SHANGHAI JIM

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Title: Shanghai Jim
Date of first publication: 1912
Author: Frank L. Packard (1877-1942)
Date first posted: July 11, 2026
Date last updated: July 11, 2026
Faded Page eBook #20260725

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

Books by FRANK L. PACKARD

SHANGHAI JIM
THE DEVIL'S MANTLE
TWO STOLEN IDOLS
THE RED LEDGER
BROKEN WATERS
RUNNING SPECIAL
THE LOCKED BOOK
THE FOUR STRAGGLERS
JIMMIE DALE AND THE PHANTOM CLUE
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THE FURTHER ADVENTURES OF JIMMIE DALE
THE ADVENTURES OF JIMMIE DALE
THE WIRE DEVILS
THE SIN THAT WAS HIS
THE BELOVED TRAITOR
GREATER LOVE HATH NO MAN
THE MIRACLE MAN

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By

FRANK L. PACKARD

THE COPP, CLARK CO., LIMITED
TORONTO

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES AT THE
COUNTRY LIFE PRESS, GARDEN CITY, N.Y.

FIRST EDITION

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SHANGHAI JIM

Wandering for years through the underworld of old Asia's tropics, Bob Kenyon sought a reckoning with that monster of mixed blood and consummate evil—Shanghai Jim. And one night, on the little island of Illola, he came, under strange circumstances, to the finding of his quarry, and to the finding besides of a great love that he had thought forever lost.

CHAPTER I
THE THREE PEARLS

UNDER the lighted, swinging lamp in the cuddy of a small two-masted schooner, two men sat facing each other at the table. Bob Kenyon, black-haired, clean-shaven, big across the shoulders, and displaying an enviable muscular development of chest where his shirt was open at the neck against the tropical heat, was a young American of perhaps twenty-eight or -nine; the other, Captain David Watts, master and owner, was a wiry, weather-beaten, blue-eyed, bearded little New Zealander of fifty.

"Old Isaacs ought to be along any minute now," said Captain David Watts significantly.

Bob Kenyon thrust one hand into his trousers pocket, extracted therefrom a little cloth sack that had once done duty as a container for cigarette tobacco, loosened the drawstring, and rolled three pearls of great size into the hollow of his other hand.

"I thought you said, when you sent for him, that this chap Isaacs was to be trusted," he observed.

"And so he is," returned the older man coolly. "That's the reason I picked him out. He's the best of the brokers ashore, which may not be saying much, but it's a safe bet he knows more about pearls than all the rest of them put together. He's been at it now for a number of years here, and I've never heard a word said about him except that he was on the square."

Bob Kenyon, still rolling the three pearls in the hollow of his hand, smiled a little quizzically.

"Why all the precaution, then?" he inquired.

"I'll tell you why," said Captain David Watts, a sudden grim earnestness in his voice. "It ain't that I'm afraid of Isaacs, except that, like every other human being, he's got a tongue. If he buys the pearls, all right; but we ain't likely to come to any bargain off-hand to-night, and, for your own sake, it ain't a wise thing to have anybody know where they're kept in the meantime. We're partners in 'em in a way, but my share is small compared with yours according to the bargain when you staked the schooner for the trip, and, except for this little bit of by-play that we're going to pull off, I ain't going to have it any other way than that they stay in your possession—

and right in your pocket, which is the safest place for 'em. But the world don't need to know it! I'm an old-timer here, and you ain't even been ashore yet, and I know what I'm talking about. The minute the word's out, it's a question of keeping your weather eye skinned. The lagoon's filling up with pearlers coming in, and some of 'em, so far as morals go, don't belong anywhere except in hell; and, furthermore, the town itself, to say nothing of the whole island of Illola, ain't unanimous in its church attendance in spite of the missionary stations. There's a British Resident here, and native police, and all that, but—" He ended with an expressive shrug of his shoulders.

"You've put an enormous price on these pearls," remarked Bob Kenyon speculatively. "Don't you think you're a bit high?"

"It ain't a question of thinking," Captain David Watts answered tersely. "I know they're worth all and more'n I've said they are!"

"All right, then," said Bob Kenyon quietly. He pushed the pearls across the table. "I must say it seems a little unnecessary to me—but go as far as you like."

Captain David Watts picked up the pearls, opened a locker, and took out a leather wallet. He placed the pearls inside the wallet, returned the wallet to the locker, and closed the locker again. He nodded his head in self-approval.

"Now," said he, "let's go up and take a look-see if he's coming."

Bob Kenyon rose from his seat and followed the other up the little companionway to the deck, and for a moment both stood at the schooner's rail staring out over the black, mirror-like, unrippled surface of the lagoon. It was a quiet night, the moon just rising, the scented odor of tropical vegetation in the air. Off to the extreme right of the bay in which the schooner was anchored, scores of scintillating little gleams, denoting the position of the town, broke through the palms that fringed the beach, but, growing fewer and fewer as the eye followed the shore line, finally dwindled out until, opposite where the little vessel lay within not more than two hundred yards from the shore, a point, closing this end of the bay, exhibited only a lonely and deserted stretch of sand. Here and there in the lagoon, some quite close at hand, some farther off, singly and in little groups, the riding lights of other vessels twinkled like stars against the sky line. But there was no sign of any approaching boat.

"What the devil's keeping him!" exclaimed Captain David Watts impatiently.

"Oh, it's early yet," said Bob Kenyon unconcernedly. "It's scarcely eight o'clock." He pointed suddenly to two or three little dots of light that came

from the windows of a house high up on a hill and almost abreast of the schooner's position. "What place is that up there?" he asked.

The question was apparently irrelevant to Captain David Watts' thoughts. He answered with a grunt:

"That's the British Residency—Colonel Willetts' place." And then: "Damn that man, Isaacs!"

Bob Kenyon made no comment. He was still staring at the lights on the hill when Captain David Watts, after an impatient turn or two along the schooner's deck, finally halted again beside him at the rail.

"Look here!" said Captain David Watts abruptly. "A thing like this don't happen in the lifetime of many men—one pearl maybe—but not three of 'em. I don't go off half-cocked as a general rule, not me; but though my stake don't amount to one-two-three alongside of yours, I've been as excited as a kid ever since we found 'em, and you've never even batted an eyelash. What's the idea? Is it because you just don't and won't believe they're worth what I've kept on telling you they were day after day?"

Bob Kenyon's eyes shifted from the lights on the hill to the rugged, honest face beside him. He brushed his hand across his forehead as though, fogged, he sought to clear his mental vision.

"Why, I don't know," he said slowly. "To tell you the truth, I haven't thought much about them—sort of all in the day's work, you know."

"Good Lord!" ejaculated Captain David Watts helplessly. "Listen to that! Well, answer me this, then. Granting those pearls are worth all I say they are, and that's a fortune, and a whopping big one, what are you going to do with yourself from now on?"

Bob Kenyon shook his head.

"Same answer," he said. "I haven't thought about it, but I don't think it would change anything."

Captain David Watts stuck a square-ended cigar in his mouth and sucked on it unlighted.

"Well, then, you're wrong!" said Captain David Watts, a sudden sharpness in his voice. "I'm going to say something to you because I like you, my lad—and, damme, you can take it or leave it! When you and I met up a while ago at MacDonald's in Suva, I was broke, and you said you had enough to pay the expenses of a trip, including a fair screw for me, and take your chances on the luck. So I fancy you weren't exactly rolling in wealth, and, on that score, I don't blame you for the sort of pillar-to-post life, I take it, you've led up to now. I can't think of anything much, according to the stories you've let slip, that you haven't done, from plantation work to the

present fling at pearl fishing, or any place in this lower half of the world where you haven't been during the last five years. But you keep that up and it gets to be a habit that ends, if you live long enough, in a whining, gin-begging, stinking beachcomber. You think it over, my boy. You know the islands well enough to know what they can do to any white man who lets himself drift. There's no excuse for you doing that any more. You're a rich man to-night whether you believe it or not."

In the flare of a match there was a queer tightening of Bob Kenyon's lips, as he bent his head to light a cigarette.

"What would you suggest?" he asked, without inflection in his voice.

"Settle down and get married," replied Captain David Watts promptly. "Yes, and"—his seriousness became suddenly mellowed by a quiet chuckle—"blimy, I'll show you the girl! You see those lights on the hill you were asking about? Well, there's a girl for you! As fine a looker as ever you clapped your eyes on is Marion Willetts, and none of those new fancy notions about her, either! She's the kind of a wife for a man—kept the Residency going like one o'clock for her father ever since her mother died a number of years ago."

"And, of course," said Bob Kenyon facetiously, "the British Resident's first choice for a son-in-law would be an embryonic beachcomber, and naturally the lady's preference would—"

Bob Kenyon stopped abruptly, as a low hail came across the water.

"Hello!" exclaimed Captain David Watts. "What's that?"

The hail was repeated.

And now both men, staring shoreward, made out the white figure of a man on the sandy beach of the point.

"That'll be old Isaacs now," said Captain David Watts in a puzzled way. "But it's blamed queer. He's walked out from the town instead of taking a boat."

"Well, you know him and I don't," said Bob Kenyon; "so you'd better take the dinghy and fetch him aboard. I'll take him back, and that'll be turn about; besides, as I haven't been ashore yet, I'd like to stretch my legs and take a look at the town when this business is over."

"Right you are!" agreed Captain David Watts, and, hurrying aft to where the dinghy floated astern, he pulled the boat alongside and clambered in.

Bob Kenyon watched the other for a moment; then, his elbows on the rail, his chin cupped in his hands, his eyes fastened and held on the window lights on the hill again. The cigarette fell with a little hiss into the water. There came again that queer tightening of his lips, and with it now, slowly, a

strange whiteness came creeping into his face. So Marion Willetts had never married! Of course, he had supposed that she was somewhere here on this island, but that had had no bearing on his coming. She would never know he was here. He would see to that. Besides, when he had seen her last, five years ago, he had been Mr. John Hingston—he was Bob Kenyon now.

Strange! Life was strange—a strange, queer thing! So was love! Why hadn't she married? She couldn't have cared—not that much. She had been a very beautiful girl of eighteen then.

His hands, clenching, bit into the folds of his cheeks. Well, he had cared, and—God help him!—he still cared. But he hadn't come here to this island expecting to torture himself with the might-have-been—or to sell pearls either! He broke into a sudden, low, mirthless laugh. The pearls! There seemed to be something mockingly ironical in the fact that stupendous luck of this kind, which he neither needed nor cared about, should come his way, when luck of another, if grimmer, sort had persistently eluded him for five futile years!

He roused himself, conscious that he was still staring at the window lights on the hill, as the splash of oars alongside warned him that the dinghy had returned. And then, a moment later, Bob Kenyon smiled to himself in the moonlight at the sight of a curious little personage who was coming toward him along the deck in the wake of Captain David Watts. The man was bent-shouldered and stooped as he walked; he had a patriarchal beard and wore sun glasses; his white duck suit had long since lost any claim to intimacy with the washtub; and his head was crowned with an over-sized pith helmet, also incredibly dirty and much the worse for wear, and which, obviously to keep it from resting on his ears, was cocked a little askew, giving its owner a ludicrously jaunty air.

"Bob," said Captain David Watts, "this is Mr. Isaacs. Mr. Isaacs, this is Bob Kenyon, my partner in this deal."

"I'm glad to meet Mr. Isaacs," said Bob Kenyon pleasantly, shaking hands.

"Humph!" grunted Mr. Isaacs ungraciously. "Well, I'll tell you right now, young man, I don't like this business."

Bob Kenyon, taken a little aback, stared at the other; but, before he could speak, Captain David Watts interposed.

"He says our crew of black-skinned rascals, that we let go ashore and warned to keep their mouths shut, have been talking," said Captain David Watts. "So Mr. Isaacs walked."

"I don't understand," said Bob Kenyon.

"You don't, eh?" said Mr. Isaacs crustily. "Well, I think I can make it clear. The whole town is buzzing like a hornets' nest over your pearls. I don't believe for a moment you've got anything much out of the ordinary, but the town does—the damned things have grown to the size of hens' eggs already." He turned irritably on Captain David Watts. "Why the devil didn't you bring them ashore to me yourself as soon as you dropped anchor this afternoon, instead of sending that black fool with a message to me to come out this evening?"

"Let's go down to the cabin," suggested Captain David Watts placatingly. "We'll get it all straightened out down there."

He led the way. The others followed. Mr. Isaacs sat down at the table. And then Bob Kenyon, leaning negligently against a bulkhead, smiled again as Captain David Watts produced a bottle and set it down in front of the visitor from shore.

"I don't drink," said Mr. Isaacs testily, "and you know it." He shoved the bottle away. "Why don't you answer my question, and where are those pearls?"

"You know why," said Captain David Watts mildly. "It was on your account. I gave the crew shore leave until to-morrow because I thought you could come off here to-night with nobody the wiser about anything. Nobody else knew anything about the pearls. Some friends of mine from that schooner there nearest us came aboard this afternoon to ask what luck we'd had, and have a drink, but they didn't go away burdened with information. I thought I could trust those fellows of mine, and it looked like the best thing to do—they must have got hold of liquor somewhere to loosen up like that."

"A nice mess!" said Mr. Isaacs tartly. "As much as my life is worth! I wouldn't have come at all if I hadn't done business with you for the last few years. Blast it! Don't you understand? I'm seen coming out to your schooner. And then they say old Isaacs has bought the pearls, old Isaacs has got them. And old Isaacs stands the best chance he ever had in his life of getting his throat cut before morning. I'd have had to have some one row me if I'd taken a boat out here from the town, and that would have given the show away. So I slipped out back of the town, and walked. Two miles!" He pushed the pith helmet nervously back on his head—and nervously snatched at it again to save it from falling to the floor as the rear brim of it bumped against his shoulders. "I hope to God I haven't been seen even as it is!"

Bob Kenyon leaned a little forward toward the other.

"You don't mean that literally, do you?" he asked.

"Mean it!" Mr. Isaacs gulped distressingly as though something had caught in his throat. "Of course, I mean it! With the stories going around now that those pearls are the greatest find that has ever been made at one time in the Pacific, there's any one of a dozen men in the riff-raff of the town that wouldn't ask for anything better than a chance to stick a knife into you for them. You ask Captain Watts."

Captain David Watts nodded.

"Yes; that's true," he said. "I've already told Kenyon so."

"Yes," said Mr. Isaacs caustically, "and I suppose what you've really got is worth maybe somewhere around twenty or thirty quid or so!" He jerked his battered pith helmet forward on his head again. "Well, well!" he ejaculated impatiently. "Let's see 'em! Let's see 'em! I want to get back."

"Twenty quid!" repeated Captain David Watts with a quiet chuckle. "Oh, right-o!" He opened the locker, produced the wallet, and from the wallet took out the three pearls. These he laid on the table in front of Mr. Isaacs. "Well, there you are!"

Mr. Isaacs did not move, he simply sat and stared at the pearls; but there was a sudden, sibilant little sound as Mr. Isaacs sucked in his breath.

Captain David Watts hung eagerly over the table. Bob Kenyon, watching, lighted a cigarette.

And then Mr. Isaacs adjusted his amber-colored sun spectacles, and, picking up the pearls one at a time, examined each in turn. Finally, he pushed the three of them away from him, and, with a shake of his head, leaned back in his chair.

"I can't do any business with you," he said brusquely.

Captain David Watts wiped his forehead with his sleeve.

"What's the matter?" he said hoarsely. "I know they're good."

"That's the matter," said Mr. Isaacs. "They're too good for a little island broker like me. I've never seen anything like them before. I tell you frankly I could not even value them. They're worth thousands of pounds."

"Well, make us an offer," suggested Bob Kenyon.

Mr. Isaacs shook his head again.

"I haven't got money enough," he said. "I've got to be honest with you. The run of pearls that are brought in here from the surrounding islands are one thing—these are another. I haven't got money enough, and all the brokers here put together haven't got money enough to buy them."

Captain David Watts laughed boisterously.

"What did I tell you!" he exclaimed gleefully.

Bob Kenyon whistled softly.

"What's to be done, then?" he asked.

Mr. Isaacs reached out for the pearls again, stared at them again, and once more, but with extreme reluctance this time, pushed them away from him.

"Get out of here with them," said Mr. Isaacs bluntly. "With that story going around, and with more than a fair share of the scum of the Pacific here at any time and worse now during the pearling season, it's the only safe thing to do. Besides, the only place to sell these is in the big market, and then to special buyers. My advice to you is to get what stores you need aboard the first thing in the morning and pull out at once for Auckland or Sydney. And, when you get there, clap those pearls in a bank for safe-keeping. They may have to be sent to New York, or Paris, or London. I don't know. Anyway, that's my advice."

"And I'll say it's not bad," said Captain David Watts after a moment. "And I'll say, as I've always said, that you're a square man, Isaacs."

"I'm not so square," said Mr. Isaacs with sudden irascibility. "It's only because I've got to be. You don't think I'm a fool, do you? You don't think I wouldn't like to get my hands on those pearls, do you? Only I wouldn't have any chance of putting anything over on you even if I tried, for sooner or later everybody from Hongkong to the other end of the world will know the price they brought. But I'm not philanthropic either, and business is business, and before you sail, if you like, I'll get some letters ready for you to take along to the right people in Auckland and Sydney who can start things going for you, and I'll leave it to you to say if you think there's a bit of commission coming to me when you've made your sale."

"Fair enough!" said Bob Kenyon promptly.

Captain David Watts gathered up the pearls, replaced them in the wallet, and returned the latter to the locker.

"Aye," he agreed. "And no more than proper, I say."

Mr. Isaacs stood up.

"All right, then," he said. "I'll get back." He secured his pith helmet firmly askew by means of a little corkscrew twist, and headed for the companionway. "One of you will have to take me ashore."

"I'm going ashore," said Bob Kenyon. "I'll take you."

He followed the pearl broker on deck, and started aft behind the other toward where the dinghy was made fast. Halfway along the deck he glanced back. Captain David Watts was just emerging from the companionway. A moment later the other joined him, and, as Mr. Isaacs clambered over the

side into the dinghy, Bob Kenyon felt the wallet pressed into his hand. He pocketed it with an amused smile. The old skipper was as fine as they made them—but at times, perhaps, a bit old-womanish. From the day the pearls had been found, Captain David Watts had steadfastly refused any share in their custodianship. Oh, well! What difference did it make? If the old man was the more contented to have it that way, there was no reason why it should be otherwise.

"I'm going to turn in," said Captain David Watts. "I think you said you were going to take a look at the town, Bob; but I'm not so sure you'd better. You heard what Mr. Isaacs here said."

"Nonsense!" Bob Kenyon laughed. "To begin with, nobody knows who I am except perhaps those chaps who came aboard from that schooner over there this afternoon. I'm not a marked man, even if what Mr. Isaacs says is true. Besides, it isn't even nine o'clock yet, and I shan't be gone more than an hour or two."

"Well, maybe that's so," admitted Captain David Watts. "And anyway, I fancy you can look out for yourself. Good-night, Mr. Isaacs, and many thanks to you!"

Bob Kenyon dropped into the dinghy, shipped the oars, and began to pull away from the schooner.

"You don't want to be landed at that point again, do you, Mr. Isaacs?" he inquired. "I'm rowing over to the town anyway, and it isn't, as you said, as though there was any one to talk who had brought you out here. It'll save you a long walk."

Mr. Isaacs grunted his affirmation.

"I'm not anxious to walk," he said. "There are plenty of places on the beach in front of the town to land without being seen. Just keep away from the rest of the schooners on the way in, that's all."

"Right!" said Bob Kenyon, and settled down to the pull across the lagoon.

And thereafter, apart from the fact that Mr. Isaacs gratified his curiosity with a question or two as to how and where the pearls had been found, the conversation languished. At the expiration of some ten minutes, the distance being but perhaps a quarter of that traversed by Mr. Isaacs in following the windings of the road ashore, the dinghy grounded on the beach at a spot a hundred yards or so away from the town's wharf.

Here, there appeared to be no one about, and, as they stepped ashore, Mr. Isaacs tapped Bob Kenyon on the shoulder.

“It’s none of my business, young man,” said he gruffly; “but, unless you’re looking for trouble, don’t drink with every one you meet. And if you’re not sure you can keep your mouth shut, my advice to you is to go straight back to the schooner.”

Bob Kenyon smiled quietly.

“I guess I’ll be all right,” he said.

“Humph!” grunted Mr. Isaacs—and, turning abruptly, trudged off across the sand.

CHAPTER II
THE CRIME

BOB KENYON pulled the dinghy a little higher up on the beach, and stood for a moment taking stock of his surroundings. Across the beach itself was a fringe of palms. Through these he could see numerous window lights stretching out for quite a distance to right and left. From directly in front of him the strumming of a banjo, the squeak of a fiddle and the rattle of a tin-pan piano made a riotous, if unmusical, medley of sound, and presently he stepped out in that direction.

He made his way through the trees, and, coming out on the road, found himself in front of a rambling, two-story, wooden structure, every window alight, and which from its sign proclaimed itself to be the Southern Cross Hotel. He did not, however, enter here immediately, but began to stroll leisurely along the street which, though quite dark in spots where the stores and copra agents' offices were closed for the night, was by no means deserted. Natives in *lava-lavas*, that looked like abbreviated aprons of gaudy hue, meandered, never hurrying, here and there. Mingling with these was a sprinkling of East Indian coolies, and, now and then, monarchial in his importance and immensely conscious of his uniform, most polite to the whites and equally brusque with the less fortunate of his own color, stalked a native policeman. But to all these Bob Kenyon paid little or no attention. His interest was centered on the whites, little groups of whom—for the most part a rough-and-ready looking lot and the majority evidently from the pearling fleet—congregated outside the lighted windows of various other public houses of the same ilk as the Southern Cross. And though once or twice he caught snatches of their conversation—"the luck of Captain David Watts" . . . "the greatest find ever made in the Pacific"—he spoke to no one, save to return an occasional good-night that was flung with easy camaraderie in his direction. But into each of these men's faces he looked, not offensively, but steadily and with a disarming smile, as he passed by. It had become a habit of long standing.

And then Bob Kenyon began to enter the various bars. But, though he ordered much, he drank little. He scanned the faces at the bars, and at the gaming tables that were invitingly easy of access. At the end of an hour, apparently a little unsteady on his feet, he found himself again in front of the Southern Cross Hotel. The banjo, the fiddle and the piano were still in

discordant evidence. This time he stepped inside, looked around a little owlishly, lurched toward a table in the corner that was shadowy in the ill-distributed lighting from the oil lamps, subsided somewhat heavily into a chair, and ordered a gin and tonic. The drink, though it was surreptitiously spilled upon the floor, appeared to be the last straw in his bout with sobriety, for presently he sprawled across the table, his head down on his outflung arms.

The long bar was well patronized. There was constant coming and going. No one paid any attention to the lone figure in the corner.

Bob Kenyon's face, hidden in his arms, was hard-set as he watched. Somehow it was different to-night from all the nights that had gone before. To-night there were *two* faces instead of the one that usually visualized itself before him. To-night there was the face of a girl whose eyes were blue, and whose hair, when the sunlight was on it, was like glinting gold, a sweet, wistful face that kept rising before him, living its way into his life again. And she was here. He knew where *she* was. And the temptation grew strong upon him to go out to where those lighted windows on the hill were because, perhaps, unseen himself, he might obtain a stolen glimpse of her, perhaps see her smile, perhaps hear her voice again.

He half raised his head—and let it drop again. He snarled savagely, contemptuously at himself under his breath. Had he not promised himself that if he came to this island here he would not torture himself with memories of her? Hers was not the face he sought; it was the face of a *man* he searched for amongst those faces there at the bar, as he had searched at other bars, in other islands, in the lowest holes of vice below the equator, along the waterfronts of the shipping centers from China to Honolulu—a face with a close-cropped bullet head, with thick, sensual lips, with slightly slanting eyes, with a complexion that was darkened with a tinge of Malay blood—the face of Shanghai Jim.

Bob Kenyon's white helmet slid a little farther over his forehead, covering still more his eyes as he scrutinized those who came, and went, and lounged about the doors. It was five years since he had seen that face—a year after his elder brother's strange disappearance in Bombay—and he had not even known then that his brother had been murdered, much less that he had stood face to face with—in the person of Shanghai Jim—the murderer himself. And then, after that year, when he had given up hope of ever solving his brother's disappearance, he had made a trip home to New York via England, and in England had met Marion Willetts, who, though she lived on the island of Illola where her father was the Resident, was on a visit to what she too called "home"—as all outpost families of the Empire called the

motherland. They had seen a great deal of each other in a very little while. He had returned to Bombay—and then that sinister sequence of events: The murder of a young Englishman committed by and brought home to Shanghai Jim; Shanghai Jim's flight and disappearance; the night that he, Bob Kenyon, had listened to the tale of his brother's murder told by Shanghai Jim's "runner," Dublin Mike; his meeting again with Marion Willetts as she passed through Bombay on her return to Illola—and his own arrest.

Bob Kenyon's face was as white as the pipe-clayed helmet on his head. Everything had culminated—and ended—that night. He was left with only one aim, one object, one desire in life—to find Shanghai Jim.

And so he had searched for Shanghai Jim, and the years had gone by without sign or trace or vestige of the man. And to-night he still searched—searched each face as it came up there to the bar, not because he had more reason to believe Shanghai Jim was in Illola than anywhere else in this quarter of the world, but because he searched as he always searched—everywhere.

There was a grim tightness to Bob Kenyon's lips. The years stood for futility. The man might be dead. How did he know? It was admittedly astounding that a man like Shanghai Jim, known in his day from end to end of the southern world, the mention of whose sailors' boarding-house in Bombay was an "open sesame" to a flood of fervent and virile blasphemy by seamen wherever ships were found, and the measure of whose iniquity ran the gamut of the decalogue, had succeeded in covering his tracks to such an extent that he had been able to defy discovery. But Shanghai Jim was clever; in his mixed blood he coupled the cunning of the Malay with the diabolical ingenuity of the degenerate white—that was the only way to account for it. It would be more astounding still if a man so widely known as Shanghai Jim, besides being wanted by the police, should have died anywhere unrecognized, his death unreported. No; Shanghai Jim was not dead! Shanghai Jim was alive; not here perhaps, but somewhere, somewhere on this side of the world, because the chances were a thousand to one that the Malay in the man would deny the north—and somewhere, some day, a year or ten from now, he and Shanghai Jim would meet.

Illola—this island here—Marion! Again he was back to that! He had not come here following any clew. In his search he had long since surrendered himself blindly into the hands of fate. His meeting with Captain David Watts in Suva had been purely a matter of chance. He had never seen the man in his life before. But money being no object to him, he had hired the old skipper and his schooner simply because the pearl fisheries offered as hopeful a field as any other.

