louis Arthur Cunningham]