Bob Kenyon lifted a hand suddenly and brushed it heavily across his eyes. Faces! Faces! Faces! Like mocking ghosts! Not one of them at the bar there was the one he sought. And to-night, as never before, he had become tired of watching them. He was full of disquiet and unrest. He knew why. He had overrated his immunity from the memories that *her* presence here on the same island with him, her nearness to him, might bring.

He lurched up from his chair, and, stumbling in simulated intoxication, made his way out to the street. It was still early, not much more than ten o'clock, and he had been ashore but little over an hour, but his spirit rebelled against any further vigil that night—and it seemed as though he had become mentally fatigued almost to the point of exhaustion. He crossed the road, went down to the beach, and, pushing off the dinghy, began to row back to the schooner.

He rowed leisurely, and presently a quiet born of the serenity of the night fell upon him; and at moments he rested on his oars, allowing the little craft to glide forward under the impetus of his last strokes until, its way quite gone, he pulled on again for a little while. It was very silent out here on the lagoon, but dark now because the moon had gone under a cloud. Elsewhere a sky, wonderfully blue even in the night, sparkled with a thousand stars. And he lost count of time. And finally, drifting silently past the schooner anchored nearest to his own some few hundred yards away, he rounded the counter of his own vessel, stood up, and making fast, prepared to clamber aboard.

And then suddenly, half over the rail, he hung for an instant motionless, robbed of all power of movement, as a scream of agony, a horrible sound out of the silence that sent the blood cold in his veins, rang through the night, and, repeated, rang again.

But now Bob Kenyon was in action. The glow from the skylight showed that the lamp was burning in the cabin. The cries had come from there. He leaped across the deck and flung himself down the companionway. And here for an instant again, because it seemed as though his reason had fled and his brain refused its functions, he stood still, save that he swayed upon his feet like a man stunned.

Upon the floor, dead, stabbed, lay Captain David Watts.

A mist seemed to swim before Bob Kenyon's eyes, but out of this mist there loomed another figure—the figure of a man, naked but for the cotton trousers that clung to the flesh as though they had recently been immersed in water—the figure of a man, head lowered, knife in hand, and crouched to spring. And Bob Kenyon's eyes fastened on the other's face—on a face with slightly slanting eyes, with thick, sensual lips, half open now like those of a

snarling beast with teeth displayed. And slowly out from his body went Bob Kenyon's great muscular arms reaching toward the other, his fingers wide apart, curved inward like claws, trembling with an unholy eagerness. And from his lips there came a choking sound.

"Shanghai Jim!" he whispered.

"Yes, you damned fool!" snarled the other. "And you're young Hingston. So you've found me, have you? And maybe you thought I didn't know what you've been after for the last five years! Well, you'll have a chance to give my chin-chin to your brother to-night before I'm through with you, and—"

The man stopped abruptly—listening. Subconsciously Bob Kenyon was aware that sounds were coming across the water from the direction of the near-by schooner.

And then Bob Kenyon sprang. There was a flicker of light on the knife blade as Shanghai Jim struck with a swift, full-arm, downward blow, but Bob Kenyon caught the other's wrist, and, as he turned the thrust aside, the blade gashed a cut across Shanghai Jim's own chin. And Bob Kenyon laughed now and grappled with the other, and for a moment, hugged close in each other's embrace, the two men lurched and swayed around the little cabin carrying destruction in their path, and the blood flowing from Shanghai Jim's chin made great crimson blotches on Bob Kenyon's shirt.

Shouts, the sound of oars, came nearer from across the water now. And these sounds seemed to lend an added frenzy to Shanghai Jim's struggles, for the man with a quick, sudden twist broke almost free, and Bob Kenyon, as he sought to tighten his hold on the other, felt his hands slipping on the naked flesh of the man's back and chest. He could not get his grip again. He dug with his fingers mercilessly, with untamed fury, into the man's flesh, making a fold of it, but the fold flattened out, and with a bound Shanghai Jim disappeared up the companionway.

It threw Bob Kenyon off his balance and he stumbled to the floor. Then with a bound he, too, was up the companionway and on the deck after the other. It was dark here, the moon still obscured, but he saw Shanghai Jim, like a black shadow, streak forward across the deck, and, reaching the shore rail, swing himself overboard.

Bob Kenyon whirled in the other direction, and, racing aft, jumped into the dinghy. His jaws were clamped now like a vise. The man had taken the water with scarcely a splash in the hope, no doubt, that he had gained the rail quickly enough to avoid having been seen, and that he, Bob Kenyon, would still be searching the schooner's deck for him. Well, it would not do the other any good! The man could not escape now. Shanghai Jim! The years

of it! He knew where Shanghai Jim was now—in the water somewhere. The reckoning would come to-night.

He stood up, staring at the black surface of the water. There was nothing to be seen—not a ripple. The man was swimming under water, of course, but certainly he would also be swimming in the direction of the shore. That was obviously how the man had come out to the schooner—swimming—his cotton drawers had been wet.

Bob Kenyon sat down and began to row the dinghy away from the schooner. He was cool now—almost abnormally cool—but there was something deadly and remorseless in his composure. He kept staring around in all directions at the surface of the water. If the cursed moon would only break free of that cloud! It was just on the edge of it! The trouble was that, curving from the point, the shore line was semi-circular, making a long stretch of beach that was everywhere equidistant from the schooner, and there was no telling just where the man might head for.

It was only two hundred yards. He was halfway in now, and still he had seen nothing. He heard voices from the schooner as the boat's crew from the neighboring craft boarded her. He kept scanning the surface intently until his eyes ached with the strain. Nothing! Shanghai Jim, to give him his due, was a magnificent swimmer.

And then well over to left, just barely discernible, he saw something dark emerge from the water and disappear quickly in the black shadows of the trees. With a low cry, he spun the boat's head in that direction, and rowed with all his strength. That was Shanghai Jim. He couldn't be mistaken. It wasn't imagination—not just a shadow. They had seen it too from the schooner. They were shouting, and the boat was coming. But there was neither time to wait for them to come up, nor any good to be accomplished by it. Shanghai Jim in the woods there already had too big a lead. Besides, somehow—and a strange laugh came into Bob Kenyon's throat—he preferred to reckon with Shanghai Jim alone.

The boat smashed its nose upon the shore, and leaping from it, Bob Kenyon dashed across the beach. The moon was coming out again. He smiled through grim lips. That would help. He was running now, dodging the trees in his path. The road ought to be ahead here somewhere. The man couldn't be very far away—he hadn't had that much start.

Bob Kenyon halted for an instant to listen—and faintly, in front of him, he heard the rustle of undergrowth and the snap of a twig. He plunged on once more. But now suddenly he found himself laboring and making progress with difficulty. The ground was rising sharply under his feet. He hadn't noticed that before. And now, too, he was aware of the crashing of

branches behind him, the sound of men running, stumbling, tripping, the sound of hoarse shouting. He swore savagely to himself under his breath. Why didn't they spread out fan-wise?

He ran on. Shanghai Jim was in front of him. He was sure of it. He had heard the man that time when he had stopped to listen. The trees seemed to be growing thinner and thinner, with the spaces between all moon-flecked now; but also now, immediately in front of him, what seemed to be a thick wall of foliage blocked his path. Strange! He plunged at it, tore and broke his way through it—and suddenly, on the other side, stood still, panting for his breath, amazed, and for a moment wholly bewildered. A stretch of lawn confronted him. A few yards away there twinkled the lights of a house; and, nearer still, the slim figure of a girl in white, the glint of gold in her hair under the moonlight, the blue eyes wide and startled, stood facing him.

He drew in his breath. He felt the color come and go from his face. He heard himself cry out in a low, inarticulate way. And mechanically he reached his hand to his hat. But he had no hat.

"Mar—Miss Willetts!" he stammered.

She came forward, staring into his face.

"Mr. Hingston!" she said almost inaudibly; and then, with a quick little cry: "What is the matter? There is blood all over you! You are hurt!"

Marion! This was Marion! This was really Marion! But there was something else—there *must* be something else, only his brain seemed all in turmoil. Yes, that was it—Shanghai Jim!

"No, I am not hurt," he blurted out.

"But what are you doing here?" she cried. "Where did you come from? How did you get here? What does it all mean? And who are those men coming there now through the shrubbery?"

He turned as she spoke. Three men were on the lawn, and were running toward him. A voice bawled out:

"You damned hound! We've got you!"

They were upon him, battering at him, striking at him. He heard Marion Willetts scream. He tried to speak—and then, stung to fury by the rain of blows being showered upon him, he struck right and left with all his strength. And then the butt of a revolver crashed against his skull, he felt his knees sag under him—and consciousness was blotted out.

CHAPTER III
WITHOUT ALIBI

WHEN BOB KENYON regained his senses he found himself in a lighted room, and stretched out on a settee of some kind. There was a buzz of voices around him. His head throbbed and ached miserably, and he blinked suddenly with pain as the reflected light from a mirror on the opposite wall seemed to stab at his eyes. He struggled up on his elbow. Three men were grouped around a flat-topped desk, at which a fourth man, elderly, gray-haired, stern-faced, military in bearing, was seated. At the elderly man's elbow stood Marion Willetts, and in front of her on the desk was a basin and some cloths. What was it all about? Marion's face over there was as white as chalk. And she wouldn't meet his eyes. He raised his hand in a puzzled way to his forehead. His head was swathed in a bandage.

The elderly man at the desk spoke now.

"I have been waiting for you to regain consciousness," he said. "Are you well enough to understand what I say now?"

"Yes, quite all right," Bob Kenyon answered a little jerkily.

"I am Colonel Willetts, and this is the British Residency," said the other. "I am ready to hear anything you have to say, but at the same time I must warn you that any statement you make may be used against you. You are accused of the murder of Captain David Watts."

For an instant the room seemed to swim around Bob Kenyon as he lurched suddenly to his feet. And then, with a grip on himself, his hands clenched, he stood rigid.

"What utter rot!" he said contemptuously.

Colonel Willetts held up the leather wallet and the three pearls.

"These were found on your person when you were brought in here from the lawn a few minutes ago," he stated coldly. "Captain Watts was stabbed to death in the cabin of his schooner. Your clothing is covered with blood, and—"

"Wait a minute!" Bob Kenyon cried out sharply. His brain had cleared now—cleared as in a flash. "This is all some ghastly mistake—and while you're sitting here the man you want is escaping. You've heard of Shanghai Jim, haven't you? You must have heard of him! He was wanted for a murder in Bombay some five years ago. His description was published everywhere."

"I will answer your question," replied Colonel Willetts curtly; "though I do not see what bearing it can have on the matter. I have heard of Shanghai Jim. I know something of his record, and, for that matter, I also know that his description has been for a long time in the hands of the police here, just as it probably has been elsewhere."

"Well, then," said Bob Kenyon tersely, "it was Shanghai Jim who murdered Captain Watts to-night in the cabin, and I—"

"You're a liar!" broke in one of the three men savagely, stepping abruptly forward from the desk. "You know me, don't you? I'm from the schooner that's anchored next to Captain Watts'. You saw me when we came aboard you this afternoon. And I saw you this evening boozing at every bar in town. You're a bad one and a rotter, that's what you are! It wasn't long after I'd got back on board to-night when we heard the screams from Captain Watts' schooner, and went over there as fast as we could. There wasn't anybody on board except old Dave, dead in the cabin—and then as the moon came out we spotted you in the dinghy making for the shore, and the moment you saw us coming you rowed like mad and tried to make your escape in the woods. If it was this Shanghai Jim that you're so glib about, what became of him? There wasn't any boat but yours on the beach."

"He swam ashore. It was Shanghai Jim I was after," said Bob Kenyon.

"And he swam out to the schooner to begin with to do his dirty work, I suppose?" rasped the man.

"Yes," said Bob Kenyon.

"Hell!" jerked out the man furiously. And then, facing quickly around to Marion Willetts: "I beg your pardon, Miss, but Captain David Watts was one of the oldest friends—and the best—I ever had."

Colonel Willetts turned to his daughter.

"I have allowed you to stay, Marion," he said quietly, "because you said you knew this man; but I think it will be just as well now if you go to your room."

Bob Kenyon's eyes shifted to the girl. She was toying with the basin and cloths—bandages he knew they were now—that lay on the corner of the desk. And now she picked these up, and, without raising her head, started silently away across the room—but, near the door, she paused for an instant as the spokesman of the three men spoke again.

"And that's another point against him, if any more are needed," snapped the man. "He's sailing under two names, if your daughter knew him as Hingston. Captain Watts introduced him to us as Bob Kenyon, his partner. The swine evidently wasn't satisfied with a *share*—he wanted all!"

Bob Kenyon's eyes were still on the girl. She had paused, but she had not looked up, and now she went on again, and the door was closed behind her. He bit his lips. They didn't believe him—but, worse still, they were letting Shanghai Jim escape. They were letting Shanghai Jim escape—the thought brought him to the verge of madness. They must believe him—he must make them—so that they would do something.

"I can explain the names!" he cried out sharply. "Shanghai Jim murdered my brother in Bombay nearly a year before that other murder for which the police want him now. Since then I have been trying to find him. To have kept the name of Hingston would only have been playing into his hands. I took the name of Bob Kenyon."

There was silence for a moment in the room. Bob Kenyon flushed. He was conscious that it had sounded lame.

Colonel Willetts cleared his throat.

"Is there anything more you wish to say?" he demanded.

"Yes!" said Bob Kenyon, a sudden rush of bitterness and passion upon him. "To beg you, for God's sake, not to sit here and let the man escape! I tell you it was Shanghai Jim. When I went aboard to-night I found him in the cabin, a knife in his hand, and Captain Watts dead on the floor. We fought for a minute, but Shanghai Jim broke away from me—we had heard these men coming from their schooner, you understand? Shanghai Jim ran up on deck, and I ran after him. He jumped overboard. I jumped into the dinghy; but he was swimming under water, and I did not catch sight of him again until just as he landed and ran into the woods. I was still out on the lagoon, and that is the reason why at that moment I suddenly, as these men say, began to row like mad."

Again Colonel Willetts cleared his throat.

"As I understand you, then," he said, "when you went aboard, this Shanghai Jim was already in the cabin. You fought for a minute, and, as he broke away, you immediately gave chase, first to the deck, and then at once jumped into your dinghy. Is that correct?"

Bob Kenyon nodded his head.

"Yes," he said.

Colonel Willetts once more held up the wallet and pearls.

"How, then," he asked severely, "do you account for these being in your possession?"

"Why," said Bob Kenyon readily, "they—" He stopped abruptly, a cold sense of disaster seeming suddenly to numb his tongue. To say that they were always kept in his possession through a whim of Captain David Watts!

It wasn't only that this, too, might sound lame—it was far worse than that! It was to stamp him both as guilty and a liar. To-morrow, old Isaacs would testify that the wallet and pearls had been taken from a locker by Captain Watts—and had been *replaced* in the locker before he, Bob Kenyon, and Isaacs had left the cabin to go ashore. The truth sounded like a damning lie on the face of it.

His lips tightened. He was in a hole—a bad hole. The evidence was overwhelmingly against him. Those three men there, glaring at him with unfriendly, angry eyes, honestly believed him guilty—as he, in their place, would have believed any man under like circumstances, and with like evidence against him, to be guilty. There was only one chance for him—Shanghai Jim. To find Shanghai Jim again! That was his only chance. It seemed to plumb the depths of irony. It was sardonic. They wouldn't do anything because they didn't believe him. They wouldn't let him do anything. It was as though hell on the side of Shanghai Jim laughed in mockery—while the prey escaped.

He clenched and unclenched his hands, and yet he heard himself speaking now quietly and steadily:

"I haven't answered your question. It's no good my trying to answer it now—or perhaps ever. But I tell you again that it was Shanghai Jim who murdered Captain Watts; that it was Shanghai Jim to-night, who, on account of the stories floating around the town, no doubt, tried to get those pearls; that Shanghai Jim is on this island. I know the evidence is all against me, and that probably the only thing that would clear me, prove my story, is to find Shanghai Jim. In that case, you'd believe me, wouldn't you?"

"Oh, yes, undoubtedly," replied Colonel Willetts a little wearily; "but it is a good many years since this Shanghai Jim disappeared, and, according to your own version, though well known and readily recognizable, he has ever since eluded the police. It is hardly likely that he could have come here without being recognized."

"He has to be *somewhere*," said Bob Kenyon tersely.

"The police theory, I believe," said Colonel Willetts, "is that the man is long since dead."

"He's not dead!" Bob Kenyon cried fiercely. "I saw him to-night. And if you want an additional mark of identification, there's a long gash across his chin that he got in the fight with me for possession of his knife in the cabin. That's where the blood on my clothes came from. You admit that finding him will prove my story. Then it's only fair play that you do something. I've a right to demand that."

There was a mingling of snarls, oaths and contemptuous laughter from the three men at the desk. Colonel Willetts, with a frown and a wave of his hand, silenced them.

"Yes," he said after a moment's hesitation, "I suppose you are entitled to that. I will order a search made for him in the morning, and, though I say quite frankly that I put little credence in your story, the search will be a thorough one."

"But to-night—now! Between now and morning!" exclaimed Bob Kenyon passionately.

Colonel Willetts shook his head.

"Apart from the town itself and the vessels in the lagoon, which I will attend to to-night, it would be utterly impracticable to beat the miles of bush and woodland on the island in the darkness, where, if anywhere, according to your story, he is most likely to be. That is the best I can do for you."

Bob Kenyon squared his shoulders. It was all he could expect—more, perhaps, than another man in Colonel Willetts' place would have done. There was nothing more to be said.

"Thank you," he said hoarsely.

He sat down on the settee. His head was throbbing brutally. He buried it in his hands, half to ease the pain of it, half because he wanted to try to think, to try to think clearly. There wasn't a loophole—save Shanghai Jim. Unless Shanghai Jim were found now, he, Bob Kenyon, was as good as dead—on the end of a rope. Shanghai Jim! The man seemed to have brought a curse into his life that was to carry through even to an ignominious and hideous end. Shanghai Jim! He could see that face now—the gloating, slanting eyes, the thick, half-parted lips, and—yes, this was queer!—something white around the chin as though a piece of cloth had been tied there.

A sudden cry rose to his lips. He choked it back. He wasn't mad, was he? That *was* Shanghai Jim! Not imagination—Shanghai Jim in the flesh, with a cloth tied around the wound on his chin! And the soul of Bob Kenyon laughed; and the brain of the man, virile, fighting for him as it had never fought before, beat down the promptings of impulse that bade him leap to his feet and fling himself across the room. Through his fingers, as they covered his face, he had been staring at that mirror over there; and in that mirror, from diagonally across the room, was reflected an open window with the face of Shanghai Jim peering in over the sill—both mirror and window out of the range of vision of the men at the desk.

He became aware that Colonel Willetts was speaking to the three men who were grouped around him.

"I shall keep these pearls here to-night," he heard Colonel Willetts say.

Bob Kenyon made no movement save that, still looking through his fingers, he turned his eyes toward the desk. Colonel Willetts was unlocking a drawer. Into this he put the wallet and the pearls, and, closing the drawer, locked it again.

Bob Kenyon's eyes reverted to the mirror. The face was still there—and it seemed to grin now horribly, triumphantly, maliciously.

And now Bob Kenyon was conscious that Colonel Willetts was addressing him directly.

"I sent for the police when you were brought into the house. They should be here presently. I have no choice but to give you into custody."

Bob Kenyon made no reply. Was he a fool, a blind, mad fool to have flung away his chance of life? The face was gone now! Shanghai Jim was gone! No—he was right, sure of it, certain of it! Something in his inner consciousness assured him he had made the one play that could save him. Long before any one could have got outside, had he given the alarm, Shanghai Jim would have vanished, and in the darkness almost certainly have made his escape; and in that case, knowing he had been seen, Shanghai Jim would not dare to come back. As it was now, Shanghai Jim *would* come back—for those pearls. The window was open—the man had both seen the pearls and had heard Colonel Willetts say they would be kept in that desk there to-night. Yes, in that, he, Bob Kenyon, was right—logically it was without a flaw.

But now—what now? For a moment bitter regret, a stinging, jeering, self-mockery for this very act of his that logic indorsed, swept over him again. Everything that he had told these men to-night in his own defense had seemed flimsy and but to make his case worse. To tell them now that Shanghai Jim *had* been at that window there, and that he had let the man go without a word! He had not thought of that. And he had just been demanding as his right that something be done to catch Shanghai Jim! The position was untenable. They would not believe him, of course. The story was all of a piece—the mythical Shanghai Jim!

And then suddenly there fell upon Bob Kenyon a sort of grim exhilaration. There was one way left, desperate perhaps, but, if it succeeded, sure. After all, this was between Shanghai Jim and himself, all the years of it—and the end was between Shanghai Jim and himself! There was no other end. There could be no other end. He wanted it that way.

Slowly Bob Kenyon raised his head, and as though in a helpless way looked around the room. The police, on their way out from the town, would be here any minute now—Colonel Willetts over there had said so. The settee on which he sat was a light wicker affair of the kind usually in vogue in the tropics. Just within a yard or so of him was a door—not the door through which Marion had gone out and which obviously led into the interior of the house, but a door which quite likely opened on the lawn.

He put his hands to his head again as though in sudden pain, staggered to his feet, swayed unsteadily, and, as if to save himself from falling, reached out to grasp the back of the settee—and then, quick as the winking of an eye, the settee in air above his head, he sent it hurtling toward the group of men at the desk, and with a leap reached the door, flung it wide and found himself in the open.

Cries, shouts, excited exclamations and a shot rang out behind him. Bob Kenyon, running at top speed, vaulted the hedge and gained the shelter of the trees. And then he paused to get his breath. It wasn't a question of putting distance between himself and the Residency—that was what they would expect him to do—and that was precisely what he neither wanted nor intended to do. He couldn't afford to go far away. He smiled now a little grimly as he swung himself silently into the branches of a tree that was almost on the fringe of the woods. They couldn't *hear* him up here—and if they couldn't hear him, the chances of finding him in the darkness, as he realized now his chances of finding Shanghai Jim had been when he had chased after the latter, were comparatively nil. Through the foliage he could see the lights of the house. He heard cries from various directions around him—men thrashing through the bushes and undergrowth. Then these sounds grew more indistinct, and finally only reached him faintly from the distance.

And then another moment of disquiet came. Suppose that in view of all this hubbub Shanghai Jim, for the very reason that he, Bob Kenyon, had refrained from giving the alarm when the other was at the window, might not return! No! He shook his head decisively. It was not at all the same thing as though Shanghai Jim had had to run for it knowing that he had been discovered at the window. As a matter of fact, having heard probably the greater portion of the conversation that had taken place in the room, and having heard, if still in the immediate neighborhood, the sounds of sudden excitement and a shot from the house, Shanghai Jim would put two and two together, and would arrive pretty accurately at the truth of who was really the quarry—and in that case Shanghai Jim's position, in Shanghai Jim's mind, would be immeasurably bettered, for, if he then returned and stole the

pearls, the theft would naturally be laid at Bob Kenyon's door. True, those out on the man-hunt now might stumble upon Shanghai Jim—but the possibility was very remote.

Bob Kenyon eased his cramped position as best he could. Shanghai Jim would be back there to-night when the way was clear and the lights were out and the Residency was asleep—and so would he, Bob Kenyon! He must believe in that, cling to that belief—if not, he might as well chuck up the sponge. It was no longer a matter alone of bringing his brother's murderer to account; his own life depended on it now, and . . . and . . . He felt the sudden twitching of his lips though they were tight pressed together. Something within him was fighting stubbornly for expression. Why hold it back? Why not admit it? There was no one to see or hear. Marion! She had not looked at him. She had refused to meet his eyes. She might not care—she could not care now. It was too long ago. But, deny it if he would, however little it might mean to her, vindication in her eyes meant more to him to-night, now, since he had seen her again, than the mere fact that he should go free. His hands clenched upon the branches that supported him until the knuckles stood out like knobs under the tight-drawn skin. The years had been very empty without her.

"Marion!" Bob Kenyon whispered out into the night.

CHAPTER IV
WHAT THE TRAP CAUGHT

THE lights still burned in the Residency. Bob Kenyon sat there in the tree for a long time—sat there until there was no longer any sound in the woods around him save only the sounds of the insects, and the soft flutter of the leaves in their thousands stirred by the gossip of the night breeze in the branches of the trees; sat there until the lights yonder began to go out one by one, and until by and by the Residency was all in darkness.

And then Bob Kenyon lowered himself to the ground, and began to make his way cautiously toward the house. There should be little trouble in gaining entry into the Residency. In the heat of the tropics, save in a storm, windows were not closed and bolted; and the shutters that served for privacy were obstacles of a far lesser nature. He reached the edge of the lawn, and, moving now with still greater caution than before, skirted the hedge until he arrived at a position opposite to the door by which, as nearly as he could judge, he had made his escape. And then on hands and knees he crawled across this portion of the lawn, and stood up finally against the wall in the shadow of the house. Yes, here was the door! He tried it. It was locked. He moved then to the window beside it. By the aid of a little force, but with scarcely a sound, he got the shutters open—and the next minute he had swung himself over the sill, and dropped silently to the floor inside the room.

He listened now. There was not a sound—no movement apparently anywhere in the house. This was the room, wasn't it? He could hardly have made a mistake—but he must make sure. He began to grope around him. It was very dark in here. He could see nothing. He dared not light a match—it might give warning to Shanghai Jim. His lips twisted in the darkness. Shanghai Jim! How did he know that Shanghai Jim had not already been here? How sure was he now, after all, that he still had not played the fool? He snarled at himself irritably under his breath. Was it the darkness and the silence that conjured up doubts and fancies and disturbing theories in his mind? Shanghai Jim wouldn't have come until the lights were out, that was certain—and since he, Bob Kenyon, had come the moment the last light had been extinguished, Shanghai Jim could not reasonably have been here ahead of him. As a matter of fact, the household could but barely have retired by

now. What time was it? He had no means of telling. He could not see his watch. At a guess it might be one o'clock—perhaps two.

His hands groping out before him touched a piece of furniture—felt over it. It was the flat-topped desk. So far, so good! He moved a little away from it, and, finding a chair, sat down. He had nothing to do now but wait.

The time dragged itself by. Bob Kenyon sat without movement. The silence seemed to become more and more profound with each passing moment, save that after a while it began to possess *noises* of its own—to beat and palpitate against his ear-drums, startling him every now and then into the belief that some actual sound had been made. It brought his nerves to tension, like tight-drawn bow strings; it peopled the darkness with imaginary and flitting shadows.

Suppose Shanghai Jim didn't come?

The phrase began to repeat itself over and over in his brain, and in a sing-song way kept tempo and rhythm with that throb, throb, throb of the silence in his ears.

Suppose Shanghai Jim didn't—

It sounded like a faint footfall. He derided himself viciously under his breath. He had heard dozens of footfalls in the last—how long was it, anyway?—half hour, or hour, that he had sat here. It was gone now like all the rest. There remained just that damnable pounding in his ears again, and —

No! Not this time! This was not imagination! A door into the room was being quietly opened. And now his eyes, straining, made out what seemed like a black shadow even against the surrounding darkness. It came nearer and nearer. Shanghai Jim! Shanghai Jim! Bob Kenyon's shoulders drew forward until his body was crouched to spring. It seemed as though every emotion he possessed were culminating in one vast upheaval of his soul—that he gloated in this moment which through all the years he had waited for. Nearer—still nearer! The shadow was opposite to him now, not a yard away —and Bob Kenyon, laughing in a low, choked way, sprang from the chair and launched himself upon it.

Something yielding, something without resistance, something that crumpled to the floor, carrying him with it, met his attack. Bob Kenyon in a blind way gained his knees, and for an instant it seemed as though his heart had stopped its beat. And then like a man crazed and distraught he leaned forward again touching the soft, clinging garment that enveloped the form upon the floor—and lifting up a woman's head, he pillowed it on his

shoulder. He whispered her name over and over again. He did not need to see. It mattered nothing if the darkness hid her face. He knew.

"Marion! Marion!" he whispered wildly. "Have I hurt you?"

She stirred a little.

"Who is that?" she said faintly. "What—what has happened? I could not sleep to-night, and so—"

"It's John Hingston," Bob Kenyon broke in hoarsely. "Are you badly hurt? Have I hurt you?"

"No," she said—and then suddenly with a low, startled cry as full consciousness seemed to return to her, she drew herself sharply away and struggled to her feet. "You—you here?" she faltered. "It was bad enough before—in Bombay. But I did not want to believe to-night. And now you are back here—that desk—those pearls. Have you already got them? If not, I—I think you had better go before I call out. If you have already taken them, you must put them back."

Bob Kenyon, too, was on his feet now. He fought to steady his voice.

"Would you take my word for it?" he asked. "How would you know whether I had them or not?"

"I know where the key is. I shall look," she replied evenly.

It was a moment before Bob Kenyon spoke again. Vindication in her eyes, his own life, depended not only on the fact that he should stay here, but that Shanghai Jim should have no warning.

"No," he said deliberately at last; "you are not going to look. Nor are you going to raise any alarm. You are either going to return to your own room with the promise that you will say nothing of my presence in the house, or you are going to sit down in that chair there and not make a sound—I only hope we haven't made too much noise already. You must make your choice."

"My *choice*! Do you realize what you are saying?" she flashed out instantly. "Do you think that you can frighten me? You would not dare—"

"Oh, yes, I would!" interrupted Bob Kenyon in a strangely dogged way. "And I must ask you not to speak above a whisper. When one is desperate, one dares anything. I would dare anything to-night. I've got to make you understand that. I would even dare to tell you what I am sure you once knew—that I love you."

He heard her draw in her breath with a sudden gasp—as though anger and amazement struggled for the supremacy.

"Which will you do?" he demanded.

"Neither!" she exclaimed sharply.

"It would be safer if you went back to your room." He spoke in low, steady tones now. "You would be out of danger. I am waiting for Shanghai Jim."

"Shanghai Jim?" She repeated the words with a curious little note of interrogation, as though she were not sure she had heard aright.

"I saw him in that mirror on the wall over there when they were grilling me here in this room to-night," he said. "He was standing outside the window."

"And you said nothing?" Her voice was flat, dull.

"Because, before anybody could have reached him, he would have made his escape in the woods, just as I did—and he would not have come back. As it is, he saw the pearls placed in that desk. It's his one chance to get them, for Heaven knows where they'll be to-morrow—and so I am waiting for him now."

There was a slight rustle of her garments.

"I—I am sitting down in the chair," she said.

It was very quiet in the room now—and it was a long minute before Bob Kenyon broke the silence. He moved closer to the chair—and suddenly impulse stronger than himself surged upon him, and he knelt beside it.

"Marion!" he said.

She did not answer.

He felt his pulse quicken, the blood pound through his veins. He had called her Marion—and she had not rebuked him. And then the great shoulders of the man squared. Did it mean that there was a chance—a chance for *more* than vindication? A chance to fight for more than life? He scarcely dared trust his voice to hold to the low, guarded whisper that it must not exceed.

"Will you listen?" he said huskily. "It has been wrong, all wrong, between us—since that night. You know that when I first met you in England my brother had disappeared for over a year, and that I had given up all hope of ever discovering what had happened to him. You know that my brother and I were the last of our family and fairly well off—too well off, perhaps, for my brother's sake. His commission business in Bombay was merely a side issue with him. He lived there because he liked the place, and I'm afraid he went the pace and had a bit of a reputation. When I left college I went out to join him, and it was then, almost immediately after my arrival, that he mysteriously disappeared. I had made very few acquaintances; in fact, I was scarcely known at all. I let the clerk run the business, such as it

was, and spent months trying to find my brother. I went everywhere, I think, in that quarter of the globe—and then, as I said, when I had given up all hope of ever hearing anything about him, I went to America and England for a change, before returning to Bombay to wind up the business there, as I had no intention of living in Bombay myself."

Bob Kenyon paused for an instant. The figure in the chair beside him did not move, did not speak.

He went on again:

"I returned to Bombay. You will remember that you expected to come out that way on your return home to Illola here a month or so later, and—and you were to let me know what ship you were coming on."

She spoke now for the first time.

"I wrote you two weeks before I sailed—as soon as I knew myself," she said almost inaudibly.

"I never got the letter," said Bob Kenyon with a quick intake of his breath.

"Would it have mattered?" she said dully. "I can not see that it would."

"But I can—now!" There was something suddenly vibrant in Bob Kenyon's whispering tones. "Marion! Marion! Listen! A week or so after I got back to Bombay, this Shanghai Jim, whom I knew well by sight because in my previous search for my brother I had been several times in his dive as I had been in many others seeking information, murdered a young Englishman in a fit of his diabolical Malay rage, and badly wounded his own 'runner' who had tried to interfere. He just barely managed to make his escape from the police, and fled no one knew where. Then, a few days before you arrived, though I did not know then that you were on the ship, I received a message to go to the hospital where Shanghai Jim's 'runner,' a man known everywhere on the waterfront as Dublin Mike and who had been there in hospital for weeks with his wounds, was dying and wanted to see me. I went; and to revenge himself, of course, on Shanghai Jim, Dublin Mike told me the story of my brother's death."

Again Bob Kenyon paused. It seemed as though the form in the chair before him, indistinct as it was, had changed position and was leaning a little forward toward him.

"Shanghai Jim," said Bob Kenyon after a moment, "besides his sailors' boarding-house, ran a low gambling dive. My brother went in there one night and foolishly displayed a large sum of money. Between them, Shanghai Jim and Dublin Mike drugged him and took the money; and then, to get rid of him, they shanghaied him. They put him on board a sailing ship

that night—and got their commission for it, too, out of the ship's captain. But before they put him on board, they doped him again, and this time gave him a deliberate overdose of the drug. They couldn't afford to have him come back on them with his story. The result was that the ship's captain got what he thought was the ordinary run of drunken sailor; but what he really got was a man, under whatever fictitious name Shanghai Jim had seen fit to ship him, who never regained consciousness, and who died and was buried two days later at sea."

"Yes," she said a little tremulously.

"I asked Dublin Mike where he thought Shanghai Jim had gone, and Dublin Mike, dying though he was, cursed Shanghai Jim as I had never heard man cursed before. He said Shanghai Jim was too clever for the police, that the police would never find him, and that there was only one way, one chance—to pick up a clew in some of the dives where Shanghai Jim might have made a confidant of some one, and especially in a famous dope joint run by a Chinaman named Ling Su, and so—"

A sudden, half-choked sob came from the chair.

"Don't!" she interrupted in a quick, low, broken way. "I—I know now. I understand. That night when we had made up a little slumming party from the ship, and I—I saw you coming out of that miserable doorway looking the way you did! I—I thought you had forgotten me and my letter in—in a debauch."

Bob Kenyon's hand felt out before him almost as though it were afraid, and found, and lay over the back of hers.

"Yes," he said, "I had been nearly two days in Ling Su's. As I told you, hardly any one in Bombay knew me. I was dressed for the part. I had got the entrée there through Dublin Mike. I—I saw you—I see you now—standing outside that doorway with all those chaps and girls. I had forgotten what I looked like, unshaven, filthy, unkempt, disreputable. I had forgotten my part at sight of you. I don't blame one of those chaps who was with you for doing what he did. I should have done the same. I looked exactly what he called me—a drunken bum. But I had forgotten all that for the moment when I jumped toward you and caught your hand; and when he struck me in front of you I—I lost my head. The other men who were with your party naturally joined in when I knocked that first chap down, and just as naturally the hangers-on in that locality, the habitués of the dives, believing me to be one of themselves, sided in with me. In the mêlée that followed, besides being arrested, I was rather badly hurt by one of the police. I was off my head for several days, and when I got around again, you had left Bombay, and—and you had left no word."

She was crying softly in the darkness.

"Oh, I didn't know, I didn't know you had been hurt like that! They told me that your brother had had a very bad record, and that you, as much as was known of you, were like him—spending most of your time in places like that. I know why now, but I didn't understand then. That was why I went and left no word. I thought that my arrival in Bombay was of far less consequence to you than a night in your usual haunts. And—and I think that night when I saw you like that I wanted to die, because—because—" Her voice broke.

"Because—because you cared?" he whispered eagerly. "Was it that?"

There was no answer.

His arms reached out to her, encircled her, drew her close to him.

"Marion! Marion—was it that?" he urged hoarsely.

Her voice was so low he could barely catch her words.

"I have always cared," she said. "Always, always, always."

A great tenderness, and a great awe, and a great glory were upon him. And his lips found hers, and found the tear-wet eyelids; and his hand caressed her hair and brushed it back from her forehead.

And for a time neither spoke.

And then she stirred in his arms, and suddenly her hands were lifted to cling passionately to his shoulders, and she was whispering wildly:

"Oh, I am afraid! I am afraid! If he doesn't come what will you do? They will hunt you—catch you—and—and without this Shanghai Jim the evidence is all against you. Even I was a witness against you—your name. I waited outside the door and heard you explain that, but—but without Shanghai Jim you would never be believed."

"He will come," Bob Kenyon answered. He laid his hands over hers on his shoulders. He was strangely sure now. He *knew*. "He will come," he said again.

"But he may not dare—even for the pearls," she said fearfully. "If he is clever enough to be here in a small place like this and the police not know it, even though they have his description, he is too clever to run any risk of falling into a trap."

Bob Kenyon drew her cheek against his own.

"That's just it," he said reassuringly. "He has no reason to think there is the slightest risk of a trap; and, besides that, if he knows that I escaped, which I am pretty sure he does, he knows that if he gets the pearls to-night the theft will be attributed to me, and so contribute another link in the

evidence against me for the murder of Captain Watts. I don't know how he has evaded the police. He may only have put in here on one of the pearling schooners. He may have been living here harbored and sheltered by some confederate. I don't know. I've been trying to answer that question for five years all over this part of the world. But I will know to-night. He will come. I saw it in his eyes and I saw it in his face at the window. He will come." His hands tightened suddenly, warningly, upon her. "He is coming now! Do you hear that? At the door over there—the outside door!"

"Yes," she breathed.

He drew her silently away from the chair, and, retreating back along the wall, crouched down behind what, in the darkness, seemed to him to be a bookcase of some sort.

"Don't make a sound until I tell you," he cautioned; "then run instantly for your father and any other men who may be in the house. Do you understand?"

"Yes," she answered; "but—but you?"

"There is absolutely nothing to be afraid of," he whispered back. "Now quiet—don't move—don't stir! He's got the door open now."

There was a faint, low, creaking sound from across the room. Then utter silence. It seemed to last interminably. Then there came the soft *pad* of a footfall treading warily; and, peering out, Bob Kenyon could discern a blur of white in the darkness. It came on, a shadowy, filmy thing, crossing the room; and now it reached the position where the desk stood, and seemed to hover there. Shanghai Jim—Shanghai Jim at last! Quietly Bob Kenyon released his arm from the girl's grasp, and crept silently a few steps forward in the direction of the desk.

And then he stood still.

A match crackled and spurted into flame. The figure at the desk, holding the little torch, back turned, was bending over and examining the lock on the drawer.

And upon Bob Kenyon there descended a sudden sense of utter hopelessness, of dismay, of disaster. Everything, far more now than when he had stolen into this room, far more than mere life itself, the love that he knew now was his, its promise and the wondrous vista of the years that only a little while ago he had glimpsed ahead, were all, as though by a single, mocking stroke of fate, shattered and destroyed. That wasn't Shanghai Jim there. It was a man who wore a ridiculously large pith helmet. It wasn't even necessary to see the other's face, though he had, indeed, caught a side view

of it. It was old Isaacs, the pearl broker—old Isaacs with a revolver dangling in his free hand.

The match went out. There came a sound much like the gnawing of a rat. The man was working at the drawer.

And then the numbness following, as it were, a blow that had been struck him, began to clear from Bob Kenyon's brain. It wasn't Shanghai Jim—but it wasn't hopeless either. He understood now. It was clear—even childishly clear. He had evidently hit the nail on the head when he had said that Shanghai Jim was protected and helped by some confederate ashore. That confederate was old Isaacs. Old Isaacs was the only one who had been shown the pearls and had reason to believe they were in Captain Watts' locker; and, pretending they were beyond his reach financially, had said so with specious honesty—and had sent Shanghai Jim to get them *for nothing*. Yes, he saw it all now. Shanghai Jim was in turn the only one, apart from those then present in the room here, who knew the pearls had been placed in the drawer of the desk. But Shanghai Jim had also *heard* what had been said—and with that knife gash across his chin which was proof of his, Bob Kenyon's story, and which would instantly attract attention and mark his identity to even a casual glance, had not dared venture out any more in person. And so it had been old Isaacs' turn again.

Grim-lipped, his jaws clamped, Bob Kenyon was creeping silently on again toward the desk. It wasn't Shanghai Jim there—but old Isaacs must know where Shanghai Jim was hiding. That was enough—because old Isaacs would tell all he knew! There wouldn't be any mercy. With his fingers once on old Isaacs' throat, the man would *talk*!

The attack upon the desk drawer went on, and in the stillness it seemed to sound thunderously loud. Bob Kenyon crept nearer—still nearer. He was close enough now to spring, and he crouched a little, poised.

"*Now*, Marion! Quick!" he called, and launched himself forward.

He heard a sharp, startled oath; he heard Marion's footsteps racing from the room; he heard her calling wildly for her father; and then, even as he closed with the man in front of him, there was a blinding flash, the roar of the report, and the flame-tongue of a revolver shot scorched his face. And now, locked together, they lurched and staggered here and there in the darkness, Bob Kenyon's left arm hooked like a vise around the man's neck, his fingers feeling, searching, clawing for a throat-hold, while his right hand grasped at the other's wrist, struggling for possession of the weapon.

A minute passed—another. The man, old as he was, seemed to possess a maniacal strength; he tore and struck and battled like a demon, snarling

oaths with hot, panting breath, raving in a fury as ungovernable as the fury with which he fought. But tighter and tighter now Bob Kenyon's fingers fastened themselves in the flesh of the man's throat; and his other hand, though it slipped again and again in the struggle for the ugly prize, still pinioned the wriggling, twisting wrist.

This way and that about the room they reeled, and then suddenly as they smashed against the wall and rebounded from it, a chair in their path crashed to the floor entangling their legs, and for an instant they hovered erect, swaying, straining to maintain their balance, then, tottering, pitched downward. Bob Kenyon, uppermost, was conscious of a great, roaring sound in his ears, of a revolver flash that was strangely obscured beneath his body, and of a sudden relaxation in the other's struggles—a sudden stillness in the form under him. It did not move any more. It did not snarl.

In a half-dazed way he rose to his feet. And subconsciously now he was aware that there was light in the room, and that others were there too—Colonel Willetts amongst them, clad in pyjamas. But he was staring down at the floor where a man with a revolver, still smoking, still clasped in his hand, lay dead. And there was a pith helmet there on the floor too, a ridiculously large one and most outrageously dirty; and moreover there was something very strange about the man's face—as though the beard were all lop-sided, as though it had been torn away from one side and had flopped over on the other, and where there was no beard a great strip of surgeon's plaster showed across the chin.

There was a stir in the room—voices—some one touched his arm.

But Bob Kenyon did not move. He was staring down into the face of Shanghai Jim.

THE MANDARIN'S HOARD

Somewhere in the isles of East India, shrouded by the inscrutable mystery of the Orient, it lay: this treasure hoard; and from the far corners of civilization came strange men searching—to meet, to fight, and to die for the lust of it.

CHAPTER I
THE JOINT HEIR

THERE had been long hours, full of intolerable pain for one, bridged by merciful unconsciousness for the other, since either man had spoken.

The elder, of perhaps sixty years, with grizzled hair, lay motionless on the boat's bottom, both arms outflung across the forward thwart, his head in a limp position, while, with each lazy roll to the smooth swells, the water that had seeped in through the seams—three inches of it since last they had baled—washed now this way, now that, against his legs. In the stern-sheets sat the other—a young man, gaunt, emaciated, but of magnificent physique, a good six feet in height, and broad even beyond proportion across the shoulders. A beard of many days' growth partially hid the sunken jaw and hollow cheeks, and a matted tangle of fair hair straggled almost into the steel-gray eyes that now had dimmed and lost their luster. His chin was cupped in his hands, his body bent forward in a crouching position, his elbows on his knees.

"Kennard!"

The younger man moved slightly—his name came to him as though from a far distance, sounding like the echo of some queer vagary of his own reeling brain.

"Kennard!"

He lifted his head apathetically, listlessly.

The other had raised himself into a sitting posture, and was beckoning to him with one hand.

Half-tumbling, half-crawling, Kennard made his way forward over the two intervening thwarts and sat down on the one facing his companion.

"There's nothing doing, Wolfson," he said, shaking his head.

"'Tain't that," said Wolfson. "I ain't going to last out, that's all. Maybe you will, maybe you won't; but there's something I've got to say while I can. Have you ever heard of the Mandarin's Hoard?"

Kennard hardly stirred. At another time those words from a dying man would have fired his imagination, thrilled him with fierce excitement—but

what was it now either to him or Wolfson, the other almost gone, himself all but as bad!

The Mandarin's Hoard!

The grim irony of it struck him, and he laughed hoarsely through dry, cracked lips. "As rich as the Mandarin's Hoard"—from Fiji to China they said that, as the Occidentals said "rich as Crœsus."

He had heard many tales about it and many variations of the tales; but, in the main, they were all substantially the same. A high-caste Chinaman, an exiled mandarin named Yu Ling Chen, in revenge for his wrongs, either real or fancied, had ravaged and terrorized the Indian Ocean and the Archipelago for many years, gradually drawing to his banner the greater proportion of the lesser desperadoes and eventually forming a sort of piratical monarchy. He had accumulated a vast store of wealth, and then retribution had fallen suddenly upon him and had snuffed out his profligate life; for, trapped at last by one of the innumerable expeditions that had been sent against him, his stronghold was made a place of desolation, his followers were cut down to the last man, and he himself had been taken to Shanghai and executed with much éclat. But, to the government's extreme chagrin, no more than a very modest amount of booty was found in the robbers' nest, and Yu Ling Chen, obdurate before the most exquisite forms of torture, had passed on to his forefathers without divulging the whereabouts of his secret hoard. After that, many an adventurer besides the agents of the government of the Sacred Dragon had searched for the treasure—and searched in vain. It had never been found—a circumstance that, rather than shaking the popular belief in its existence, but nursed the "Mandarin's Hoard" in imagination into more and more fabulous proportions.

Wolfson's black, fever-burned eyes played restlessly over Kennard's face.

"Why do you laugh?" he asked querulously. "If you live, you will thank me; if you die—well, for a few minutes now at least it will take your mind and mine from the hell of hunger and thirst. God, if we could but numb the brain!"

He raised himself a little higher with a quick, spasmodic jerk as his muscles responded mechanically to his sudden sweep of emotion; and then, the exertion too much for him, he fell weakly back again.

"Talk then, if you can," said Kennard dully. "But I know the story of Yu Ling Chen—he was executed at Shanghai two years ago."

"No," said Wolfson, after a moment, during which he had lain with closed eyes; "Yu Ling Chen was never executed at Shanghai, or anywhere

else—it was his chief lieutenant, Won Sen. I think the local government knew that, too; but they were not of a mind to mar their glory by letting a little thing like that stand in the way. Furthermore, some one else's head would probably have fallen, too, if it had leaked out that Yu Ling Chen had escaped after all. *Yu Ling Chen died in my cabin*, aboard the same *Orissa* we saw the last of—I've lost track of time—was it a week ago?"

"Six days," said Kennard, leaning suddenly forward. His pulse was stirring now. The shivered, broken butt of the wrecked mast protruding a jagged foot above the gunwale, the empty water cask, the pitiless heat, the waste of oily sea, the vacant places in the boat of those who had gone, the gaunt, sick man before him—all seemed now a logical setting for the tale. He even grudged the other's halting pause for fear Wolfson might not be able to finish. He felt a greedy eagerness to hear it all now, like a child that hangs on a fairy tale. Yes; Wolfson had been right, it was distracting his mind. What a queer beginning! What a—his brain felt wobbly again! He drove his hand across his eyes and straightened himself. "Go on!" he said.

"The whole of it's a long story that I'm not equal to," Wolfson said slowly. "I'll give you just the bare facts. When Yu Ling Chen's nest was attacked and they saw that the game was up, some of his followers smuggled him away in a small proa—but not for love of Yu Ling Chen, you understand? The men he trusted intended to betray him. The plot was to purchase their own immunity and hold him for a big ransom from the government. He discovered it after the second day at sea, and made his escape from them in a sort of native canoe the proa carried. I was in command then of the *Orissa*, same as when you joined us a year later; and at that time we were outbound from Singapore to 'Frisco with silk, and that's how I came to pick him up."

Wolfson had been speaking with an effort; but now, as he went on, his voice seemed to strengthen as though the excitement, visibly growing upon him, were acting as a stimulant:

"He was badly wounded, dying from that and from what I, and maybe you, though you'll hold out a bit longer, are dying from—fever and exposure and starvation and thirst. I didn't know who he was, of course; but half an eye was enough to see that he wasn't any usual run of Chinese sailor. He was high caste, you know, a man of rank in the old days, well educated, knew English better than any Oriental I ever met, and his dress alone was enough, what there was of it, to mark him as out of the ordinary. I had put him in my cabin, and I did what I could for him. He may have been a devil and an incarnate fiend, but I didn't see any of that side of him, didn't know anything about it till the end, and by that time I had got to like him. There

was never a whimper out of him, but there was lots of gratitude. I nursed him all I knew like a kid, and I can see him now lying there on the bunk with his narrow black eyes following me about the way they used to do all the time I was in the room—but I guess we both knew he was a goner from the first. I buried him three days out of 'Frisco after keeping life in him for near on to two weeks. The night he died he told me who he was, because he knew he was going—just as I'm telling you the story now because I know I'm going."

Wolfson licked at his parched lips, a grayish tinge crept into his face and a little shiver passed over him.

"I ain't afraid," he said. "It's—it's just the coincidence that struck me. I remember him talking while he died and me listening—just like we're doing now—d'ye hear, Kennard?—like we're doing now."

Kennard's eyes wandered over the other's face with sick petulancy. It was a better story, of course, than *Robinson Crusoe*, or the *Arabian Nights*, or any of that sort of thing he used to pore over, very much better, only Wolfson was breaking the thread of it—there was no sense, none at all, in breaking the thread of it.

"D'ye hear, Kennard?"

"Go on," muttered Kennard.

"That night he told me who he was," repeated Wolfson. "He told me, too, of the treasure; and I swore to him then that if I had not found it before I died I would pass on what I knew to some one else—that sounds queer, doesn't it? But you'll see, you'll see! I never counted on this; perhaps it's too late now, for in passing it on to you I'm doing little better than passing it on to the grave. No, no!"—almost fiercely—"something tells me you are going to live, Kennard—live and find what I never found. Man, rouse yourself, force your will to concentrate on what I'm saying! Can't you see it's taking all that's left in me to tell it? Rouse yourself, man!"

Kennard's head had drooped a little forward, but now the intensity of the other's tones struck through to his swimming brain like a galvanic shock, and his mind that had been playing queer fancies with the tale, wandering, and weaving the extraneous about it, cleared, focused. He pressed both hands upon his aching head and straightened up once more.

"I'm all right again, Wolfson," he said. "I guess my head is bad, but I've got it so far. You were to tell some one else and you're telling me. I won't let go again."

Wolfson fumbled with a cord around his neck, and presently jerked a small oilskin bag into view from beneath his shirt.

"Take this," he said, "and look at it."

Kennard lifted the cord over Wolfson's head. The little bag was drawn tightly in around the top with a drawstring. Loosening the drawstring, he found that the bag contained a folded piece of paper and, spreading this out upon his knee, he sat staring at it for a long time with a puzzled expression on his face. Two lines, one starting at the upper left-hand corner and the other one at the upper right-hand corner, ran in a diagonal course down the paper until they converged near the bottom—the point of contact being marked by the minutely drawn figure of a squatting idol. The lines themselves zigzagged now this way, now that, and the one on the right was embellished with figures and markings at different points along its length until, just as it approached the other line, it became perfectly straight and all figures and markings ceased. The left-hand line had no markings whatever; but it, too, ceased to zigzag and became straight as it neared the meeting point, so that the two lines just before they terminated approximated very closely the two sides of an isosceles triangle. It was a plan of some kind, obviously drawn with scrupulous care, but Kennard could make nothing of it—but that was perhaps because his head was very bad, and his faculties too dulled to understand it.

"That"—Wolfson, who had been watching with half-closed eyes, spoke abruptly—"is the map of what is now known as the Mandarin's Hoard, and was given to me by Yu Ling Chen himself. Put it back in the bag and hang it around your neck. It's yours now. I pass it on; and I hope it will do you more good than it has done me."

Kennard mechanically replaced the piece of paper in the bag, and hung the bag around his neck.

"The Mandarin's Hoard, yes," he said slowly. "Yes, I understand; it is a map—but a map of where? Where is the place?"

"I do not know," Wolfson answered.

"You don't know?" said Kennard heavily, as though trying to understand what he vaguely felt was in some way illogical and inconsequent; then quickly: "Why, you must know, if Yu Ling Chen gave it to you!"

Wolfson smiled wanly.

"Would I have let two years go by without getting there if I had known? Whether it is an island, coral reef, mainland, or what—I do not know. I only know what Yu Ling Chen told me—its longitude. Listen! You must remember it: *One-two-three-four-five; one-two-three-four-five!*"

Kennard strained forward. Was it Wolfson's mind that was failing now with his ebbing strength, or was it still his own dizzy head?

"It is easy to remember," said Wolfson. "The first five numerals divided —that's the way Yu Ling Chen gave it to me. See? One hundred and twenty-three degrees, forty-five minutes, east."

"Yes," said Kennard. "I can remember that—the first five numerals divided give the longitude."

Deep within him he was conscious that he was listening to a strange and startling tale, a secret that men had spent vast sums to penetrate, and, spending money, had spent, too, their lives—it should have roused him, whipped the blood through his veins in quick, fierce, pounding throbs. He wondered numbly why it didn't. It was all clear enough. He understood, quite understood, what Wolfson had said; and he would remember it, every word of it—if he lived. Ah, that was it—if he lived. The pain and suffering, the weakness that was upon him was blunting all other sensibilities. Yes, that was it. Nevertheless, he might live; and then—his hands went to his head again, clasping his forehead in a hard, vise-like pressure. The longitude—given the longitude, there yet remained the latitude—or else—

Wolfson laughed very low, very grimly.

"The line," he said, "bisects the western half of Australia, it bisects a thousand islands, it bisects the Philippines, it bisects Celebes, it bisects God knows what else—am I a fool? Suppose I ran down every one of them, even then how would I know which one was right?"

"But the latitude, then—you have not got the latitude?"

"No," said Wolfson.

And now Kennard laughed raucously, unpleasantly, mockingly.

"Then what is the good of this?" he cried, his fingers closing on the oilskin bag dangling from his neck. "What's the good of this?"

"It is of no good," Wolfson answered; "it is worthless—unless you find the man I couldn't find."

"Find . . . the . . . man . . . you . . . couldn't . . . find"—Kennard repeated the words, halting between them as if striving the better to grasp and weigh their meaning.

"Yes," said Wolfson. "Only half of that map is complete, the right-hand half; and only the longitude is known to me. The latitude, and the other completed half is in the possession of this other man—we are joint heirs of Yu Ling Chen, and one without the other is powerless. What is behind that I do not know. Neither do I know when nor why Yu Ling Chen gave away the other half of his secret, but it must have been long ago when he was still running amuck through the Archipelago; for, though I have used every

means to find this other man, I have never succeeded in obtaining the slightest trace of him."

"His name, his address—didn't Yu Ling Chen tell you that?"

"Both," Wolfson replied, "but it has done no good. His name is Gilcreast, Howard Cheever Gilcreast—say it over after me so that you will remember it."

"Yes," said Kennard, "I will remember it—Howard Cheever Gilcreast. And the address?"

"Yu Ling Chen gave one of the big New York hotels as Gilcreast's address, the Crescent Hill. I went there clear across the continent the minute I touched 'Frisco."

"And there was no such man"—Kennard felt an uncontrollable impulse to bitter mirth. The tale was ending in a fiasco. Wolfson perhaps was out of his mind, raving, delirious; he was going to die, he had said so himself; he must be pretty near the end already. But the map! That was real! Kennard sucked in his breath with a long, hard gasp. "Go on!" he prompted sharply.

It was a long time before Wolfson spoke again.

"I am very tired," he said at last. "I can't talk much more. You are right—there was no such man there, and at first no one remembered him. The hotel had changed hands and with the new management had come new clerks. Finally, however, I located one of the old clerks at another hotel—and he remembered. Four or five years before—and that means six or seven years ago now, for it's two since I buried Yu Ling Chen—this Gilcreast had lived for a year at the Crescent Hill hotel. The clerk recalled the name, but little more. Gilcreast's business, where he had come from, where he had gone, the clerk couldn't tell me. His recollection of the man was that of a gentleman of a little over middle age, with grayish hair and mustache—that was all, and that was all I ever found out. I advertised in the New York papers, and afterwards here and there, wherever I happened to be, and I used my tongue; but nothing came of it. That's the story, Kennard; that's the story I promised Yu Ling Chen I'd pass along, I suppose for this same Gilcreast's sake, if the time came when I knew I wasn't going to look for him any longer myself. Maybe you'll find him, Kennard—I never did."

"Yes," said Kennard, "maybe I'll find him."

Wolfson closed his eyes and shifted back into his position with his head between his arms.

Kennard did not move.

The hours crept on, the sun crept to mid-heaven, and flung its merciless rays upon the boat; the seeping water crept an inch, two inches higher over

the bottom boards.

Then Kennard stumbled back over the thwarts and baled mechanically with a tin dipper. After that he crouched in the stern-sheets, his chin cupped in his hands again.

The hours crept on; the westering sun crept to the horizon, and upon the glistening plain of glass was a flood of crimson glory, and the range of waters was as a vast reach of burnished gold.

"Kennard!"—Wolfson raised his head, his voice was a weak whisper.

Kennard licked at his lips and looked at the other, but there was little of reason in his eyes.

"It's near sunset, and it's getting cooler, ain't it?" said Wolfson faintly.

"It's near sunset, and it's getting cooler," said Kennard.

Night fell. It grew dark. By and by a star here and there twinkled; by and by the moon rose and its cold, white light fell upon the drifting boat.

In the bow, a form, motionless now, huddled over the forward thwart; in the stern, a man stood erect, his hands upraised above his head—and laughed.

"One-two-three-four-five," he babbled; "one-two-three-four-five"—and laughed again.

His hands dropped with a queer, impotent, wriggling movement to his sides. He slid to his knees and lay upon his face. A cloud swung athwart the moon and the moon-path was gone; but upon Kennard was a deeper blackness than the night—the boon of unconsciousness had come to him.

CHAPTER II
A STRANGE WARNING

WHEN KENNARD opened his eyes again it was light—not with the full light of day, but as with the first flush of dawn or the gray twilight of coming evening.

He was very weak—weaker than he had been yesterday when Wolfson had told him that strange story. Yesterday! Wolfson! Was it yesterday he had listened to that story? Was it morning or evening now? Had he lain unconscious only through the hours of the night, or had he escaped the torment of another pitiless day?

He raised his head—and a cry, broken, like a moaning sob, burst from his lips. Trees, trees, foliage cool and green in an unbroken line, stretched before him. He dashed his hands to his straining eyes, rubbing them.

Yes, yes, yes; it was true!

The water lapped gently at a fringe of white sand—the boat's nose was rubbing with a soft caressing sound upon a beach!

"Wolfson!" he cried excitedly. "Wolfson! Land! We are saved!"

There was no answer; no movement from the curled form that lay forward in the bow.

Kennard dragged himself over the thwarts and shook at the other's shoulders.

"Wolfson!" he cried again. "Wolfson!"

Then he stared for a long while, sitting on the thwart.

"He's dead!" he explained to himself at last, shaking his head. "Wolfson's dead—quite dead!"

He clambered over the boat's side into the water ankle deep, and, hanging on by the gunwale, staggered to the beach—and stood swaying, his hands gripping the boat's bow to steady himself.

"Hello, you there!" bawled a voice.

Three forms had emerged from the line of trees, and were running toward him across the sand. Kennard watched them come—they seemed to dance up and down before him very foolishly. Two were men—one was a woman. The first man had a thin, very hollow face—he didn't like the first man very much; the other had whiskers—he disliked whiskers. The girl was

very much better—she had great brown eyes, and brown hair fluffing about her face. He gripped a little harder at the boat as he lurched.

"Hello, you there!" said one of the men again. "Where d'you come from?"

They had halted before him. Kennard's eyes ran them over, and held on the girl.

"Wolfson's dead," he said inconsequently. "Quite dead. Is it morning or evening?"

"Wolfson!" ejaculated the man with whiskers.

"Wolfson!" echoed the other.

Both stepped quickly past Kennard and leaned in over the side of the boat.

"You are sick—you are ill!" exclaimed the girl in sudden alarm. "Here, Tom—quick! Mr. Grieg!"

"One-two-three-four-five," muttered Kennard—and went down on the sand.

The hours that followed were passed by Kennard in a dreamy sort of coma, during which voices spoke out of the nothingness, and one voice was always soft and musical—and hands seemed to hover over him, ministering to him, hands whose touch was cool and soothing.

A long, long time this lasted, then gradually his surroundings began to take concrete form. He was lying on a bed in a low-ceilinged room that had grass mats upon the floor; and, through a window opposite him, which appeared to open like a door on to a wide veranda with bamboo uprights, he could see wooded land, and, beyond this, the dark blue of a rising hill where the sun was just touching the peak.

The dizziness was gone; his head was clear now.

He lifted his arm and bent it, flexing his muscle, and nodded approvingly to himself, noting his reviving strength.

"Yes, you're very much better," said *the* voice. "But you'll need another day at least before you begin to be yourself again."

Kennard's eyes met the brown ones—and they smiled back at him.

"You've been very good," said Kennard. "You've fed me broth and—"

"How did you know?" she demanded cheerfully. "You've been unconscious ever since we found you this morning."

"I knew," said Kennard, nodding his head. "I—I knew—and you've got some there, and that proves it."

She laughed as she set a little bowl down on a small wicker stand beside the bed.

"Who are you?" Kennard asked suddenly. "And where am I? And—"

"No!" She shook her head. "You're not to talk now. You must wait until to-morrow."

"I'm perfectly fit," protested Kennard, "and I'd like to know."

"I'm quite as anxious to ask questions as you are," she replied smilingly, "but they must wait—until you *are* perfectly fit. I'm quite sure you mustn't be excited now. Drink your broth and go to sleep again."

"Well, then," Kennard compromised, "just those two questions and I will."

She shook her finger at him chidingly.

"Well, then, just those two," she agreed. "You are in a trading-station on the island of Kao-Lon."

"And you?"

"My name is Aldeth Moore," she said simply.

"Aldeth"—Kennard repeated the name. It was a very pretty name, he thought, and somehow it seemed to belong to her—any other name would never have done at all. He said it again: "Aldeth—"

"Moore," she prompted.

"Of course," said Kennard. He felt the color rise in his cheeks. "I beg your pardon. I did not mean to be rude. Mine's Kennard, Martin Kennard, late second officer of the *Orissa*."

"You are forgiven, Mr. Kennard," she said brightly. "Now, sir, the other side of the bargain—the broth."

He drank it obediently.

"Now sleep," she commanded.

Kennard closed his eyes—halfway—and watched the lithe, graceful figure of the girl as she crossed the room and disappeared through the door.

Then he opened his eyes wide and raised himself quickly upon his elbow—a face was drawn suddenly back from the window that gave on the veranda. Barely a glimpse he got of it, but with that glimpse came a sense of familiarity. He lay back after a minute and tried to think. The man had evidently been watching—why? Or, rather, listening—why? And who was he? Kennard shook his head. He could have sworn that he had seen the face before, but when or where, try as he would, he could not remember. He gave it up after a further fruitless effort that only resulted in irritating him, and

then, his thoughts jumbling into a medley of Wolfson, trading-stations and Aldeth Moore, he grew dreamy and presently he slept.

He awoke with a start.

Moonlight was in the room. A man was bending over him—the man whose face he had seen at the window. Kennard, with a jerk, came suddenly upright, a muttered cry on his lips.

"Hush!" cautioned the man in a low tone. "Keep still! I want to talk to you."

From somewhere in another part of the station, through walls that were not made to deaden sound, came very distinctly the sound of voices, the occasional clink of glasses, and the ring of coin.

"What do you want?" Kennard demanded.

"First of all, I want to *warn* you!" answered the man significantly. "You were delirious this morning and you talked a lot—about Wolfson and Yu Ling Chen, and you kept repeating 'one-two-three-four-five.'"

"Yes?" inquired Kennard coolly. His brain was alert now, and he was trying to study the other's face in the uncertain light. "Well?"

"Two and two make four," said the man. "If you know anything about the Mandarin's Hoard, and care a penny for your life—keep your mouth shut. And if Wolfson gave you any paper or map or anything of that sort, hang on to it like grim death until—"

"Grieg! Hey, Grieg! Where are you?" bellowed a voice.

"Curse it!" growled the man; then quickly: "Remember what I say. I'm risking something to tell you this. Look out for *her*—she's a siren and treacherous. And look out for that thin-faced brother Tom of hers. *Look out for them*. Keep your tongue in your cheek if you want to keep your soul in your body—"

"I say, Grieg! Ho—*Grieg*! Where the devil are you?" bellowed the voice again.

"To-morrow," breathed the man hurriedly. "I'll get a chance to see you to-morrow. Remember!"—and he was gone.

Presently his voice sounded from the veranda:

"Right, I'm coming! What's the bally stew?"

Grieg! In a flash Kennard remembered now. That was what she had called the man with the whiskers at the boat. "Her thin-faced brother, Tom"—yes, she had called the other man Tom.

What in Heaven's name did it mean? How could Grieg or Aldeth or Tom or any living soul on earth know there was even a possibility that Wolfson

had given him—a cold chill struck suddenly to his heart, and his hand shot quickly to his neck. No; it was there—safe. His fingers felt the cord, felt the little oil-silk bag, and felt the fold of paper within.

What did it mean? His life in danger—from her! A siren? Folly! But it was strange enough, unpleasantly strange. What could these people know of Wolfson? And again the question: how, short of the supernatural, could they know what Wolfson had given him? His life in danger—from Aldeth! His mind kept harping on that. It was preposterous, of course; but why had this man Grieg come to warn him in the dead of night? Who was Grieg? Who was Aldeth? What was she doing here in a trading-station on an island he had never heard of before, the island of Kao-Lon?

Kennard was now thoroughly aroused. To dismiss the matter from his mind, to try and compose himself to sleep again was an impossibility; and, besides, it was a time now for action—not sleep! A game of some sort was being played out, and the stakes, at a grim guess, were himself!

He swung one foot out of bed, followed it with the other, and stood up. Yes; he was still a bit weak! His legs felt somewhat wobbly—but he wasn't a paralytic by a very long way—not so weak but that he could get a look at the roisterers whose shouts and laughter now rang loud through the partitions, and obtain, besides, an idea of the place he was in. Also it might be possible to secure a weapon. He approved of that latter idea with a hard smile.

And then another thought came to him, and he sat down suddenly on the edge of the bed. Yes—why not? The chances were a hundred to one that the bag around his neck had already been noticed, therefore its contents would certainly be safer somewhere else! He could hit on some hiding-place for the map easily enough. Furthermore, carrying out this idea, there were some sovereigns and a little wad of five-pound notes in his trousers pocket, his sole salvage from the wreck of the *Orissa*, and by transferring these to the bag in place of the map, they would furnish a most excellent reason for the very existence of the bag itself.

He loosened the top of the bag on its drawstring and extracted the folded piece of paper from within—Yu Ling Chen's legacy to Wolfson, Wolfson's legacy to him, the partial map of the Mandarin's Hoard. He opened it out to look at it again in the moonlight—and then, white-faced, he sat rigid. A bead of cold sweat started to his forehead and glistened, then another.

He held a blank piece of paper in his hands!

CHAPTER III
A RACE FOR LIFE

TOO late!

Kennard laughed now, low, anxiously, mirthlessly. The bag had not only been *noticed*—it had been opened, the map taken, and a piece of paper substituted.

By whom? Grieg?

He had found Grieg bending over him. But it couldn't have been Grieg who had taken the map. He, Kennard, had roused instantly from an intuitive sense of the man's presence in the room. Grieg could have had no time in which to open the bag.

Kennard's hands clenched suddenly, crumpling the piece of paper. The ugly inference from Grieg's warning, unwilling though he was to accept it, was gradually forcing itself upon him. It had been done that morning—that morning when unconsciousness had made of him an easy prey.

Aldeth Moore's face, the brown smiling eyes, came before him—*could* it be? Had Grieg told no more than the miserable truth? No; he would not believe it—not yet, not until there was *proof*.

He set his mind to grapple with the problem that confronted him. Obviously, it was more imperative than ever that he should investigate his surroundings. They were not through with him yet, for there was still the location of the treasure; and his having been in possession of the map would lead them naturally to credit him with knowing the whereabouts of the Mandarin's Hoard. He smiled grimly at the thought, as he smoothed out the paper, folded it, and replaced it in the bag. Well, then, his safest play on that count, while awaiting developments, was to pretend ignorance of his loss, wasn't it?

Dressed, he tied the laces of his boots together, slung the boots around his neck, and, walking very slowly and cautiously, crossed the room to the door leading into the next apartment. Like his own, it was flooded with soft, white moonlight which enabled him to see distinctly enough. It was evidently the trader's private room—whoever the trader might prove to be! A cot was in one corner, a desk in another, while a table and a couple of basket lounging chairs stood in the center; and—yes, what he needed more than anything else just at the moment—a bottle of some sort of liquor was

on the table. He stepped quickly forward, picked up the bottle and raised it to his lips. It was brandy. The stimulant coursed through his body like fire, bringing him new life and strength.

From the next room beyond came the voices he had heard before. He could even distinguish some of the words now—enough to indicate that the occupants of the room were playing cards; and, from the noise they made, he decided that the party must consist of at least seven or eight men. He looked around him again. Here, in this room there was a French window like his own that gave on the veranda, and another opposite through which he glimpsed white sand and a dark mirror-like surface of water beyond; both windows were wide open.

As the latter exit would be less likely to result in discovery, he started toward it—but, his eye catching the glint of metal, he turned abruptly aside to a wash-stand at one side of the window that he had not noticed before. On the top of the wash-stand amongst a litter of shaving utensils lay a revolver, and, beside it, a box of cartridges. The next instant the cartridges were in his pocket, and the revolver was in his hand.

Kennard's spirits rose. Momentarily, at least, his weakness was gone, and the touch of the cold steel thing he held was like the reassuring handclasp of a friend. He looked out of the window. No moving thing was in sight; no sounds came to him, save those from within the house itself. He stepped out through the window; and from there to the stretch of white sand. And now, walking clear of the darkened end of the house past his own room to where he could obtain a general survey of his surroundings, he sat down to husband his strength while he looked about him. A low, dark, thatched building, evidently a combination of storehouse and barracks for the native helpers, lay directly ahead of him, paralleling the beach as did the house itself. The beach stretched away for perhaps a hundred yards to where, drawn up at the water's edge, were a number of boats. Out in the lagoon, riding lights twinkled from two vessels at anchor—both schooners, from what he could see of the shadowy outline of their masts and rigging. These, then, probably accounted for the presence of Aldeth Moore and her brother on the island, and likewise for the unusual number of men in the trading-station, whose ordinary quota would be the head trader and, at most, two assistants.

Kennard now turned his attention inland. The trees and foliage that he had seen through the window when lying in his room loomed like a dense black wall before him, but the trees were much closer to the house than he had thought—unless in the shimmering moonlight the distance was deceptive. Fifty yards away at the outside, he placed them. The house itself

was long and narrow, except at the far end where it was built out L-shaped facing the barracks, and here a veranda, with bamboo uprights like the one at the rear, filled in the triangle thus formed. There was nothing else to be seen from where he sat.

He got up then, and stole around to the landward side of the house. Halfway down the length of the building, a light streamed out from one of the open doorlike windows, and played across the low veranda that was raised scarcely more than a foot from the level of the ground. And here, protected by the shadows of the house and just on the edge of the path of light, Kennard halted. The view into the interior was unobstructed.

It was a large room, but it was crowded. Under the big, hanging-lamp in the center, that solely, but inadequately, illuminated the apartment, seven men, dressed in cotton trousers and collarless shirts open at the neck, sat at a round table playing cards and drinking. Across from these in the farther corner four other men were evidently engaged at bridge. But, at times, as Kennard watched, he saw the seven and the four cast frequent and speculative glances at still two other men, also playing cards, who were seated alone by the window near which he stood.

Grieg, whiskered, short, stocky, aggressive of feature, was one of the two; the other, slim, hollow-cheeked, with an unpleasant sneering cast of countenance, an expression enhanced now by a face flushed with heat and an intemperate consumption of Scotch and soda, Kennard recognized at once, both from the sight he had had of him at the boat, and from Grieg's terse, graphic description—"her thin-faced brother, Tom."

These two played in a desultory fashion—but they talked constantly in low tones. Kennard, shoeless, stepped upon the veranda noiselessly and drew close against the wall. This hid Grieg and Moore from him—but he could hear.

"I can't say I like the lot, or the idea of their being here," said Moore.

"A trader keeps open house," replied Grieg. "How else would he do business? One schooner, or every schooner in the islands at once, it's all the same—open house. So I keep open house. What difference does that make?"

So Grieg was either the owner or the agent of the trading-station of Kao-Lon—Kennard stowed away that bit of information as he continued to listen.

"It wouldn't make any, I suppose," said Moore, "if Wolfson hadn't turned up the way he did."

"Wolfson turned up—dead," returned Grieg in what seemed a slightly wearied tone. "What do *they* know about Wolfson?"

"They know about that cursed advertisement Simmons nosed out of a year-old paper yesterday, don't they? And they heard him go on gassing for an hour afterward on Wolfson's life and biography, and—"

"Doesn't connect *you*, does it?" Grieg cut in. "You ought to be thankful to Simmons; you'd never have known what you do now, else."

A noisy burst of mingled laughter and curses from the seven at the large table drowned out the two men's voices for a minute.

Kennard was vainly trying to piece together what he had heard. Grieg had warned him against Moore, and yet Grieg and Moore had very evidently something regarding this selfsame thing in common.

What did it mean?

And then, suddenly, at the next words, when their voices became audible again, he caught his breath.

"Of course, this chap Kennard, or whatever his name is, knows the longitude"—it was Moore speaking—"but trust Aldeth for wheedling that out of him, and then—" A short, nervous laugh ended his sentence.

Kennard's fists closed fiercely—one over the revolver that for the moment he had forgotten was still clutched in his hand.

Aldeth! He laughed to himself bitterly. Here was the *proof* he wanted. Aldeth! Well, why not? What did he know of her—men had been betrayed by entrancing brown eyes and a pretty face before! He was not the first!

He moved a little back from the wall, keeping carefully in the shadow. He wanted to *see* their faces, Grieg's and Moore's! Moore's wore a nasty self-complacent smile; Grieg was running his fingers scissors-fashion through his beard, and, eyes narrowed, was nodding his head slowly.

Kennard had learned much—and little!

What puzzled him was Grieg's hand-in-glove attitude toward Moore, and now presumably toward Aldeth too, after warning him against them both—a warning that it was only too evident had not been an idle one.

But what was Grieg's game? And what was—?

The questions began to come in an endless chain. One led to another, and all of them—to a blank wall! A sense of danger, imminent and closing fast around him, was upon him. What was *his* play? Go back to his bed, and, forewarned, watch and wait and trust to luck, or—what? What! What else was there to do? His strength had only partially come back to him—it was the excitement and the brandy that was keeping him up now. There seemed to be nothing for it but to risk his bed again.

But his eyes had never left the two men. Their game was finished. Grieg was figuring on a piece of paper. And now he put down his pencil and shoved the result across to Moore. Moore glanced at it and scowled, but put his hand into his trousers pocket. The others in the room were still casting curious glances at the two. Moore was apparently well supplied with funds, for the pocketbook which he produced bulged fatly. He opened it with rather bad grace and jerked savagely at a crammed-in wad of English bank-notes. They came loose suddenly—and with them a piece of paper which fluttered to the floor. Folded once, it opened as it fell; and, with a sharp ejaculation, Moore reached for it—an instant too late!

A hoarse cry rang out involuntarily from Kennard's lips. He had obtained no more than a glimpse of the paper; but that glimpse had seared its two black, zigzag, converging lines upon his brain. His map! The stolen map! The map of the Mandarin's Hoard! His mind had sensed it all in a lightning flash. The cry was still on his lips as he sprang forward full into the line of light.

"You thief!" he yelled, and flung himself in a plunging dive at the table—at Moore, unbalanced, leaning over in his chair.

There was a crash; the table tottered, careened, and went over. Moore pitched backward and sprawled on the floor.

A snatch at the paper, and it was in Kennard's hands; another instant, and he was on his feet again and the map was in his pocket.

Grieg jumped forward, but promptly fell back with an oath as Kennard shoved the revolver muzzle between the other's eyes. A wild din was in the room; cries, shouts, chairs pushed back, as the men from the tables made a sudden rush. But a savage joy, the joy of primal conflict, possessed Kennard now—and he laughed aloud. Weak! His strength was as the strength of ten!

"I'm called a good shot"—he hardly realized that it was his own voice, the cold, even, deadly ring in it was at utter variance with the turmoil of passion that surged within him—"and the first man that moves a step nearer —*drops*!"

It checked them, halted them, the steady sweep of the levelled arm; but it would be only for a moment—Kennard knew that well enough. He backed through the window to the veranda. Grieg was barely an arm's length away; Moore was still upon the floor, his face full of convulsive fury. Then the revolver in Kennard's hand roared. There was a spurt of flame, the tinkle of splintering glass—darkness. His bullet had found the lamp unerringly. Once and once again he fired in swift succession at the ceiling to disconcert and confuse them; and then there came, so quick as to be almost coincident with

his own last shot, the report of another shot—and a blinding flash was in his eyes, and hot powder singed his face, while a scream of pain rang in his ears! He turned and ran.

Along the veranda to the end of the house, onto the sand, his eyes strained toward the black fringe of trees, he raced—a fair mark in the moonlight, once they in turn had gained the end of the house—but there was no other way to run.

Fifty yards! Could he do it before they saw him? He used to do the hundred in close to ten seconds flat in the old days—half of ten was five. He stumbled. He was not so strong after all! He was weak, weak, weak, pitifully weak!

Sweat stood out upon him. He recovered himself and reeled forward. Like the howls of a wolf-pack, a burst of yells rose from behind him. He heard the running tread of many feet along the veranda, and—yes, that was next, what he had feared and expected—but it had missed him. Not by much, though—the drumming hum of the bullet sung close to his ears. He clenched his teeth.

If he could only win to the trees, there was the wooded land beyond and a chance that he might escape in the darkness. Perhaps he had acted rashly, on impulse, on the spur of the moment; perhaps he should have bided his time once he knew where the map was—but who acts always unprompted by impulse, always with cold-blooded equanimity!

Anyway, right or wrong, all that was too late now. A blaze of shots rang out—perhaps his staggering, uncertain gait had saved him. No; not altogether—a sharp pain, followed by a numbed sensation was in his left arm.

A voice that he recognized as Grieg's bawled suddenly over the tumult:

"Get him alive! He can't run far—he's all in!"

Ten yards more, just ten yards—nine—eight—the old sick swimming giddiness was in his head again. They were gaining on him fast, covering five yards to every one of his. Two yards more—he could hear the panting breath of the foremost pursuer. To turn and fire was to have them *all* upon him; and there was only a yard now, *one* yard more, and— A hand closed heavily upon his shoulder with an iron grip.

A fierce, twisting, backward wrench spun Kennard around and pitched him to his knees—but the next instant a vicious spit of flame leaped from the trees, and the man, with a yell, let go of Kennard's shoulder to grab at his own.

The rest, strung out behind, stopped dead in their tracks.

"Quick!" cried a voice. "Quick—here, to your right!"

Kennard threw himself forward, and, as he plunged and fell face downward amongst the undergrowth, some one spoke with a low, hard laugh:

"They'll think twice before they try another rush in the dark, and—"

But for the second time since morning Kennard's senses had left him.

CHAPTER IV
THE OTHER MAN

HOT, fiery liquid was burning his throat. Some one was holding a flask to his lips. Kennard sat up. It was pitch dark.

"A flesh wound in your arm, barely grazed the skin," said a guarded voice. "I risked a match to look at you. We'll have to put a mile or two between us and the trading-station before daylight."

"Give me your flask again," mumbled Kennard. He remembered now. They had chased him; one of them had caught him, and then— "You," he blurted out suddenly, "who are you?"

"Never mind that now," replied the other. "Introductions will keep. They're checked for a few minutes; but we've got to move in a hurry. Are you fit?"

Kennard, by way of answer, handed back the flask, unslung his boots from around his neck, and began to put them on. A babel of excited voices, English mixed with native cries, came from somewhere not far away. Through the trees he caught a glimmer of light from the trading-station; he was still therefore just within the edge of the woods where he had thrown himself. He tied the last lace, and groped about him.

"Your revolver?" inquired his companion. "Here it is. You had a grip like death on it."

"Thanks," murmured Kennard, as he staggered slowly to his feet.

"Look here!" said the other sharply. "Are you hit anywhere besides in the arm?"

"No," Kennard answered. "It isn't that. I've been six days adrift in an open boat, and I'm beastly weak."

"Oh!"—the ejaculation came with a low whistle. "By Jove, that's bad business! I don't know what they were hounding you down for, but my winging one of them won't make them any the more angelic. All they're waiting for is to get the natives out of the barracks—they'd rather risk them than their own skins for a starter—and then they'll drive them in here to beat the bush. Can you—"

"If I can't, you can," interposed Kennard quietly. "You've risked enough to-day."

"Oh, no," said the other coolly. "When I sit in, I play out the hand and take the draw as I get it."

"Your luck's poor to-night then, I'm afraid," responded Kennard grimly. "I ought to be among the discards. Go ahead! I'm not all in yet by a hanged sight, and if you don't go too fast, I'll—"

Grieg's voice, bull-like, roaring orders in pidgin English, and followed by a burst of native chatter, cut Kennard short.

"Come on!" rapped out the other tersely—and taking Kennard's arm headed into the woods.

The hours that followed till dawn were as a long, interminable space of time to Kennard in which little save utter weariness was concrete. Long spells of rest there were, and miles—thousands of miles, it seemed, they covered—now stumbling against tree-trunks, bruising arms and legs; now tripping in the undergrowth; now forcing their way through thick, damp vegetation; now in an open space; now descending; now climbing. At times, cries, a halloo repeated and repeated, now far, now near, as though transmitted from man to man along a wide-flung line reached them; at times utter silence. But always spells of rest—delicious moments from which the other would inexorably arouse him, and they would go on again.

And now, at the first gray tinge of light, Kennard was hanging limply to the other's shoulders, his face chalky, his hair tumbling and straggling into his eyes. They had stopped before what looked like a huge cleft in the rocks, or like a cave—Kennard neither knew nor cared which, so that there was no farther to go. They had come abruptly through a screen of trees and this dark opening was before them, that was all he knew.

But suddenly he straightened up with a quick jerk, and one hand went to his pocket and wrenched out the revolver—a Chinaman had appeared from nowhere in front of him. So they hadn't given Grieg's devils the slip after all! Well—

His hand was forced sharply down, and his companion laughed:

"What a fire-eater you are! But I really can't let you shoot Louie. Here, Louie, help me get him to bed."

When Kennard awoke from a protracted sleep he was stiff and sore and ravenously hungry. He called for food, and while Louie, the Chinaman who answered his summons, went to prepare it, Kennard looked about him curiously. He was unquestionably in a cave. He laughed suddenly. What next? Wolfson's tale had certainly been a magical "open sesame" to a sequence of events that had crowded upon him with bewildering and none too pleasant persistency. What next? He had met a very beautiful girl whom

he wished now with all his soul he had not met, been warned that his life was in danger, been robbed of his map, had discovered it in the possession of the girl's brother from whose lips he had learned of her further meditated treachery, had secured the map again, had made a very narrow escape thanks to some person unknown, and he was now—in a cave! Oh, yes, very decidedly, what next?

Louie was back again. Kennard ate the portion the other brought—it seemed a very meager portion—and asked for more.

"Too much all same time not good," pronounced Louie gravely.

"Oh!" said Kennard; then abruptly: "Where's your master?"

The Chinaman pointed to the roof of the cave.

"Him upstairs on watch out," he replied. "Me get him—by and by you eat some more, plenty, all can eat. Savvy?"

Louie's blouse fluttered and disappeared. Kennard again gave his attention to his surroundings. It was certainly a very light, airy, commodious and comfortably furnished cave!—it pleased him to be a little facetious. He was lying on a cot, and there was another along the same side of the wall nearer the entrance. There was a table, too, a folding affair, with a curious assortment of things upon it—a sextant, parallel rulers, dividers—in short, a complete navigator's outfit; and, thumb-tacked on a board, a drawing of some kind appeared to be in progress.

A shadow crossed the entrance of the cave, and he looked around. A black-eyed man of dogged, stubborn, though not unpleasant expression, tall, muscular, and well-built, sturdy and rugged in appearance, for all of the gray beard and hair that stamped him as well past middle life, came briskly toward the cot.

"Well, how goes it?" greeted the other pleasantly. "You've slept the clock around, and Louie says you wanted to eat our stock out—that's a good sign. Better, stronger, beginning to feel fit, eh?"

"I am," said Kennard, "and I've you to thank—"

"Rubbish!" interposed the other gruffly. "I wasn't going to stand by and see a man shot down like a dog without lifting a finger to help him, was I? No"—as Kennard was about to speak—"no, of course, I don't know what you've been up to, but"—he laughed a little grimly—"I know *Grieg*—and that's enough to clear *your* slate. But now we'll talk it out, and, to begin with, my name's Gilcreast."

For a numbed instant Kennard lay still, then he came suddenly bolt upright on the cot, and strained forward, staring in a fascinated way at the other.

"Gilcreast!" he repeated hoarsely. "Gilcreast!" He reached out and grasped the other's arm fiercely. "What's the rest of your name—your *full* name?" he demanded excitedly.

"Howard Cheever Gilcreast"—in astonishment. "What's the matter with you, man?"

Kennard gazed at the other without a word. His hand brushed backward and forward across his forehead in a quick, nervous fashion. He saw Wolfson again huddled against the thwart in the open boat; he heard Wolfson speaking again: "Howard Cheever Gilcreast—say it over after me so that you will remember it." And Gilcreast was the man standing before him! What next? What trick and turn of fate was next? Was he—?

"What's the matter with you, man?" iterated Gilcreast sharply.

Then Kennard laughed low, unnaturally, as he pulled himself together.

"Maybe I'm mad, or dreaming, or still delirious," he said. "I'm hanged if I know! Things have come so fast since they started that I can't make head or tail of anything, except that everybody I've run up against since this morning, or yesterday, or whenever it was that I reached this island, is mixed up with the Mandarin's Hoard."

Gilcreast stepped back as though he had been struck.

"The Mandarin's Hoard!" he exclaimed. "What do you know of the Mandarin's Hoard?"

"Just this," cried Kennard, "that if you are Howard Cheever Gilcreast, then you and I are—but wait, wait!—we're both excited. Let's take it coolly. Now! Two years ago Yu Ling Chen gave half the map to Wolfson, the captain of the *Orissa*, who picked him up at sea after his escape from the expedition that was sent against him—"

"Yu Ling Chen was executed at Shanghai," interrupted Gilcreast.

"No; he died on the *Orissa*."

"Good Lord!" ejaculated Gilcreast. "Go on! Go on!"

"And Wolfson gave that half to me."

"Yes, yes!"

Both men, in spite of Kennard's admonition, were growing even more excited than before. Kennard spoke eagerly, quickly, almost running his words together. Gilcreast's interjections came like the sharp report of small-arms.

"And the other half of the map," said Kennard, "Yu Ling Chen gave to you. But Wolfson could never find you."

"Yes, yes!"

"Well, the *Orissa* was wrecked last week. Five of us got off in one cutter. Three died after four days. Wolfson died before we ran ashore here. I was off my head by that time. They took me to the trading-station—and stole my map from me."

"Stole your map!" The words came from Gilcreast like a groan.

"But I got it back, curse them!" Kennard shook a clenched fist in the air. "That's what they were after me for when you took a hand."

"You got it back? You've got it now?" demanded Gilcreast feverishly.

"Yes!" Kennard flung out the single word with fierce exultation.

"Then here, look! See!" Gilcreast caught Kennard's shoulder, pulled him from the cot, and half-dragged him toward the table. "Man, we're rich! The treasure's ours. It's *here*!"

"Here!" echoed Kennard. "What do you mean?"

"I mean here—*on this island*."

"Impossible!" Kennard flung out. "How do you know? You had only the latitude."

"I tell you *yes*—here!" Gilcreast's fist came down upon the table. "Never mind about the latitude. I *know*. The treasure lies somewhere on a line drawn due northeast from the entrance of this cave to the shore. You know the idol, the point of intersection? Well, that's all we want—and you've got it."

"Yes!" Kennard fairly shouted the word in his excitement.

Gilcreast, worked up to an even higher pitch, shouted back at him, pounding constantly on the table.

"Here"—indicating it on the table—"is my original half of the map, with the distances and compass directions of the left-hand line; and here"—pointing to the drawing-board—"I've drawn it on a larger scale. I've checked it out on the island itself. The straight line that forms my side of the triangle and runs to the idol begins at the opening of this cave. You have—"

"Yes," yelled Kennard. His face was flushed, eager; he fumbled in his pocket. "I've got the figures and distances on the right-hand line. You've got the left. Two halves make a whole. Here it is—see!"

He jerked the map from his pocket, and spread it upon the table.

Gilcreast bent over it eagerly—closer—a gray pallor began to creep into his face—a startled cry came from his lips.

Kennard, as though turned to stone, stood rigid, staring wildly at the map he had just placed upon the table.

It was identical with the one already there—*not a figure showed on the right-hand line!*

CHAPTER V
GILCREAST'S STORY

FOR a long minute neither man spoke. Their faces blank, drawn, strained, they looked into each other's eyes.

"What does it mean?" stammered Kennard at last. "I *know* my map had the figures on the right-hand line. I know it, I tell you! I might have been pretty well all in when Wolfson told me the story, and gave me the map; but I remember what he said—that only half of the map was there, the right-hand half; and I remember, too, that there wasn't a mark on the left-hand line. *This isn't my map!*"

Gilcreast suddenly picked up both maps and examined them critically. He laid them back on the table presently, a curious expression on his face.

"No," he said, trying to infuse calmness into his voice, "this isn't your map. There's a schooner, a pearler, with a hard crowd on her, that's been at anchor in the lagoon for a week past, and there's another schooner that came in a few days ago. I went down last night to try and find out who was on the second schooner—that's how I happened to be on hand when they came after you."

"What's that got to do with this?" demanded Kennard impatiently.

"A lot," said Gilcreast, "if I'm not mistaken. I didn't find out last night who had come in on that schooner, but I think I know now. Do you know?"

"I'm not sure," Kennard answered, "but I imagine that a young fellow and his sister came in on her."

"Yes," said Gilcreast slowly; "that's what I thought. I'm beginning to see a little light—Wah Fang never made port; he must have been lost."

"Wah Fang?" repeated Kennard. "Who's Wah Fang?"

"Wait!" said Gilcreast. "When you got this map, it was in the possession of the young fellow you speak of, wasn't it?"

Kennard stared blankly.

"Yes!" he exclaimed. "How did you know?"

"And when your map was stolen from you," went on Gilcreast, "it was stolen by Grieg, eh?"

"No." Kennard shook his head. "I think you're wrong there. I can't prove it, but I believe it was the girl who took it."

"Aldeth! Nonsense, man!" said Gilcreast sharply.

"You know her name!" ejaculated Kennard.

"Yes," said Gilcreast quietly. "Aldeth Moore is my niece. Tom Moore is my nephew."

Kennard smiled feebly.

"It isn't a shock," he said. "Nothing's a shock any more—I've had too many of them. If you told me Westminster Abbey or the New York Aquarium was around the corner from the cave here, I wouldn't be surprised. I'm sorry, Gilcreast; but upon my soul, just the same, I believe she took my map."

Gilcreast plucked at his beard, and frowned.

"Tell me everything that happened—everything that you can remember," he said abruptly.

Kennard told him.

"It was that scoundrel Grieg," announced Gilcreast decisively, when Kennard had concluded. "Grieg stole your map—*and he's got it now!* This one that you took from Tom, thinking that it was your own, is a duplicate of mine that I made myself. I recognized it as soon as I began to examine it. That's how I knew who your 'young fellow and his sister' were."

"I don't understand," said Kennard. "You appear to know Grieg, since you say he is a scoundrel, but you evidently have no dealings with the trading-station, for, from what you say, you didn't know before that your nephew and niece were on the island; you live here queerly enough in a cave, and—no, I'm dashed if I understand a blessed thing about anything!"

"Well," said Gilcreast, "you will in a moment. Half of the treasure, if we ever get it, belongs to you now—and you've a right to know everything. I'm afraid my nephew has—" He stopped, pulled at his beard, and looked at Kennard uneasily. "I'm afraid we are in for trouble," he ended bluntly.

Kennard sat down on the cot.

"I'm beginning to get used—to trouble," he remarked dryly.

Gilcreast pulled a folding camp-stool near the cot and seated himself facing Kennard.

"Listen, then," he said earnestly. "As I said, you've a right to know, and I'm going to tell you. My end of it goes back farther than yours, or Wolfson's—back to eight years ago. Yu Ling Chen was a mandarin, and a powerful one then in the province of Kwangsi, which borders, as you know, the Gulf of Tonkin; and I was American consul at the port of Pakhoi, a town of about twenty thousand inhabitants. That's the way I came to know Yu

Ling Chen first. He did me more than one good turn; in fact, we were fairly thick, as the English say. Maybe you remember the uprising in Kwangsi, and maybe you don't—there've been so many of them here and there in the land of the dragon that any single one, unless you've had a hand in it yourself, is likely to be forgotten. Anyway, it was bloody enough and fierce enough while it lasted, and, at first, the government got the worst of it; afterward, of course, they got the upper hand and executed the rebels wholesale. Well, to make a long story short, Yu Ling Chen was the head and front of the revolutionary movement, but for friendship's sake, and at the risk of trouble with my own government, and my head with the Chinese authorities, I hid him in my house when things looked pretty desperate for him, and finally managed to effect his escape with the help of a coasting skipper that I knew. The next I heard of him he was making things sizzle in the Archipelago. Three years after that I was recalled to the States and given a government position in New York. I was still with the government, you see, so it was easy for Yu Ling Chen to trace me where Wolfson afterward failed. One evening in New York, a Chinaman—the Wah Fang I spoke of—came to my hotel and gave me my map and latitude. I couldn't make anything out of it, of course, and I couldn't get anything out of Wah Fang. 'Sent by Yu Ling Chen. Mabbe some day Yu Ling Chen him die, then you see,' was all he would say."

Kennard drew up his knees, wrapped his arms around them, and laughed suddenly.

"It strikes me," he said, "that Yu Ling Chen was no fool; and, apart from his piracy, must have been a decent sort. I see it now. He wanted to repay you for saving his life, but he did not want any one—even you—to know where the treasure was then; so he sent you half the map, keeping the other half to send you when he died, or to give to some one else who might do him a good turn, as, in fact, it so turned out with Wolfson. The only objection I can see to his plan from your standpoint is that it was a case of waiting until he died, and I don't imagine he was a much older man than you, eh?"

"No," said Gilcreast with a queer smile, "he was younger. But wait! In my mail the morning after Wah Fang's visit was a notification from the bank where I did what little banking business I had to do in those days, informing me that fifty thousand dollars had been deposited to my credit."

"Great Arabian Nights!" ejaculated Kennard weakly.

"I didn't lose much time in getting to the bank," said Gilcreast whimsically, "though my heart was in my mouth all the time for fear it was a mistake. But it wasn't any mistake. The money was there right enough. A

Chinaman answering Wah Fang's description, and who refused to reply to any questions, had deposited it in cash the day before."

Kennard nodded his head.

"From Yu Ling Chen, of course," he said; then in sudden excitement: "Great Scott, Gilcreast, if he had fifty thousand dollars to spare *then*, what's the size of this treasure, the Mandarin's Hoard, *now*?"

"I've gone through something in the last eight months trying to find out," Gilcreast answered grimly. "But let me finish. I had been in New York about a year when this happened—four years you see, after the Kwangsi uprising—and the money to me was, I imagine, something like what the unlocking of the door must be to a caged bird. There wasn't anything ahead in the government service so far as I could see, and, besides, I had no great liking for it; combined with this, there had always been a germ of wanderlust in my make-up and I was longing for the Orient again. I resigned. Things turn out curiously sometimes. I had no definite plans except to go back first to China, where the only relatives I had were living in Canton—this niece and nephew of mine. Their father had married my sister, but she had died when Aldeth was hardly more than a baby. At San Francisco I received a cablegram from Tom, forwarded on after me from New York, saying that his father was dead. This, of course, did not change my immediate plans, for I was on my way to them then; but it decided the course of the next year for me. Robert Moore had made me his executor. He was an important export merchant and fairly wealthy. Tom was not quite of age. I lived with them that year, attending to the affairs of the estate until Tom reached his majority, when I turned it over to him and was free again. And now I come to Grieg. It was during that year that I met him, and I must confess that at first I liked him. He was young, apparently open, square and aboveboard, owned a trading schooner, which he sailed himself, and seemed to be doing well. He and Tom were great cronies, and he was at the house often. It sometimes struck me that he had a liking for Aldeth. As Aldeth was still only sixteen years old, and I thought well of Grieg then, I was quite satisfied to let the future in that respect take care of itself. And so, when Grieg was ashore, he became practically one of the family, and—"

"That's how he found out about the map," supplied Kennard.

"Yes," said Gilcreast, "that's how he found out, for I trusted him just as I did Aldeth and Tom; though, for that matter, there wasn't so much to trust any of them with. I could only guess at what the map meant, and, of course, I didn't know the location myself, except the latitude—and I never said anything about that on account of Tom. He was inclined to be a little rattle-brained and reckless, and with anything like that to fire his imagination he

would just as likely as not have run off on a wild-goose chase that could have resulted in nothing but the throwing away of a considerable sum of money—which he got rid of, as it was, a little more freely than I liked. You understand, of course, that after a while the matter fell more or less into oblivion. Naturally I thought of it every now and then, but that was all. 'Mabbe some day Yu Ling Chen die, then you see'—that was the crux of it, and I let it go at that. Yu Ling Chen wasn't dead—he was still setting a lively pace in the Archipelago. Well, the affairs of the estate settled up, I let the wanderlust have its fling—Southern China, Siam, India, back by Thibet, took a shot at the Great Gobi Desert, and ended up in Peking after a two years' trip. And there in Peking I heard that Yu Ling Chen had been executed the year before in Shanghai. Do you wonder that Wolfson didn't find me the first year after he got his half of the map? Well, you'll see in a minute why he didn't find me during this past year, either. Things, as I said before, turn out curiously. I hadn't been in Peking a day when I met Wah Fang. Coming on top of the news of Yu Ling Chen's execution I thought, of course, Wah Fang had purposely sought me out to give me a final message from Yu Ling Chen that would clear up everything—supply the missing longitude and all that, you know. Instead, he was a fugitive himself—one of the few who had escaped from the attack on Chen's stronghold. Yu Ling Chen had given him no other message for me, but there was something Wah Fang *did* know—and in the pipe-house of a friend of his we talked all that night. Briefly, what he said was something like this: Each year after Yu Ling Chen first went to the Archipelago, and in later years more frequently, he made trips away from his stronghold in a large proa and would be gone sometimes three, sometimes four weeks, taking with him each time the cream of the year's pickings, which was always packed in small bundles or cases—one-man loads, you understand? The same men never went with him twice. Wah Fang had been on one of these trips. It had taken them two weeks to reach their destination, which proved to be an island that, though of considerable size, he was quite sure was uninhabitated. On their arrival there, they landed the cargo on the beach where it was left until nightfall; then in the darkness, so that no man among them knew where he was going, the crew picked up the loads, and, led by Yu Ling Chen, carried them a distance inland. There the loads were left in a pile on the ground, the crew was taken back to the proa, and Yu Ling Chen returned inland alone. He remained away two days, then came down to the proa again and they sailed back."

"Yu Ling Chen must have had his work cut out to get away with all that year after year," commented Kennard, in a puzzled tone. "Didn't it strike you that way?"

"It did—and still does," Gilcreast answered. "It's just one more of the baffling features of it all—that's the only explanation I've got. Well, I dare say you can guess at the result of my confab with Wah Fang. He didn't know where the island was, but it was a moral certainty that I had the latitude of it. He was equally certain that he would recognize the island again if he saw it. It resolved itself, therefore, into the problem of running down every island on that latitude within a distance of nine hundred miles maximum from Yu Ling Chen's old stronghold, whose position, since the capture, was, of course, a matter of common knowledge."

"Nine hundred?" queried Kennard.

"Yes; we figured it this way. On the trip Wah Fang had made it had taken two weeks to get there. Granting an average rate of four knots, which would allow for light breezes and calms, it would give a total of thirteen hundred and forty-four knots for fourteen days. Half of that, perhaps more, would be consumed in tacking—to be absolutely on the safe side we allowed two-thirds of the total as representing the crow-line distance covered by Yu Ling Chen's proa—roughly nine hundred miles. I could trust Wah Fang implicitly; which was, in fact, the prime factor in my decision to make the attempt—a man who would fulfill a trust of carrying fifty thousand dollars across the Pacific and the American continent didn't need any further recommendation. We went to Tien-Tsin on the Pei-Ho the next day and fitted out a small schooner. I left that part of it to Wah Fang. He had been a sailor all his life and was a good navigator, though I might say, being always fond of mathematics, it wasn't long before I could take an observation myself. He got the stores aboard in short order, but he was four days picking out our crew of fifteen—all Chinamen. He wasn't taking any chances with any one that he wasn't satisfied he could trust. And I'll say this for him, he got together as dependable a lot as ever I'd wish to have at my back in a row—I only wish to the Lord that they were here now! During this time I made the duplicate of my map, marked down the latitude upon it, and sent it, separately sealed, in a letter to my nephew Tom. I told him I was going to try to locate the treasure, and that, mindful of the possibility that something might happen to me, I was sending the map and latitude jointly to Aldeth and himself to do with as they saw fit, if, at the expiration of two years, they had had no word from me—but that, in the meantime, until those two years were up, the sealed envelope was not to be opened, and he was to consider it as simply held in trust. That would have precluded the latitude from being known to him or any one else, you understand? But"—Gilcreast's lips tightened suddenly—"I was a fool, it seems!"

Kennard's brows were drawn into a frown.

"Just a minute!" he said. "The map, providing you did find the island, didn't locate the treasure. I don't see—"

"Because you are looking at it from an entirely different viewpoint," interposed Gilcreast quickly. "You knew that there were two parts to it, but you must remember that we didn't. To us it was the key to Yu Ling Chen's treasure, and though the blank line puzzled us and promised difficulties in store, we believed that, given the island and the starting point"—he placed his finger on the map—"these three trees marked here on the top of the left-hand line—we would be able to work it out eventually once we were on the ground. But running down a given latitude with a sailing vessel is a good deal easier to talk about than it is to do. We were five months at it, and I don't know how many islands we touched at, but it was always the same story. Wah Fang shook his head at each one, and said: 'Not here.' But meanwhile"—Gilcreast leaned suddenly forward—"there was something, or some one, if you like that better, that I *did* run down—Grieg. We were among the islands where he usually did his trading—and if there is any crime a white man could commit in these parts that he hadn't committed, I've yet to hear of it. The natives were afraid of him, and his name was a curse among them; but it wasn't from them alone that I got Grieg's true character—the worst of it came through the missionaries and agents at trading-stations. There's no use going into it—he's a scoundrel and bad to the core. Well, of course, after those five months of it we found this island. Wah Fang recognized it; we located the starting point—the three trees—and we knew we were right. Its longitude is one hundred and twenty-three degrees, forty-five minutes, east."

"One-two-three-four-five. Right!" said Kennard. "And then?"

"Then we worked out the left-hand line and came to this cave—and realized what the blank line meant—that we needed the intersection on the three-mile stretch northeast from the mouth of this cave to the beach. It was like a slap in the face, but we weren't beaten—not until every foot of the three miles had been searched again and again. We talked it over. It meant a long job, and, as the island was uninhabited, it meant, too, many supplies—more than we had. We decided that Wah Fang should go for these, and that I should stay here and make what progress I could, so as not to lose any time. We fitted up this cave and I kept Louie, who was cook aboard the schooner, with me. I don't need to tell you that my work has been absolutely fruitless." He waved his hand toward the drawing-board. "The possibility occurred to me that the map might be drawn to scale. I drew a new map enlarging the original four times, completed the triangle of which the cave and the idol mark two angles, figured out the lengths and compass directions, dug at the

point where the idol according to that reckoning should be, and found—nothing. There wasn't a soul on the island except Louie and myself when Wah Fang went away. A month after he left—he has been gone three now—Grieg came and put up that trading-station, and that has kept me pretty close to the cave here, for, since he knew the story of the map, it would be as good as telling him that the treasure was here, if he saw me or knew of my presence on the island. I don't know what brought Grieg here, but that there's some underhand work in it somewhere is a safe bet. In the last two months, several schooners have called. We've watched them, Louie and I, always on the look-out for Wah Fang—they've been without exception a hard, carousing lot like the present crowd. When there's no schooner in, Grieg lives alone with half a dozen Malay servants. Four days ago a second schooner came in. I'm pretty sure it's the one Grieg owned and used to sail himself. It brought Aldeth and Tom. Why? I don't know. I wish I did. The night before last I found you—the rest you know. Wah Fang should have been back within six weeks at the outside—I've begun to give up hope of him. I'm afraid he has been shipwrecked, for a heavy gale raged here for about a week not long after he went away. Summed up, Tom has betrayed my trust. I sent the map to him, sealed, only to be opened at the end of two years—and barely one has passed. Wolfson's advertisement, your wandering talk of Yu Ling Chen, of the Mandarin's Hoard, of the map, that it was Wolfson who was in the boat, didn't require any advanced mathematics on Grieg's part to put two and two together; and it doesn't require any on my part to figure out who stole your map—it was Grieg."

"Or Tom," supplemented Kennard. "I guess, after all, Aldeth's out of it."

"Grieg," said Gilcreast, with a stubborn intonation. "It was Grieg."

"Well, Grieg or Tom," rejoined Kennard. "I don't see that it makes much difference. It looks to me as though we were in for pretty serious business before we're through, for we'll have Grieg to reckon with anyway."

"You're right there," agreed Gilcreast gravely. "You've got Tom's map, and they've got yours, so they are just where they were before, but Grieg knows you can't get away from the island. He won't give up hunting for you till he gets you alive or dead, for he'd have both parts of the map then." Gilcreast got up from the camp-stool with a sudden nervous jerk, and walked a pace away—only to wheel abruptly and face Kennard again. "What's to be done?" he flashed out. "Here's my own nephew and niece down there with as specious a two-faced scoundrel as ever went unhanged; and I can't trust my nephew, though he's at least a safeguard for Aldeth—"

"*Uncle!*"—a broken cry rang from the entrance.

Kennard came to his feet like a shot.

It was Aldeth Moore, her brown eyes wide with a look in which joy, relief, surprise and terror, all seemed mingled, as she ran now straight to Gilcreast and threw herself into his arms.

"Oh, uncle! Uncle, uncle, uncle!" The words were like a succession of sobs.

"Aldeth!" stammered Gilcreast. "Aldeth!"

She clung still closer to him.

"Oh, if only I had known that you were here!" she cried. "If only I had known! Tom is dead—killed."

"Dead! Killed!" gasped Gilcreast.

"Yes, yes, the night before last when—" She stopped suddenly, and drew back from Gilcreast.

"What is it?" Gilcreast reached out his hand to her. "What is it, Aldeth?"

She was standing erect now, her little figure drawn to its fullest height, the small hands tightly clenched, her face colorless—facing Kennard.

And in her eyes was something Kennard had never seen in a woman's eyes before—a look that lashed him with abhorrence and a passionate fury—but her words, as she pointed at him, were mercilessly cold and even:

"That man is Tom's murderer!"

CHAPTER VI
BLACKER WATERS

BEFORE KENNARD could answer, he saw the entrance to the cave darkened by the forms of five or six Malays—and on the instant two of them sprang upon him. He leaped back instinctively, and, as they struck at him, one went down from a full-arm swing that he landed, with all the strength of his body behind the blow, on the man's chin. And then the others flung themselves upon him. Bewildered, first by the shock of Aldeth's accusation, followed by this sudden attack upon him, he fought simply because the instinct of self-preservation rose dominant within him. They battered at him, clawed at him. He saw Aldeth being drawn hastily clear of the mêlée by Gilcreast—saw Grieg's face loom suddenly in the background. He battled savagely with all his strength—but they were too many for him. He was down now—and while four of them held him pinioned on the ground, the other two quickly bound his arms and legs with rope.

"Regular wildcat!" It was Grieg's voice.

Kennard watched the man walk toward Gilcreast with outstretched hand.

"This isn't very kind of you, Mr. Gilcreast." Grieg's tones were suave now. "You've been here on the island a long time, I should say. Surely you had no reason to keep away from an old friend, and an intimate of the family."

Gilcreast made no offer to take the extended hand.

"We'll talk of that in a minute," he said bluntly. "But first of all we'll have fair play here. What did you attack this man for?"

"You heard Aldeth, didn't you?" returned Grieg coolly. "He shot Tom, and we've been scouring the island for him ever since."

"Because he shot Tom?" snapped Gilcreast sharply.

"Of course!" Grieg's eyebrows went up. "What else? Isn't that enough?"

"Aldeth"—Gilcreast turned to her quickly—"you have accused Kennard of being the one who killed Tom. What is your proof? Is it because Grieg told you so?"

Kennard's eyes fastened on the girl. Her face was full of weariness, full of sadness. The passionate anger was gone from it. She was just a girl again, very troubled, very grief-stricken; and, in spite of the fact that she was

responsible in some measure at least for the perilous situation in which he now found himself, Kennard's heart went out to her in sympathy.

"Tom was able to say so before he died," she answered in a low voice.

"To *you*?" Kennard tried unsuccessfully to struggle into an upright position as he put the question eagerly.

She made no reply, made no movement; it was as though she had not even heard him.

"It is a fair question," said Gilcreast. "Did Tom say that to you, Aldeth?"

"Yes."

The word, low-spoken though it was, seemed to ring and beat upon Kennard's ears as a thousand clamors. He scarcely heard the bark-like, discordant laugh from Grieg.

"And you, Kennard?" demanded Gilcreast. "What have you to say?"

"I've told you my story," said Kennard simply. "I shot no man. I fired a shot at the lamp and put it out, then two more at the ceiling—" He stopped. The other shot! So close to him! The scream of pain! His eyes held suddenly on Grieg. "There was *another* shot!" he said with stern emphasis.

"So there was," Grieg answered sharply. "We are all agreed there were four shots, but the fourth didn't go into either the lamp or the ceiling."

"It was dark then," said Kennard, "and because I fired the first three, Moore thought perhaps I fired the one that struck him." Then to Grieg: "You agree that there were four shots fired?"

"I said so, didn't I?" said Grieg shortly. "There were four shots."

A grim smile settled on Kennard's lips.

"Gilcreast," he said, "thank God I'm lucky enough to be able to prove my innocence out of Grieg's own mouth. Four shots, he said. My revolver is in my coat pocket. Take it out, will you, and look at it?"

"Right!" said Gilcreast with evident relief in his voice.

He stepped up to Kennard, bent down, felt in the pocket, and took out the revolver. He broke it, and emptied out the five chambers of the cylinder.

Four empty shells lay in his hand!

Kennard strained forward, his face white, numbed.

A little cry came from Aldeth.

Gilcreast stared, his jaws clamped, at the damning evidence in his hand.

Grieg spoke.

"I guess that'll do for him for the present," he announced with a short laugh.

"I don't understand this," said Gilcreast slowly. "Untie him anyway, and we'll see if we can't get to the bottom of it."

"No," said Grieg, "we'll leave him the way he is. I very much prefer him like that for a few minutes at least."

"What do you mean?" demanded Gilcreast.

Grieg turned, and motioned his men from the cave. As they filed out, he faced Gilcreast again with a cool smile.

"Some of these fellows understand English, and I never like to play heavier odds than I have to. Afterward, you can do what you like with Kennard as far as I am concerned, *providing* we can all come to a little agreement first. If we can't, why then—" He ended with an expressive lift of his shoulders.

"And what makes you think there should be any difficulty about coming to this agreement, whatever it is?" inquired Gilcreast coldly. "You said you were an old friend and intimate of the family."

"That's just it," rejoined Grieg. "To run upon you here, to find out that you've practically been hiding from me for months, for all I know, looks as though something was up."

Gilcreast suddenly stepped back a pace toward the folding table.

"You're quite right," he said sternly. "Something *is* up, and in plain English, it's this: I know you for what you are—a thoroughbred scoundrel!"

"Really, Mr. Gilcreast!" A quick, scarcely perceptible narrowing of his eyes belied Grieg's tones of hurt expostulation. "That's hitting a man pretty hard, isn't it? I don't know what you mean—there's some mistake somewhere, isn't there?"

"Not much of any," Gilcreast answered evenly. He took another step backward and stood beside the table. "I've just spent five months cruising around your stamping-ground—no, there's not much of any mistake—you're a blot on a white man's name! Wait!" His voice rose in angry imperativeness as Grieg tried to speak. "I know the proposition you have to make. You say you've hounded Kennard down because he shot my nephew, and I say to you, his guilt or innocence apart, that you lie! You want the map he took from Tom; that is the proposition you have to make—and this is my answer." He turned like a flash, snatched at the two small maps upon the table, ripped the large one from the board, and began to tear the three of them into little shreds.

Kennard, expecting a quick leap from Grieg upon the other, stared in perplexity at the trader.

Grieg made no move—only a sardonic smile was upon his lips; then, abruptly, with a sneer, Grieg laughed.

"That's a very good idea, Gilcreast," he said; "you can never tell who might get hold of them, now that they have served their turn. *All we want is the intersection on the three-mile line northeast from the mouth of this cave to the beach, eh?*"

The pieces fluttered from Gilcreast's hands to the ground; the red flush of anger in his cheeks turned to a sudden white.

"You—you know that?" he said hoarsely.

Again Grieg laughed, this time mockingly.

"Yes, I know that. Shall I tell you how? I dare say, too, you're wondering how I got here. Half an hour ago one of my men came to me and told me he had seen a Chinaman perched up on the rocks. It was the first I knew that there was anybody but ourselves on the island. I sent some men around in a détour, and Mr. Chinaman by now is a prisoner at the trading-station. Simple, isn't it? And then we heard your voices, and Aldeth and I crept up to the mouth of the cave. You see, Aldeth insisted on accompanying us each time in the search for her brother's assassin." He leered at Kennard. "She'll tell you I tried to persuade her not to come; it wasn't a woman's work—but I suppose it was a woman's way. However"—he shrugged his shoulders—"I had some difficulty in preventing Aldeth from bursting in at once when she recognized your voice, Gilcreast. I'm afraid I even used a little force to stop her—but your conversation *was* interesting! As it was, her interruption was a little more premature than just suited me; but I heard about that intersection on the three-mile line, all right!"

For a moment there was silence.

Kennard's eyes fixed on Gilcreast. The man's face was working with the passion he could not control—eloquent of what was passing in his mind: The months of hardship, struggle and privation gone for naught—the map that Yu Ling Chen had given to Wolfson, the knowledge that the Mandarin's Hoard was here upon the island, all this in Grieg's possession—the treasure swept from him in a breath!

"So that's it, is it?" Gilcreast choked. "And now you've got what you were after, and you think you've nothing more to do but help yourself to the treasure! Well, you're right, probably, and I was wrong about the proposition you had to make. I see it now! You want to throw me a sop to keep my hands off, but listen to what I say! With Heaven for my witness, as long as I live you'll never get away from this island with it."

"Hard words!" said Grieg coolly enough. "But *you're* hardly in a position to threaten, are you? Also, Gilcreast, you're jumping at conclusions. You'll do better to keep your temper. I haven't got the other map."

"What!" Gilcreast leaned toward Grieg, as though searching the other's eyes for the truth or falsehood of his words; then slowly, numbly, but with an indefinable undertone of relief, like a man to whom an unexpected reprieve has come: "You haven't got the other map?"

Grieg smiled unpleasantly.

"Not yet," he said significantly. "You still haven't heard my proposition. It's not a sop. There's no sense in our flying at each other's throats—I'm willing to work together. Give me the map, and I'll guarantee—"

"Give you the map!" roared Gilcreast, his quick passion roused again. "What game are you trying to work? Give you the map! We haven't got it. If you were listening outside the cave, you know well enough it was taken from Kennard, and that I believe *you* took it. Give you the map! It isn't here!"

"Oh, yes, it is," said Grieg easily. "I know well enough it was taken from Kennard, and that he thought he was getting his own back when he took Tom's. He said 'You thief!' when he jumped in—a child could figure out what that meant. But I didn't take it from him; Tom didn't take it from him—Aldeth did." He wheeled on the girl. "That's right, isn't it, Aldeth? And you've got it now—here!"

But it was Gilcreast who spoke—before she could answer.

"Aldeth, is this true?" he asked uneasily. "Was it you who took the map from Kennard?"

For an instant she did not speak; then her words came quickly, passionately:

"Yes, it is true. I took it from Mr. Kennard that morning when he lay unconscious, and put a blank piece of paper in its place. And I took it"—she faced Grieg steadily—"to save it for him from you; yes, and from my own brother, from Tom." She looked down at Kennard suddenly, and a sweep of color came into her face, though her eyes met his proudly.

"I believe you!" said Kennard simply. The words came spontaneously, involuntarily. Then he bit his lip—she had turned her back on him and was addressing her uncle again:

"A few weeks ago, Captain Harlow of Mr. Grieg's schooner, called on us in Canton, and brought us an invitation from Mr. Grieg to go back on the schooner and visit the trading-station that had just been completed. We knew that Mr. Grieg was building one, for he had spoken of it. Tom was very

anxious to go, and I was too; so we accepted. I tell you this so that you will understand how and why we came to be here. It had nothing to do with—with this other thing. That was just started by one of the men speaking of an advertisement for you, uncle, signed by some one named Wolfson. Then Mr. Kennard came, and the dead man in the boat—Wolfson—and Mr. Kennard talked in his delirium—and then Mr. Grieg began to talk to Tom about your map—and—and I think Tom and Mr. Grieg were both mad. I begged Tom to remember the trust you had placed in him, and not to open that sealed envelope, but he wouldn't listen. In the meantime I was doing what I could for Mr. Kennard, and in his delirium he kept talking of the map in the bag around his neck. It was his and yours, uncle—and to save it I took it. I didn't know how far Tom and Mr. Grieg would go, or how literally they would believe what a man said when he was delirious, so I put a piece of blank paper in the place of the map in order that, if they took the bag, it would look after all as though there was really nothing back of Mr. Kennard's words but a sick man's wandering fancy or hallucination."

"Of course!" said Grieg ingratiatingly. "That's how it all came about. And now, Gilcreast, what do you say? My men know nothing about this. I got that pearler away yesterday morning. We'll share and share alike."

For a long minute Gilcreast looked Grieg in the eyes, the muscles of his face twitching, his lips drooping ominously downward at the corners.

"No!" The word came finally with a sudden roar.

A sullen, vicious look crept into Grieg's face.

"You mean that?" he snarled.

"Aye, I mean it!" Gilcreast shouted. "Share with you! Share with you, you low-lived hound! Sooner than let you get one finger on the treasure, it will stay where it is now—forever! Forever, do you understand?"

"Perhaps *you* don't!" Grieg's tones were measured, deadly—there was no pretense now. "But I'll give you one more chance—for Aldeth's sake. Aldeth and I have always been—"

A quick, startled cry came from the girl. Suddenly, white-lipped, white-faced, she shrank back—and the movement brought her almost to the spot where Kennard lay.

"Quick! For God's sake!" Kennard whispered. "A knife! Cut me loose!"

She had heard him, understood—but she did not move. Kennard turned his head from her with a groan of despair.

Grieg was speaking again, an ugly ring of menace in his voice:

"Very good, Gilcreast—just as you like! Leave Aldeth out of it. It's quite true I ran Kennard down for the map; afterward—I didn't need it until I had

his—I intended to get the other from Aldeth. Naturally I don't now need the one you tore up—but the other one I am going to have! You see the unfortunate position you place me in? I have no choice but to take it now. If you persist in your refusal, you simply force my hand. Your common sense should tell you that the result is inevitable. She has it. I can't give her the opportunity of hiding it, or destroying it, or of turning it over to you. I know where it is now, and, while I know, I'm going to have it—at any cost." His voice rose suddenly. "At any cost, Gilcreast! You say you know me for what I am. If you do, you know that when I say at any cost, I mean—at any cost. You've everything to gain by standing in with me; you'll lose everything if you don't. I make you the offer again, and I'll give you one minute to decide before I call in my men and *take* the map, if you want to play the fool."

Kennard watched the two men feverishly. There wasn't a second to lose—the hard, black look on Grieg's face, the savage, dogged, stubborn fury settling on Gilcreast's, were eloquent enough of imminent trouble.

"Gilcreast," he cried desperately, "cut me loose!"

Grieg laughed raucously.

"Try it!" he sneered.

For an instant Gilcreast hesitated; then he too laughed—mirthlessly.

"There's another way than that," he jerked out. "Aldeth, have you got the map?"

"Yes," she answered in a low, dull tone.

"Then"—Gilcreast took a sudden step nearer Grieg, his eyes blazing, his fists clenched—"I'll show *you*, Grieg, that I mean what I say—at any cost. Tear it up, Aldeth—*quick*!"

Like a madman Kennard strained at the ropes that bound him.

Aldeth's hand had gone to the bosom of her dress. With an oath and a shout for his men, Grieg leaped forward. Gilcreast blocked his way. Grieg hit the other a smashing blow that staggered and swept the older man aside—and the next instant Grieg reached the girl. She had not succeeded yet in getting at the paper. He tore her hands roughly away from her dress. She screamed and fought fiercely—and then Gilcreast, with a maddened roar as he regained his balance, sprang again at Grieg.

Great beads of sweat were upon Kennard's forehead, and the veins of his temples stood out like whip-cords as he writhed and struggled to free himself, heaving until his muscles cracked, putting forth without avail all the strength that was in him—sobbing at his impotency.

A revolver spurted—the report echoed and reverberated through the cave with the detonation of a cannon-shot. The acrid smell of powder was in

Kennard's nostrils. Grieg was forcing Aldeth toward the entrance of the cave. Gilcreast, wounded, reeling, lurching, like a drunken man, clung to the trader, fighting like a tiger, raining blows upon the other—weak blows, for Grieg laughed contemptuously, and did not seem to mind them. And now the cave rang with chorused shouts. Grieg's men dashed upon Gilcreast; but a new strength seemed to have come to the latter, for he flung off his assailants, and, as Grieg thrust Aldeth through the opening and disappeared outside, he sprang after the trader, the others at his heels, their yells and cries making a din infernal.

That was all Kennard saw—the cave was empty—but before him was still the vision of a white, stricken face out of which brown eyes, wide with fear, stared unseeingly.

CHAPTER VII
THUMBS DOWN

THE minutes passed—hours they seemed to Kennard. Voices reached him from outside—men's voices—once Grieg's, but neither Aldeth's nor Gilcreast's. Then there was the sound of a number of men moving off together, heavy-stepped, as though some burden were being carried; and then Grieg entered the cave, and came toward him.

Seething anger, a paroxysm of fury swept upon Kennard at sight of the sneering face. There was no thought of what the other's intentions in regard to himself might be; only a blind rage, a desire to grapple with the man, to strike him down, to crush him as he would a poisonous snake—and the realization of his own impotency made self-torture of his rage. And now Grieg was standing over him, glaring down at him. The man held a piece of paper in one hand—and made no attempt to hide it. Kennard could see it plainly enough—the map. Grieg had taken it, then, from Aldeth!

"You can thank that bull-headed fool Gilcreast for this!" Grieg announced viciously. "It's cost him his life, and I don't see any mark-down price coming to you—you know too much now!"

Kennard's eyes held steadily on Grieg's face, but he made no answer.

"D'ye hear?" snarled Grieg, and there was a curious note of nervous self-justification in his voice. "You know too much—and I've got my own skin to look out for. I'm forced into this. You know too much. I can't keep two prisoners. Aldeth's enough to look after, though"—he laughed brutally, significantly—"she'll—"

"Grieg"—his lips quivering with passion, Kennard rolled suddenly on his side the better to face the trader—"Grieg, I'd give my soul's chances of salvation just to stand free long enough to rid the earth of you—after that it wouldn't matter." Then in a half-cry, half-moan: "God help her!"

"Keep your prayers for yourself," growled Grieg savagely. "You'll need them. What do *you* expect, eh?"

"Nothing!" Kennard flung the word at him. "I know too much—I know that it was *you* who murdered Tom; you've murdered Gilcreast—and now you'll murder me."

"Murder you?" said Grieg, and he laughed again, the same devil's laugh. "Oh, no, you're wrong!" He bent down quickly and examined the knots at

Kennard's wrists and ankles, then straightened up and searched the interior of the cave with his eyes. Presently, with a grunt, he went toward the rear, and came back with a long, stout piece of rope. He fastened one end to a projection of rock and tied the other beneath Kennard's arms. "You're wrong," he said once more. "I'm not going to lay a finger on you—I'm only afraid that if you get to rolling around you might roll outside. There are cliffs and things there, and you might fall over and hurt yourself. I don't want you to do that—even if you do try to shift Tom's murder over on to me. I'm charitable. I'm not going to touch you—I'm going to leave you where you are."

A sudden end, and Kennard had expected neither more nor less, was one thing; but this—! Grieg had made his intentions plain enough—a slow death—days and nights of it! Yes, that brought fear! He closed his eyes; he would not let Grieg see in them that he had faltered. When he opened them again, Grieg was standing at the cave's mouth, looking back at him.

"Good-by, Kennard!" Grieg called jeeringly. "Pray for *yourself*!"

A taunt, a curse, bravado to fling after the man—Kennard choked it back. A poor thing at best—and useless!

Grieg was gone.

The hours wore on, and that day was as the days Kennard had passed with Wolfson in the boat—true, it was cool here, while in the boat there had been pitiless heat, but the mental torment was ever present.

Aldeth! Death for him—a thousand times better that there should be death for her than to be in Grieg's power! He remembered Gilcreast had said that Grieg had once shown a fondness for the girl. And, besides, she also knew too much now for Grieg ever to let her go, ever to let her leave Kao-Lon. "God help her!"—again and again through the day that cry would burst from him.

The treasure of Yu Ling Chen! The Mandarin's Hoard! Gold, blood and death!

Grieg's acts from the first were clear enough now. Grieg hadn't known that Gilcreast was on the island. The pearlers were in ignorance of what his, Kennard's, arrival had meant to Grieg and Tom, and Grieg and Tom had taken good care not to enlighten them. The pearlers had gone now—Grieg had said so. There was only Grieg's schooner, and his own men left. Grieg had meant to secure the treasure for himself—that was what his "warning" had meant that night. Yes, it was clear now! The treasure for himself—to do away with Tom if it turned out that he, Kennard, possessed what they suspected he did. Afterward his, Kennard's, turn would come—he would

follow Tom, and there would be only Aldeth left. And everything he had done that night at the trading-station had been a play straight into Grieg's hands. He had given Grieg the information the other was waiting for before taking any action; and he had given the other, too, the chance, the opportunity, a better one than Grieg could have hoped for, of getting rid of Tom, of firing in the darkness, of letting the blame go elsewhere in the eyes of every man present in the room. The four empty shells—yes, that was clear, too. There could be only one possible explanation. One shot must have been fired already from the revolver, grim trick of fate! when he had picked it up from the wash-stand. That fourth shot—so close to him that the hot powder had singed his face—no one else could have fired it from that position but Grieg.

Gold, blood and death!

The game was Grieg's. A day, two days, three, and Grieg would have worked out the map, and the secret of Yu Ling Chen would be his.

And Aldeth! Always, while Kennard's brain went over and over again with remorseless monotony every happening since he had come to Kao-Lon, knotting the threads together now that it was too late, his mind came back—to Aldeth. Love! He laughed mockingly, bitterly, at himself. But a few hours before he had believed her to be what Grieg had whispered to him she was that night—a thief. And now—love! Love—for a girl he had scarcely seen, for a girl who knew him as her brother's murderer! Love—from a doomed man, bound and helpless, left to a merciless death! By what right of time, or circumstance, or chance, or logic should love for her have come to him! But it was here—in spite of logic, in spite of all else, it was here. Why drive it away? It could neither hurt her—nor protect her! He could only *die*; but she was in far greater peril than he was, and he could do nothing to— His mind had swung its cycle again.

And so the day passed—a day of miserable, dragging, agonized hours that alternated periods of forced calmness, and periods when, losing all control, he raved as a madman in frenzy. But, finally, worn out as it began to grow dusk, and the light, filtering gray, came more and more dimly through the opening, he slept.

Not restfully—his sleep was fitful, full of wild nightmare, chilling, terrorizing. He awoke from it bathed in a cold perspiration—and strained his ears to listen. It was utter blackness around him, and he could see nothing; but he thought he had heard a sound as of some one or something moving stealthily outside the cave.

But now all was silent again, save for the soft lullaby of the tropical night breeze whispering through the leaves and branches of the trees. And

then it came again—this time unmistakably—the soft pad of feet, the crack of a breaking twig—nearer and nearer.

It was at the mouth of the cave now. Kennard held his breath. Man or beast, it meant no good to him. He tried to pierce the darkness—but only imaginary and exaggerated shapes took form before his eyes.

And now it was *inside* the cave—closer—upon him—something touched his foot, crept up to his knees, *feeling* him—and then the tension broke.

"All same very dlamn bad business come back find everybody dead!" muttered a voice.

"Louie!"—the word burst from Kennard in a mad yell of relief.

CHAPTER VIII
THE ALLIES

THERE was a quick rustle of garments, as though a man, startled, had jumped backwards; but the voice, a second later, was full of the calm imperturbability of the Oriental.

"Hello, you no dead? What you do there?"

"It's you, Louie; it's you, isn't it?" Overwrought, his nerves unstrung, Kennard's question, more an appeal, came hysterically.

"Yes," said Louie. "What you do there?"

"Get a light, and then cut me loose," cried Kennard. "I'm tied up, hand and foot."

"You tied up? Very well. Wait little minute. No can make light without cover up front. Mabbe they see. Wait little minute. Me fix that."

Impatiently now Kennard listened to the other's movements. Louie was fumbling with something at the cave's entrance—obviously a screen of some kind, that no doubt had served Gilcreast and Louie for the same purpose, was being drawn into place. Then Louie came back, felt his way past Kennard further into the interior, and presently a match crackled. A moment more and Louie had set a ship's lantern on the ground, and was hewing with a knife at Kennard's bonds.

Kennard swayed a little, as with Louie's help, he got to his feet when the last strand was severed; managed the two or three steps to the cot, and sat down on the edge of it.

"How did you get here, Louie?" he questioned quickly.

"Eat first—talk by and by." Louie, lantern in hand, was already busy among the stores in the rear. "I like eat, too, very much—very hungry!"

He brought Kennard some whisky, and then some canned meat and biscuits—upon which latter he fell to even more ravenously than did Kennard himself.

At the conclusion of the meal, for during its progress Louie had resolutely refused to talk, Kennard repeated his question:

"How did you get away from them, Louie?"

"Make escape soon him get dark," said Louie. "Not pay very much attention to just Chinaman." He stopped, and his lids flickered down over

the narrow, slanting black eyes, but not in time to hide from Kennard a quick, ominous glitter. "Mabbe Grieg change mind about that before him through—Gilcreast him very all right fine man, too pretty bad him kill. Grieg steal map, eh? You know about treasure?"

"Yes," said Kennard, a sudden grimness in his voice. "I know about the treasure; I had the other half of the map. And I, too, have an account to settle with Grieg that—" A short, mirthless laugh completed his sentence. He checked himself with an effort. "But never mind Grieg now. They took you to the trading-station this morning after they caught you, didn't they? Yes"—as Louie nodded—"well, what happened there? Did you see Aldeth Moore? No, I forgot, you don't know who she is. Did you see a girl, a white woman, Gilcreast's niece? What did they do with her? Is Grieg there now? Is—"

"You talk too many questions all same time," interposed Louie placidly. "I tell story, then you see. Little missy there all right, very much tightly locked up in house. Grieg and men bring her in and go away. Pretty sure now it must be for hunt-up map on island."

"Wait," said Kennard. "You mean he's left her at the trading-station, and gone into the interior to work with the map as Gilcreast did?"

"Yes," replied Louie.

"How many men did he take? How many are left?" queried Kennard tensely.

"No can tell, how can say?" Louie lifted his shoulders. "Me locked up too; only can tell what hear from very good Chinaman friend, Hin Su, boat-keeper on schlooner at night."

"What's that?" cried Kennard. "Aren't the crew of the schooner on board her?"

"Crew on board!" Louie repeated the words parrot-fashion, and smiled indulgently. "You no live much around here, eh? Schlooner come to island, crew live on shore—very glad get off boat for change."

Kennard, growing visibly excited, leaned toward Louie.

"Listen, Louie! The crew—what are they? How many white men are there amongst them? How many white men are at the trading-station now?"

"Just one white man on crew," Louie answered. "Him captain, and him stay at trading-station. Crew him Chinese, Lascar, Malay, same as men belong to trading-station that Grieg keep here all the time."

"Left the captain at the trading-station, did he?" muttered Kennard. "Then he's still playing his same game. He got the pearlers away, and now he doesn't propose that any white man should know what he's up to, even his own captain, while he locates the treasure." He laughed out suddenly,

shortly. "Well, it doesn't matter how many men he's taken, or how many he's left at the trading-station—so long as *he* is away! Louie, when you first came here and Gilcreast made his 'hunt-up map,' as you call it, how long did it take him?"

"Two days, mabbe three," said Louie.

"Good!" exclaimed Kennard. "Then it's bound to take Grieg as long, or longer, with the other half. Aldeth is safe till he gets back to the trading-station. To-morrow night will be time enough; by then I'll be fit, and meanwhile we'll have a chance to get ready. Grieg is certain to have ordered the men he had here at the cave with him to keep away on account of what he did to me; and he won't come back here himself until he has found the point on the other half of the map and wants to lay out a line northeast from here for his intersection. Yes; to-morrow night's time enough, thank God! I wouldn't be much good to-night."

"What you do," inquired Louie. "You got plan?"

"Yes," Kennard said. "One more question, and I'll tell you what it is. This friend of yours, the boat-keeper, can you trust him?"

"Him not much friend," said Louie. "Him just Chinaman all same me, never see him till to-day."

"Oh," said Kennard, frowning, "that's bad! I thought you meant he was some one you had known before. I want to get aboard the schooner."

"That very all right," Louie responded quickly. "Him not make very much trouble because him become very true, deep friend if see revolver between him eyes. You count on that, all right. But what good get on schlooner? Two men no can make sail and get out of lagoon."

"I don't want to." Kennard smiled grimly. "*I want Grieg!* Two men aboard the schooner out in the lagoon, with the boats corralled, can hold it against Grieg and all of his pack ashore—I don't want to sail her. Listen! All the supplies Grieg has on the island are in the barracks and the trading-station, except the few day's rations he's carried with him into the interior. Destroy the supplies, and Grieg is at our mercy. You must have kerosene here since you are using a lantern, so it will be simple enough to make brands, and to-morrow night we'll free Gilcreast's niece, and then fire the barracks and trading-station—the buildings are dry, flimsy, and thatched, and they'll burn like tinder; nothing will stop them once they're started. We can get across the beach and into a boat before they know what's happening—and we won't leave anything in the shape of a boat behind for them, either! Food will be the last thing they'll think of trying to save, for, with the

schooner there, the thought of supplies will never enter their heads. Do you see, Louie? I want Grieg—and I'll get him."

"That very excellent, good plan," agreed Louie. "That very easy thing set fire and get away quick to schlooner, but no like idea about get girl—that muss plan all up, make very great risk, and mabbe then we get kill."

"Maybe!" Kennard shrugged his shoulders.

Louie squinted at Kennard, puckering his face into a wrinkled smile.

"You very fond of girl, she very fond of you; mabbe some day you mlarry, eh?" he observed ingenuously.

Kennard laughed bitterly.

"No, she's not fond of me," he said with sudden hoarseness. "I think she would be glad if I were dead."

"Then what good make trouble over girl and risk plan?" demanded Louie.

"To save her from that devil Grieg," Kennard flung out fiercely. "Do you understand, Louie? That comes first—if that fails, nothing else counts. Do you understand? We win with her—or we lose."

Louie smiled sapiently.

"Me no fool. Mabbe she no very fond of you; then I think you very fond of girl. Very well. You want girl very much great deal? Very well. Then we get girl, though I think that all same very excellent dlamn fool thing. Now mabbe we sleep—it commence get morning pretty soon."

"Louie," said Kennard impulsively, and he put out his hand, "Louie, you're whiter than any white man I ever met."

CHAPTER IX
AN UNFORESEEN FACTOR

THAT night, what there was left of it, Kennard slept through like a tired child—slept till well past noon, when Louie awakened him; but from then on until darkness fell again he labored unremittingly.

The stores in the cave, depleted though they were, would still have been enough to furnish Grieg and his men with sufficient supplies to prolong the time considerably more than Kennard had any wish or idea of permitting it to be prolonged before, as he now hoped, he would have the trader at his mercy. So, saving only enough for their own evening meal, he and Louie destroyed everything in the shape of food to the last biscuit crumb. It was literally a case of burning their bridges behind them. If they won, they would have no further need for anything in the cave; if they lost, they would have no further need for anything—anywhere!

Gilcreast had landed a barrel of kerosene when he had first come ashore on the island, and more than half of this was left. They plugged the spigot, set the barrel on end, knocked in the head, collected as many dry fagots from the vicinity of the cave as the barrel would hold, and put them to soak.

At dusk they had still another task to perform—Gilcreast. He lay where he had fallen—where Grieg had left him. They found him not far from the cave, and, as they buried him, Kennard's face was hard as adamant; and upon Louie's face was a look that it was not good to see. Neither spoke—and the last crude rites were as a grim, mute pledge of vengeance.

Later, as the evening grew on, they constructed their proposed firebrands by tying the oil-soaked fagots into bundles, and by wrapping around these bundles the thin blankets that they took from the cots and saturated in the residue of the kerosene. After this, they collected some short lengths of rope. Their last act was to gather up the ammunition, of which there was a fair supply, and to arm themselves with the revolvers, a brace apiece, and the two repeating rifles that were in the cave.

At moonrise, close onto eleven o'clock by Gilcreast's chronometer, the bundles of fagots lashed on their backs like huge knapsacks, they started, Louie leading as guide. An hour saw them clear of the rocky, upland country as they circled the base of the larger of the two mountains that rose, Kennard now knew—for the afternoon had given him his first real opportunity of

forming any idea of his surroundings—almost in the center of the island. Then they plunged directly into the lower, wooded stretches; but now the going was slower, and it was long past another hour before they finally emerged upon the beach a little to the north of the trading-station.

A light showed from the schooner out in the lagoon; the storehouse, or barracks, was dark; a single gleam came from the trading-station.

"That room where little missy locked up," said Louie. "Hin Su tell me that yesterday."

Kennard nodded; his eyes were searching the beach.

"Three native canoes belonging to the trading-station, and one of the schooner's boats," he said tensely. "We're in luck, Louie; we can tow them all in one trip."

"Got plenty time," responded Louie quietly. "Take just little minute make very true friend of Hin Su on schlooner. Him sleep anyway. No make noise, that all."

They walked quickly to the water's edge, deposited their loads and rifles in the boat, and in succession floated it and the three canoes.

These latter, using the ropes they had brought as painters, they fastened bow to stern, passed a line from the leading canoe to the stern-sheets of the boat, and, getting into the boat, rowed silently with their tow out to the schooner.

Hin Su was very evidently asleep; or, at least, perhaps judging his occupation of boat-keeper a sinecure, was not awake to their approach. They rubbed the vessel's hull and came alongside another boat that was made fast at the schooner's waist, where a rope-ladder dangled from the rail—obviously the boat in which Hin Su had come off from the shore.

Louie kicked off his shoes.

"Me fix this. You tie up canoe so as make all ready for go back," he whispered—and with noiseless, cat-like agility, he went up the side and disappeared over the rail.

He was back almost before Kennard, who, on the alert to lend aid if it was necessary, had secured the canoes.

"Very easy thing to do," announced Louie, dropping into the boat. "No make any fuss when see revolver, so tie him up hands and feet. Him say very good friend and not like Grieg or captain very much, so put little gag in mouth make sure him stay friends till we get back." He took the oars and began to row.

"There's a fairish on-shore breeze," commented Kennard significantly.

"Him very excellent thing for fire," Louie agreed laconically.

They landed further up the beach, directly opposite the trading-station itself, grounding the boat's nose just enough on the sand to hold her and so that she could be readily launched.

Their plan was simple enough. The French windows giving on the veranda would naturally be fastened upon their prisoner from the outside—the only real difficulty came from Aldeth herself. There were no means of communicating with her, of letting her know that friends were working for her. If she heard them forcing an entrance, a scream, a cry, would give the alarm, and the game would be up. But any attempt to rescue her involved risk—the risk must be taken, that was all!

Leaving their rifles in the boat, but carrying the huge, unwieldy oil-steeped bundles, they crossed the beach swiftly to the L-shaped end of the house from where a glow, dulled by tight-drawn shades, still came from the window of the room Louie had pointed out as Aldeth's. And, of that, that it was her room, that Hin Su had told Louie the truth, they now had evidence of their own—they could hear her pacing the room, up and down, up and down; and her shadow passed and repassed upon the blinds.

The French windows—frail prison bars of glass, yet for the purpose as strong as though they had been of steel, for a window pane shatters with startling noise—opened outward; and Kennard uttered a suppressed ejaculation of satisfaction as he examined the fastenings. Grieg had used but primitive means to prevent his prisoner's escape—primitive, but adequate enough against even a man's strength to open the windows from *within*. Whether due to natural warping, or a slight settling of the newly built house on its sandy foundation, there was a space, varying from an eighth to a quarter of an inch, between the bottom of the windows and the sill—and into this space thin wooden wedges had been driven.

Kennard now tested the window knobs cautiously. They moved freely. The rest was simple then. It would be but an instant's work to remove the wedges, pull the windows open, and show himself before Aldeth would have cause to become alarmed and cry out.

He placed his lips close to Louie's ear.

"All right here, Louie," he said. "I'll see to this. You go now to the storehouse and touch it off. Then run to the boat—if you get there first, launch it. Savvy?"

"Savvy all right," Louie answered. "But you wait till me get there before go in here. Very poor thing start fire on outside. Mabbe better drop fire through window on other end from where men sleep; that storehouse end,

and mabbe take little more time, but catch oil and powder very quickly. You wait till me get there."

"Right!" Kennard whispered tersely. "Go ahead."

Kneeling on the veranda, his hands on the wedges, gently working them backward and forward, loosening them, Kennard kept his eyes on Louie. His pulse quickened; his lips were tightly closed. It was a mad, desperate venture they were engaged upon, a— The shadow passing on the blind before him drew his eyes for an instant from Louie, and his face grew harder. A mad venture? He had known that before. Desperate? The alternative was death for him; but for her, for Aldeth, for this girl, who even now in the small morning hours, sleepless with terror, walked her room, it was . . . The figure of the Chinaman speeding across the sand in the white moonlight caught his eye again, and now he saw Louie dart suddenly around the end of the long, low building that housed Grieg's men and stores, and disappear from sight.

The time had come! The wedges were loose! With a final wrench he jerked them free, rose, reached for the knobs, turned them, and whipped open the long, narrow doors that made the French window.

"Aldeth!" He breathed her name involuntarily, as he stepped forward.

She did not cry out. Startled, she stood transfixed in the center of the room confronting him.

"Aldeth!" he said again.

"You!" Her lips formed rather than spoke the words.

"Don't make a sound!" entreated Kennard in a hurried, guarded voice. He turned, stooped, and lifted the bundle of fagots into the room. When he faced her once more, she had retreated to the wall, and was watching him. There was fear in her eyes, fear and another light creeping into them that he did not comprehend.

"You!" She strove to control the quaver in her voice. "What are you doing here?"

"Whatever you do, don't speak above a whisper," said Kennard tensely under his breath. "I've come for you—to save you from Grieg. There's not an instant to lose! There's a boat on the beach; the schooner is ours, and—"

"*You* came to save *me*—from Grieg!" She put out her hands to ward him off as he moved toward her. "You—save me? You—who murdered my brother! Go, while you have the chance! You are afraid they will hear you here, are you not; well, go—or I'll scream and arouse the station!"

He fell back from her, dazed and bewildered as from a blow. She would not go! He had not thought of that; that he, that *anything*, made Grieg a

lesser evil, that—

She pointed to the windows.

"*Go!*"

"You are mad," Kennard whispered hoarsely. "You do not understand what you are saying. You do not understand what Grieg—"

"I understand only too well"—in spite of a brave effort to suppress it, the quaver was back in her voice again—"but there are others here who, perhaps, at the last may help me; if not—then—" She stopped.

"Then?" Kennard prompted fiercely.

"I would rather take that chance!" She had suddenly drawn herself erect, and now she flung her words at him with cold, biting finality: "For the last time—go!"

The moments were flying, every fraction of a second was lessening their chance of safety. Kennard's brain was whirling. She did not understand—he could not make her understand. Argument, talk, was useless, futile—and there was no time—no time. Louie must already have done his work. He turned and glanced quickly toward the storehouse. A red, leaping gleam shot across a window pane, then another. In a minute, awakened, the men would be pouring from the barracks. The sight cleared his brain and roused him to instant action. There was but one thing to do, and but one way to do it. In a flash he had picked up the bundle of oil-soaked fagots and thrown it upon the bed; in another he had snatched the lamp from the table, wrenched the chimney loose, and applied the flame. Dumb with terror and amazement, Aldeth had crouched against the wall, her lips parted, her hands clasped tightly over her bosom; but now as he whirled and jumped toward her, she uttered a piercing scream. She fought him off with all her strength, raining wild blows upon him with her small, clenched fists, crying out, screaming again.

But in spite of her frantic struggles, he caught her quickly to him, lifted her up in his arms, and rushed for the window. A yell came from the interior of the house as he gained the veranda—a chorus of them from the barracks. A tongue of flame shot skyward from the storehouse. Then there came another chorus of yells, louder, fiercer than the first—and he knew he had been seen. Forms began to race toward him along the beach from the barracks—four, five, ten—how many he did not know. He ran with all his might, panting, gasping under his struggling burden.

He heard Louie shout. He saw the boat, launched now, floating just a few yards away—but they were closing on him fast. Some one behind him was coming from the house, urging the others on with hoarse English oaths—

Harlow, of course, Grieg's captain. But there was no need for urging—they were almost upon him.

A shot! The flash cut a lane of light from the boat. Louie had fired! The nearest pursuer stumbled, and for an instant it checked the others—and in that instant Kennard's feet splashed in the water. He reached the boat, leaned over, placed Aldeth on the bottom, and sprang in himself.

"Quick, Louie," he gasped. "Quick! Shove out!"

And then Louie's voice came calm and placid and undisturbed as the boat shot into deep water.

"That very dlamn narrow close squeak!"

CHAPTER X
BEFORE THE DAWN

NO hail of bullets had followed them to the schooner's side. The trading-station natives and the crew ashore were evidently unarmed, and Harlow had promptly turned his attention to more pressing matters—the barracks and the house—both blazing fiercely now.

On the deck—as light almost as at noonday from the flames ashore—which she had gained refusing assistance, Aldeth faced Kennard, mute-lipped, wild questioning in her eyes.

He came close to her. The grim tension of a little while before was gone now from his face, and in its place was an expression half-troubled, half-pleading.

"Let me speak," he said hurriedly. "There is time now, and for your own sake you must listen to me for a moment. And first I am going to say this to you—perhaps I did not realize it then, but I know it now—from the moment I came back to consciousness that afternoon in the trading-station yonder and saw you for the first time, I loved you."

"You coward!" She shrank back from him, the words a piteous cry.

Kennard shook his head.

"You do not understand," he said gravely. "I am not making love to you—God knows I have little hope of ever doing that. Perhaps I should not have said it, but to me it was the greatest pledge I had to offer you."

"If you have anything more to say, say it quickly," she said dully.

"Yes," Kennard said simply; "I have a little more to say. I am as innocent of your brother's death as you are. One shot must have been discharged from the revolver before I got hold of it—I found it in the room next to mine. That was how there came to be a fourth empty shell."

"I do not believe you," she said monotonously.

"No; you do not believe me," Kennard repeated. "But still I shall say what I have to say. Your uncle's death, as you know, lies at Grieg's door; *I* know that your brother's lies there, too—as mine would if Louie had not set me free. Grieg left me bound—to die in the cave." He stopped; then suddenly his voice rose strong, dominant, and he flung out his hands, pointing shoreward. "What choice had I to-night? What other way was there

to save you from that man's hands since you would not come willingly? You know him for what he is—you know what you could expect from him. His hand was forced, he was fond of saying; well, here again, his innate fiendishness apart, his hand was forced. He took the map from you. He murdered for the treasure; I, he thought, was as good as dead—only you remained who knew his guilt. What could you hope for from him? Had I any choice but to carry you out here by force?"

"And now?" The question came with cold disdain.

"Now?" Kennard turned for a moment to the schooner's rail. The barracks and house, flame-wrapped, were, it was quite evident, beyond all saving. He faced her again. "Now? I do not know. Their supplies are gone—that was our reason for what you see ashore there. We have taken the boat and canoes. I believe we can hold this schooner and starve them out; if we can, my terms are that Grieg is to be turned over to me as a prisoner. I will take three or four men, just enough to handle the schooner and no more than I can watch, send food ashore for the rest, and land you at the nearest port where you will be in safety until you can secure a passage home."

"Why do you lie to me?" she cried out passionately. "Is further pretense necessary? I am here now—in your power—as I was in his. You turn your words against yourself. You say my very presence forced Grieg's hand—does it not apply to you? You will never land me—you know I would denounce you as a murderer to the first man I met."

"I have thought of that," Kennard answered quietly; "and I do not think I am heroic enough to give you the chance to do it. I am innocent, but I know well enough that the circumstantial evidence would hang me! I only have one hope of clearing myself—to wring a confession from Grieg. If that fails, then somehow, though I do not just know how now, you, in any case, will be landed at the first port I can make."

"Somehow—you do not know how!" She laughed nervously in bitterness and fear. "But *now*? You have not answered that question yet."

"I had hoped," he said, a hint of wistfulness creeping into his voice, "that you would understand a little—that you would not need to ask again. But it seems there is no chance of that. I will answer you, then. You made the voyage here in this schooner; so many of your things, all of them perhaps, for I do not imagine you joined the men's party at the trading-station, are still in your cabin, and you will suffer no inconvenience on that score. For the rest, Louie and I will bunk forward in the forecastle, and you are absolutely free to come and go as you please while you are aboard. Louie will serve your meals to you; and anything else he can do for you, he will. And this"—he took a revolver from his pocket and handed it to her—"will

mean more to you, perhaps, than anything I can say. If by word, or act, or look I give you cause for offense, turn it against me; if things go wrong, if Grieg gets the upper hand again, then I pray God you will turn it against—*yourself*."

Mechanically she had reached out for the weapon, and as he laid it in her hand she drew her breath in sharply, searching his face with a quick, startled look.

Then her hand dropped to her side.

Neither spoke.

For a moment their eyes held each other's; then Kennard turned abruptly to the rail again, and, with elbows upon it, chin in hand, stared at the fire-swept beach.

When Louie came to him a few minutes later she had gone below.

CHAPTER XI
THE ATTACK

THAT night and two others and two days had passed—a time full of anxiety for Kennard, but without untoward incident. Charred heaps of ruin upon the beach spoke eloquently enough of the thoroughness with which the fire had done its work. A few pieces of furniture, snatched like hot chestnuts from the scorching pan and scattered here and there upon the sand were all that remained of the trading-station—and these brought a grim smile of irony to Kennard's lips whenever his eyes fell upon them. Harlow and his men had presumably gone inland to join Grieg, for since daylight after the fire there had been no sight of living being from the schooner's decks; but, nevertheless, the sense of unseen, watching eyes was always present, and so he and Louie, spelling each other through the hours of the days and nights, had maintained a ceaseless watch—and gradually the strain, nervous and physical, upon them had grown, and the tension had become more and more acute. But there was nothing to do save wait—a little longer.

In the meantime any move that was made must come from Grieg. Grieg himself, Kennard knew, would never yield, nor would Harlow turn against the trader; Harlow had been too long hand-in-glove with his superior, was in with him now in whatever had caused Grieg to set up a station on the island—for some underhand reason, Gilcreast had believed and said. It was the men—the Malays, the Lascars, the Chinese—that Kennard was counting upon to round on Grieg when they had become desperate from hunger. Hin Su would be sent ashore to find them and take them his offer in another day or so; the time should be ripe then.

Aldeth's presence had been bitter sweet to Kennard. He had not spoken to her. They had rigged an awning aft for her where at times she sat and made pretense at reading; at other times she walked slowly up and down the deck. But if no words had passed between them, Kennard's eyes, when she was on deck, and they could be unostentatiously so, were always upon her. One thing he thanked God for with fervent sincerity—her look of ever-present, questioning terror had gone, and intuitively he knew that, in that respect, a certain trust in him had come to her. But that was all—as it must necessarily be all. Between them was the barrier of her brother's blood. And it was the perfect understanding of this, that from her standpoint she was

justified in her belief, that she could believe nothing else, that he, in her place, must have believed as she did, that made him cry out sharply in pain at night as he tossed in his bunk, when, instead, he should have snatched his few scant hours of needed rest.

A barrier truly. A barrier that kept him from even approaching her with a word, lest he should destroy the little sense of security she now had—the one relief in her intolerable position. Once, by the rail, he had raised his eyes suddenly and caught hers upon him with a curious, speculating, and, yes, he had thought, too, a wistful light in their depths. Involuntarily he had moved as though to go to her, and the color had flushed to her cheeks—and she had risen instantly and gone below.

And the end? As time went on Grieg's silence had troubled him. Had he overrated his own strength, underestimated Grieg's resources? Would the game play out as he had planned it; or, was he, juggling now with the whip-hand, but tempting fate to turn the tables on him again? He did not know. But, come what would, he would have a final reckoning with Grieg!

And so the time had passed; and so, at late afternoon on the second day, the schooner still lay at anchor in the lagoon, a bare five hundred yards from the beach. It was Kennard's spell off watch, and he lay stretched on his bunk in the forecastle. He was not asleep; his thoughts, as usual, were too busy for that.

Suddenly he heard the sound of quick-running feet on the deck above, and a moment later Louie's voice was calling to him shrilly, insistently. He sprang from his bunk and gained the deck.

"What is it, Louie?" he demanded tensely.

Without a word Louie pointed seaward.

Kennard looked—and then he looked into Louie's face.

Just rounding the northern headland, but still perhaps a mile out at sea, a schooner was bearing slowly down in the light breeze upon the island. There was no need for words—each read in the other's face his own thoughts. The pendulum had swung again—to Grieg's side!

Whoever was aboard the schooner mattered little. Whether they were a daredevil lot like the last, or whether it was an ordinary trader, the result would be the same. In the former case they would be intimate friends of Grieg's, which needed no further amplification; in the latter case, Grieg had but to point to his ruined trading-station to discredit anything Kennard or Louie might say. Grieg won either way!

Kennard laughed suddenly, bitterly, but his voice was cool and steady when he spoke:

"The game's up, I guess; but there's a chance for us yet, Louie. We'll slip our cable and stand out to sea if there's enough wind to take us. She won't pay any attention to us in passing, as she'll naturally suppose we're just leaving the trading-station after a visit here. By the time she gets in and Grieg sets her after us again, it should be dark enough for us to give her the slip. Bring Hin Su, and we'll get the mainsail up. Quick now, Louie!"

Kennard, without waiting for reply or comment, turned as he spoke and ran quickly aft along the deck to the main boom. The sails had, of course, been securely housed on the schooner's arrival, preparatory to what was expected to be a protracted stay, and now he set to work rapidly tearing off the gaskets. He worked with feverish speed, intently—and, turning around as he completed his task, drew his breath in sharply. He had seen Aldeth at the rail as he had run down the deck, but once at work upon the sail his back had been turned to her. Now, as he faced around, she was barely two yards away—at the wheel—casting it loose from its lashings with deft, nimble fingers.

She raised her head, and, as he stepped quickly toward her and she looked at him, her eyes were shining.

"I can attend to this," she said in a low, reliant voice; "and I can steer—I often did on the voyage here. You men will have all you can do to get the sails set."

"Steer! You steer!" His voice in its hoarseness, mingling incredulity and a sudden wild, mad joy, sounded strangely even in his own ears. "You mean that you—"

"I mean," she interrupted quietly, pointing to the schooner in the offing, "that I realize as well as you do what the presence of that vessel means."

"Then, thank God it came!" he cried passionately. "I hoped, I dared to hope, that you had come to believe in me that much—now I *know* it. Some day—"

"Here are Louie and Hin Su," she said hurriedly, turning her head away from him. "You have no time to lose."

For an instant he hesitated, watching her; then he sprang to join Louie and their prisoner at the tackles. Hin Su had given them no trouble, though, for precaution's sake, they had kept him confined. He gave none now, readily throwing in his strength and weight with the other two as they began to heave up the mainsail. A foot, two feet, with squeak of blocks and rustle of loosened canvas, they hoisted the sail—and then, with a yell, Hin Su let go his hold and clapped his hand to his arm.

The crack of a rifle died away in a series of sharp, chirping echoes; a tiny puff of smoke lifted from the fringe of trees on the beach. Grieg had spoken at last.

The sail and gear came rattling down on the boom. Kennard whirled, leaped for Aldeth, and literally pulled her flat upon the deck. Louie had already taken refuge there, and had dragged Hin Su down beside him. A minute, two, they waited—no other shot came from the shore. Louie, with a portion torn from Hin Su's blouse, bound up the other's wound to stop the flow of blood. The bullet had evidently smashed a bone, for the man's left arm dangled powerlessly. Kennard broke the silence.

"I've had an idea all the time that he's been hiding in there," he rapped out savagely. "I wonder he hasn't fired on us before."

"No good fire before," said Louie. "Mabbe no hit, then we just keep low down behind rail, and all go same as before, only know sure him there then."

"Yes," agreed Kennard, flinging out his words from between his teeth. "And now in order to get that sail up we've got to be stationary targets long enough to give him a chance to pick us off. He's seen the schooner yonder, and he doesn't intend to let us go. Do you think between us, Louie, we could hoist the sail before he wings us both?"

"Take too long," Louie answered. "Very hard dlamn heavy job for two—Hin Su no can pull any more. Very easy thing get us both, then all over. But you say yes, then all right make try."

"Well, then, I say—*yes*!" Kennard decided desperately. "It's the only chance we've got—it'll be all over if we don't."

He glanced at Aldeth. She did not look at him. Somehow, for some reason that he could not quite explain, he had expected her to say something. He waited now an instant, hoping that she would; and then, as she did not speak, he rose to his knees—and an exclamation, sharp and sudden, burst from his lips. The breeze, what there was of it, was blowing off shore, but further out by the incoming schooner it had died away—and there the sea, unrippled, lay like a sheet of glass.

"She's becalmed!" he cried, a fierce exultation in his voice. "It'll be another half hour before the evening breeze sets in, and then it will be dark enough for us to get under way with the chances one in a hundred of Grieg being able to pot us while we're doing it. The luck's not all his yet—we'll get *out* while the schooner's coming *in*."

For a moment, at Kennard's words, Louie's face had lighted; but now it fell, and he shook his head.

"Grieg him no fool," he said. "Him know that, too. No give us chance. Him make strike now pretty soon quick, you see."

"What do you mean?" asked Kennard.

Louie, crouching low, close to the deck, ran to the rail and cautiously raised his head above it. He ducked back again, and, turning, beckoned to Kennard.

"Look!" he said, as Kennard joined him.

The fringe of trees from where the shot had been fired formed a little point, hiding a small bay, or cove, on the other side; and now coming round this point was—a boat!

"My fault!" gasped Kennard. "Louie, I *forgot*. It's—it's the *Orissa's* boat—the one Wolfson and I came here in."

"No use feel bad about that," Louie answered calmly. "No make any difference. See! Him got raft, too—the boat just save him make another raft, that all. Him make fight on schlooner at two places all same time. Very dlamn clever sharp man Grieg—very hot warm time here by and by soon. You think rifle-shot go through them wood he got up-stuck in front of boat and raft?"

"I don't know," gritted Kennard. "If they won't, we're done for. But we'll find out soon enough. Get the rifles, Louie, quick; and clap Hin Su into the forecastle—he may be helpless, but we'll take no chances."

"All right," said Louie, and, running back to Hin Su, he hurried forward along the deck, half-dragging, half-carrying the wounded man with him.

Kennard, his head just above the rail, kept his eyes fixed shoreward. Grieg in the last two days had not been idle. Around the bow of the boat he had built a curious bullet-shield, like a stockade of small tree-trunks, rising perhaps four feet above the gunwale and completely hiding the occupants. The same tactics had been employed on the raft, a long, clumsy affair made of four or five large logs lashed together and propelled by a sweep on either side that protruded from the uprights. Louie was right. Grieg meant to board them simultaneously at two points—and the odds would be ten to one. The raft was making straight out for them, but, unwieldy, it moved through the water at little better than a snail's pace; whereas the boat was sweeping along parallel to the beach to reach a position which, when it headed out, would bring it on the schooner's port side, thus leaving the raft to board to starboard. It was the end! Louie and he could hold off the attack for a little while; it would be a good fight, and then—the end.

Louie came running back with the rifles.

Kennard turned to Aldeth.

"Please go below," he said quietly.

Her answer was irrelevant:

"There are more rifles in the cabin. I will get them"—and she was gone.

For an instant he stared after her, then taking a rifle from Louie, he stretched himself out on the after hatch.

"Lie here," he said. "We'll be a hard mark for them to hit, and we're high enough to fire over the rail easily. I don't think any of them have firearms except Grieg and Harlow. Never mind the raft—it can't get here under twenty minutes. Concentrate on the boat! If we can force them to fight one at a time, there's a chance in a thousand we may pull through—if they board together, there isn't a ghost of one. Now!"

Flat on their stomachs, side by side, coolly, steadily, without wasting a shot, but firing almost as fast as they could pull trigger, the two men rained a hail of bullets upon the boat. A yell, a scream, answered them above the roar of the reports. The bullet-shield at least was not impenetrable. Kennard's hopes rose. He pulled trigger again—but the magazine was empty. He reached for the cartridges that Louie had laid on the hatch between them, and a fresh rifle was thrust into his hand. Aldeth was kneeling on the deck.

"Go below at once! For God's sake, go below!" he cried hoarsely.

A bullet pinged against the rail—a splinter flew. Another whistled a scant foot overhead.

"No," she answered in a steady voice. "Give me your empty rifle—and yours, Louie. I will load for you. That is *my* only chance, isn't it?"

"My God!" Kennard muttered to himself. "My God"—and the words were almost like a sob.

Puffs of smoke and spurts of flame were bursting from both the boat and the raft; a buzz, angry, continuous, was in their ears, as the bullets cut the air above them. They were evidently better armed than Kennard had given them credit for.

"They're too low to get the angle, with the rail between," Kennard rasped out once between his shots. "Make a sieve of the boat, Louie!" His lips were a thin, merciless line. "Make a sieve of it; a sieve of it!"

"Mabbe," rejoined Louie imperturbably, "but mabbe that not help much. Boats coming from schlooner now, find out what shot-shot means."

Kennard turned his head and sent a quick glance in that direction. It was true. For a moment he had forgotten the schooner. Two boats were pulling rapidly away from that vessel's side. Without a word he took another rifle from Aldeth's hands. Voices, Grieg's from the boat, Harlow's from the raft,

were bawling and cursing loudly now; Grieg urging on Harlow, Harlow urging on his men. The boat was evidently suffering severely under the heavy fire centered upon it, and Grieg, quite as evidently, was not anxious to make the attack single-handed. The raft was still no more than halfway to the schooner. The boat still hung back close to the shore, waiting to make a quick dash of it as soon as the raft was within striking distance. Then, all at once, the boat's oars began to beat the water madly, and the boat leaped forward. Grieg, too, had seen the boats from the schooner coming. Again and again, Kennard and Louie fired, but in return the fire from the raft came upon them hotter than ever.

A yell of derision burst suddenly from Louie.

One of their shots must have got a rower, for an oar flew above the water on the stroke; the boat yawed a little, giving them a glimpse of a white man's figure in the stern—Grieg.

"*Cran-n-g! Cran-n-g!*" Kennard's and Louie's rifles spurted as one.

"Missed him!" cried Kennard; and again in a bitter gasp: "Missed him!"

And now Louie wriggled to the deck.

"You keep up plenty hot fire," he said hurriedly. "Me see what schlooner's boats do."

"What's the good of that?" said Kennard. "You can't—" But Louie was already making his way rapidly forward along the deck.

Kennard emptied his rifle at the boat—and snatched at another.

"There are only a few cartridges left," Aldeth spoke suddenly, trying to infuse a brave ring into her voice.

He swung around and looked at her—but, before he could answer, a sudden outburst of excited cries and shouts came from forward. This was followed by the grating sound of a boat bumping against the schooner's side—and then the quick, fast splash of racing oars. A volley of shots rang out—another. And now Grieg's boat had turned and was scurrying for the shore.

"*Look!*" Aldeth cried.

To starboard a boat manned by Chinese, yelling wildly, and firing as they yelled, was sweeping down upon the raft. To port, the water snoring from her bows under the powerful strokes of her straining crew, another boat, manned, too, by Chinese, was racing for Grieg; and in the stern, rocking with the boat's motion, waving his arms frantically, Louie stood up and screamed deliriously:

"Him all same right, Klennard! All same right! Very close, intimate fliend of Gilcreast, Wah Fang, him come back again!"

CHAPTER XII
THE TREASURE OF YU LING CHEN

IT was early morning.

A quarter way up the side of the smaller of Kao-Lon's two mountains a man crept from behind a bowlder, and stood for a moment silhouetted in the gray dawn against the bare, rocky slope. Suddenly, not far below him, closer than he had thought evidently, a dozen figures sprang from cover and rushed for him, and in the lead was Kennard. The man—it was Grieg—turned and ran at top speed.

All that night the chase had lasted, and all that night, grim, relentless, dogged, Kennard had spurred on the pursuit. Harlow wounded, the others on the raft had surrendered incontinently to Wah Fang's men; but Grieg, with the boat, had reached the shore and with half a dozen of his men had escaped inland. There had been a hurried consultation on the beach, which Kennard, leaving Aldeth in safety then aboard the schooner, had joined; and then he and Louie and Wah Fang, with half of Wah Fang's crew, had taken up the pursuit.

In snatches through the night Kennard had rounded out the story to Wah Fang that Louie, in the stress of the fight, had only had time to give in barest outline; and, in turn, he had listened to the tale of the short, wiry, grim-faced Oriental in European dress, who had been Gilcreast's friend.

Wah Fang, as Gilcreast had supposed, had been wrecked in the hurricane which had swept that region shortly after he had sailed from Kao-Lon. He had lost many of his crew, but was finally picked up with the remainder and eventually reached Singapore, where, on the strength of the credit with which Gilcreast had furnished him to obtain supplies, he had, after great difficulty, succeeded in chartering another schooner—the one in which he had returned to the island.

All this Kennard had learned during the night—a night that had been much as that other night when Grieg had been the pursuer and he, Kennard, the pursued, only with the conditions reversed, and save that Grieg had left, in the shape of his men, a plainer trail to follow. These, straggling, worn out, more sadly in need of food than even Kennard had imagined, and whose heart for fight had been due solely to the necessity of securing supplies from the schooner, and not from any love for Grieg, gave themselves up singly

and in pairs as Kennard and his companions at intervals had come upon them, each successive captive pointing the way Grieg had gone.

And now, at daylight, they had come suddenly in full sight of their quarry.

A shot rang out.

Grieg appeared to reel, then recovering himself, sped on again. Kennard, without slackening his pace, turned and shouted savagely over his shoulder at the men behind him, as once—grimly significant came the memory!—Grieg had shouted when he, Kennard, was running for his life:

"Alive! Do you hear? *Alive!* Don't shoot!"

Wah Fang's voice answered him:

"Very much better kill a mad dog before him bite again."

"Alive!" Kennard flung back. "He can't get away now. I want him *alive*!"

He was not fifteen yards behind Grieg now, and Grieg was visibly weakening, looking from side to side, evidently for shelter from which to make a stand, for they had come to a long, wide, barren stretch of rock, seemingly without break, save where ahead and a little to the right a patch of broken bowlders and copse showed again. Grieg cast a hurried glance behind him, and swerved in that direction. Kennard laughed out remorselessly—he was within *ten* yards of the other now. Grieg answered with a snarl, and once more turned, this time almost full around; and, still running, but backward now, raised his arm and levelled his revolver at Kennard. There was a flash, the roar of the report, but the shot went wild, high in the air—and the revolver flew from Grieg's hand as, suddenly missing his footing, he slipped, and pitched his length upon the ground. He rolled over with desperate haste in an effort to regain his feet—and the next instant a wild, despairing cry rang up and down the mountainside.

Kennard halted in his tracks, as did Wah Fang and the men behind him. As though the solid rock had literally opened and swallowed him, Grieg had vanished!

A moment, stunned by amazement, Kennard stood motionless. Then he ran quickly forward, and a sharp exclamation, mingling both surprise and understanding, escaped him. Where the gray of the rock had looked unbroken there was, in reality, a long fissure or cleft, so curiously formed that it gave the effect from a little distance away of being no more than a slight crack. The side of this fissure on which Kennard stood, projected out, he saw, and overhung the opposite side, which latter sloped downward for a distance of some three feet to where it ended abruptly, leaving a narrow,

black, yawning gap that was almost hidden by the overhanging surface above. Grieg's first fall was a matter of but a few feet, then he must have slid down the short, sharp descent and pitched finally through the gap. How far —ten or a hundred feet—there was no telling.

Wah Fang and the Chinese crew came clustering around Kennard, the latter chattering like magpies.

"Keep quiet!" Kennard ordered curtly, and threw himself flat down on the rock, bending over to listen. There was not a sound. He straightened up and turned to Wah Fang. "Heaven knows how far he's fallen!" he exclaimed. "Maybe far enough to have finished him, or again, only a few feet—in which case, if there's an opening anywhere below, he's got away."

Wah Fang shook his head.

"No opening below," he said. "See!" He pointed along the length of the fissure to where, perhaps twenty yards away, it closed in again at the other end. "All volcano formation around here; do that many years ago. No opening below, but mabbe deep; pretty sure he's dead."

"Dead," said Kennard dully. "Then if he's dead, I— Listen!"

A faint moaning sound came from beneath their feet. It lasted for, it seemed, no more than a bare second, and then, in its place, came peal on peal of wild, inhuman laughter. Ghastly, maniacal, it came again and again, until, as suddenly as it had begun, it ceased, and utter silence fell.

"Crack him head when fall," diagnosed Louie with calm, judicial stoicism. "Gone off him nut."

"Well, he not dead yet anyway," Wah Fang said.

Kennard crossed to the other side of the fissure.

"It can't be very deep," he said quickly. "I'll see if I can't get a look below."

"Take care!" cautioned Wah Fang. "I tell you once about mad dog's bite. Take care again!"

"He hasn't got any revolver now," Kennard answered, as he got down on his knees and peered under the upper ledge.

The gap at the edge of the short incline here appeared to be about four feet across, but a little to the left it narrowed to half that distance. Noting this Kennard hastily changed his position, and, on his back, feet foremost, let himself slide. It was simple enough. His feet struck the opposite side, while his head was still above ground. The two feet across the gap at this point presented no danger and he had only to turn sideways and let his head and shoulders down. This he did, and, braced by one hand on the opposite

side, lay fairly across the opening. And then for an instant as he lay there his heart seemed to have lost its beat—then it began to pound with quick, fierce throbs that sent the blood rushing in a mad tide to his head. Was he crazy, dreaming, or was it true?

Below, not more than a bare six feet, Grieg's form lay sprawled face downward; but everywhere along the bottom of the fissure, in places piled four and five deep, and many of them burst open from the fall when they had been dropped in, were innumerable small boxes, and there was gold about, and gems, and chased ornaments, and things that glittered and winked from jeweled eyes.

The Mandarin's Hoard! The treasure of Yu Ling Chen!

He cried hoarsely, hysterically, to Wah Fang, to Louie, scarcely knowing what he said; then he edged forward to where the gap was wider, and, letting his feet drop through, lowered himself to the bottom and ran to Grieg. He bent quickly over the prostrate form. Grieg lay still, without movement, one hand stretched out and plunged into an open case, the fingers in pitiful irony clutching at the heap of tarnished gold coins it contained.

White-faced, Kennard straightened up. No wonder Grieg had shrieked aloud in his madness. Gold, blood and death! Grieg had murdered for the treasure, sold his soul for it—*and he had found it!*

Kennard bent down again. Grieg had seemed to stir. The shot when they had seen him reel had struck him in the right side, and was still bleeding profusely. Kennard rolled the man over in order to get at the wound and make an effort to stanch the flow. The movement seemed to rouse Grieg, and he began to mutter. Kennard leaned closer to catch the words, as Louie and Wah Fang dropped down from above and joined him.

"Joke," murmured Grieg. "Yu Ling Chen's joke. Found the point—three miles—on line—northeast from cave. Dug it up. Found a little box—nothing in it—but an idol. Little idol—beastly ugly little idol." He tried to fumble in his pocket.

Wah Fang suddenly reached forward, put his hand into the pocket, and brought out the small metal figure of a squatting idol not more than three inches high.

"Joke," murmured Grieg again. "Yu Ling Chen's joke—curse him!"

Wah Fang turned the idol quickly in his hand.

"That what I thought idol on map meant," he said excitedly. "Ten years ago Yu Ling Chen show me this. Got spring. See!" The idol, working on a central hinge, lay open in his hand.

There was a piece of paper inside. Wah Fang took it out, opened it, looked at it, and handed it to Kennard.

Kennard stared at it in turn. It was a complete chart of the island, one point marked with a cross, and at the bottom were foot-notes of distances and directions.

"Cross show where this place is," said Wah Fang. "That clear up everything—how Yu Ling Chen bury treasure all by himself by just drop it in here, and explain too why no find any sign of anything on line from cave where only very small little box with idol is buried."

"Joke," babbled Grieg for the third time. Then he jerked himself suddenly upright, and again the hollow, cavernous place rang with wild, demoniacal laughter—and again, and again—and then a gasp, a choking sound, and Grieg fell back.

"Him dead!" said Louie.

Dead! Kennard's lips were drawn into a straight line. Around him, strewn about the ground, was gold in vast quantity, of the coinage of all nations. In fabulous confusion, from the bursting sides and tops of boxes, earrings, bracelets, necklaces, studded with precious stones, gleamed at him; and gems, too, were there, cut and uncut—rubies, sapphires, diamonds, emeralds. And there were weapons—daggers, swords with jewel-crusted hilts, the pick and choosing of the accumulated store of Yu Ling Chen's wild, plundering years. Riches beyond all counting were his; wealth whose value staggered computation lay within his grasp—but what good was that to him? What would the treasure of all the ages matter now? It would not buy Aldeth, nor right him in her eyes. Grieg, his one hope, was dead. Grieg's lips from which, in his poor vaunting strength, he, Kennard, had sworn he would wring a confession, were closed forever.

Grieg was dead.

No; perhaps not! A sudden hope leaped within him. He pushed Louie away and stooped hurriedly over the silent form—only to rise again with set, bloodless face. Yes, Grieg was dead.

"Help me from here," he said hoarsely—and there was something in his eyes, his face, that invited neither word nor comment.

He gained the surface, and, without a glance at the group of chattering Chinamen who waited there, he walked straight before him across the bare, gray stretch of rock that led yet higher still up the mountainside.

The hours passed. At times, from an elevation, the sun pouring hot upon him, he saw the schooners lying below in the lagoon; at others, it was cool and dim in the wooded tracts—but both were as one to Kennard. A murderer

in the eyes of men, forever to be an outcast from society, to be hounded down, to be caught at last and hanged like a felon by the neck until he was dead—and might God have mercy on his soul! But what of that? That was as nothing!

It was *Aldeth*! All this must come through her—must come—for, even if she would, she had no right to shield him, no choice but to denounce him.

At sundown, worn out in mind and body, he came out upon the beach by the charred ruins of the trading-station. At the water's edge were half a dozen boats, and men were loading them from a great heap of small boxes that were piled on the beach. He smiled bitterly. The Mandarin's Hoard! Gold, blood and death—the Mandarin's Hoard!

And then from the group, but walking very slowly, a girl's figure came toward him. Aldeth! Why did she come to him? He watched her dumbly, his eyes full of hopeless pain.

She stopped a pace away from him.

"We have been very anxious about you." The full, rich voice was very low. "We have searched all the afternoon."

"*You* have been anxious about *me*!" The words came slowly in a puzzled, wondering way. Then he shook his head. "I do not understand," he said.

And now she raised her eyes, and they were filled with a strange, wistful shyness.

"Aldeth!" he burst out fiercely. "What is it? Why do you look like that? Why do you come to me? Do you not know that Grieg is dead; that he—"

"Yes," she said quickly. "I know all that. Listen! Last night Harlow died—you know he was wounded when the boat fired at the raft. He and Grieg were mixed up together in this trading-station here. The little legitimate trading they did was to cover up the real object. They bought the pearls that were stolen from the pearling grounds. And that was why, because he was thick with Grieg, he said nothing, and let the blame go to you. I—I—was with him last night, and he told me. He—he was standing just behind Grieg that night when Tom was shot, and he saw Grieg fire the shot, and—and—you—I—I think I believed you that night on the deck when you gave me the revolver—only—only—I—"

She faltered, and put out her hands to him impulsively. He caught them quickly, drew her to him, and, lifting her face, searched long the eyes, grown tear-dimmed now; and then, as the quivering lashes fell, he led her, with song and happiness in his heart, across the beach out of sight from the men

on the shore—and she was in his arms, her face, crimsoning, shyly seeking a hiding-place on his shoulder. Hope, life, joy and love were his!

"Aldeth!" he cried. "Aldeth!"

THE MARAUDER

Piracy ravaged the coasts and lurked among the gentle isles of Polynesia. It reared its ugly head, struck quickly and cruelly, and was gone with its loot, leaving ruin and death in its wake. It flitted about the southern sea like a sinister vampire, cunningly eluding capture; and caught in its loathsome talons were Martin Lane and the girl he loved—Carol Gray.

CHAPTER I
THE OFFICER OF THE WATCH

THE *Bonara*, Singapore to Brisbane, heavy with cargo and low in the water, rolled sulkily, lifted sulkily, grumbling, chattering her disapproval of the night in the language of her kind, which is a language universal to all ships under whatsoever flag, and is, withal, a very human language. Bulkheads, rivets, plates, stanchions, all the innards of her, lifted up their voices in an unanimity of discontent, refusing to be assuaged by the soft lullaby of the engines that sang in steady throb and beat as though to allay her fret. She was unhappy, irritable and disgruntled. Not that it was heavy weather, but there was a choppy cross-sea, and it was thick, misty, sticky, dirty weather. She flung the seas from her bows, not smoothly, but in short, angry buffets, as though annoyed beyond her patience at their incessant teasing and the denial of her right to ride through their domain in comfort. Occasionally she seemed to shake herself much after the manner of a wet dog, as the wind in accentuated gusts every now and then deposited a tropical downpour upon her decks. Also, it was pitilessly black, save when, in the distance, on-driven, the showers seemed to take on a spread of grayish color, thinly transparent, like some strange wraith hurling itself through the night upon her. And her raucous whistle blasts, in these moments of mist, were as though she were giving added vent to her spleen.

On the bridge, Martin Lane, chief officer, a tall, sturdy figure, bulking the larger for his oilskin wrappings, brushed the wet out of his face, and, as a downpour subsided temporarily into a mere drizzle, flung his oilskin jacket wide open. It was hot.

From forward the ship's bell struck once. Half past four in the morning.

Martin Lane stood still for a moment, his head cocked slightly to one side in a listening attitude, his steady gray eyes fixed over the weathercloth —he could just barely make out the rise of the foc's'le-head beyond the *Bonara's* low, flush foredeck. Then he frowned, shrugged his shoulders a little impatiently, and resumed his pacing up and down the bridge again.

There was something uneasy in the night—or was it himself?

From the boatdeck below, as he passed the head of the starboard bridge ladder, he caught a faint glimmer of light as a curtain swayed in the wind

from one of the open portholes of the captain's cabin. The old man was a bit uneasy himself—still up; or, at any rate, still stretched out on his settee with his ubiquitous pile of month-or-more-old newspapers, of which it was his habit to garner an enormous sheaf in every port, and which he thereafter read with amazing thoroughness and pertinacity.

Martin Lane's frown gave place to the flicker of a smile. The skipper's hobby was quite harmless, and on a cargo boat any hobby that would pass the time was a blessing. Captain Botts prided himself on being a bit of a shark at world news.

"It was a man's business, and especially a seaman's," the old man was wont to say, "to keep posted on what was going on in the world while one, in a way of speaking, was out of it. Eh? What? Wireless? Bah! Sketchy at best, Mr. Lane—and a lot you don't even get, at that, with the forsaken sets they put into us cargo boats. I've just been—h'm—just been reading about —"

Martin Lane laughed outright now, softly to himself. Even the stewards pulled each other's legs with that phrase. It prefaced about nine-tenths of the old man's remarks. "I've just been—h'm—just been reading—" Martin Lane halted once more, staring out over the weathercloth as another rain squall came pattering with a rush along the foredeck. But now his face was serious again. "A damned good man, at that, though!" he announced. "None better as a seaman from his boots up!"

It wasn't the newspapers, as Martin Lane very well knew, that were keeping the old man up to-night, though he might be reading them, as, indeed, he undoubtedly had been doing when he, Martin Lane, had stuck his head inside the skipper's cabin just before taking the bridge when the watch was changed a little more than half an hour ago. Nor was it the promise of worse weather. As a matter of fact the glass had been rising a little, even if grudgingly, for the last few hours. It was the ship's position. For two days the *Bonara* had plowed her way by dead reckoning through what Captain Botts had designated as the tail of a bad doing somewhere up to the nor'eastward. There had been no stars, there had been no sun—a smoky haze had simulated daylight, the nights had been as this one was. The *Bonara* was beyond any question or doubt in the Flores Sea, but exactly where was another matter, and a matter of much moment. A parallel ruler and a pair of dividers applied to the chart proclaimed her, on the basis of dead reckoning, to be on her course due south from Celebes and with ample sea room. But in the Malayan Archipelago there are many other islands, very many; they loom up out of the sea at dawn, when there is dawn, and they are

the specters of the night—and the dots on the chart that represent them are in number as the specks left by countless vagrant and wandering flies.

Martin Lane's hand, gripping the bridge rail, tightened suddenly, fiercely, involuntarily—tightened until the knuckles cracked. Yesterday, the day before, times without number, he had consulted the chart, hung over it like a man fascinated, leaving it only to return to it again at frequent intervals. And Captain Botts, coming into the chart-room on more than one of these occasions, had nodded his head approvingly at what he considered the praiseworthy conduct of his chief officer.

"Mr. Lane," Captain Botts had said in his mild manner—Captain Botts always spoke in a mild manner, "I'll go so far as to say it's a pleasure to find an officer whose interest in his duties is such as yours. Very gratifying, Mr. Lane—very!"

He had answered Captain Botts with a mechanical, "Thank you, sir." He laughed now mirthlessly, self-jeeringly. The parallel ruler and the dividers had strayed always to one particular dot on the chart—which was not the ship's supposed position. There were very many of those little dots, they were innumerable; but, ignoring those closer at hand, those in respect to which the ship's welfare was indubitably more concerned, one point of the dividers invariably found lodgment on perhaps the most diminutive dot of all. To-night, for example, that dot was barely a hundred and fifty miles away—by dead reckoning.

"Carol!" said Martin Lane in a low, strained way.

He did not move. It was raining again—heavily. He did not rebutton his oilskin. Why should he? It was a night of moonlight, of sheer beauty, a placid sea, and a form in soft, clinging white stood beside him, and the moonrays caressed the great masses of dark hair so close to him, and her face . . .

"Carol!" he whispered. "Carol Gray!"

That was two years ago. He had been—the cycle again! Another of the black hours that had haunted him with remorseless insistence since the cursed chart and that diminutive dot had been so constantly under his eye! It had been bad enough before—at intervals.

He swung around, buttoning up his oilskin coat as the rain came again. Shadowy, indistinct in the wheelhouse, the form of the quartermaster showed in the binnacle light. What was *that* man thinking about? Absurd to wonder about it! No thoughts, probably. Life was the present. Home? The man hadn't any. The end of the voyage? There was only another one to

begin. If the man was thinking about anything it was that there would be plum duff next Sunday, and—

He found himself standing at the port side of the bridge. Somewhere out there, a hundred and fifty miles away . . . nearer to-night than in all those two years! Perhaps not. Perhaps she wasn't there. Who knew!

It wouldn't down! Well, why try? A voice within him jeered:

"Of course! Why try? Go on, you silly fool, torture yourself! Two years ago you were first officer on a swell mailboat on the India run. And you chucked it when you got back to England. Go on, tell us why! We'd like to hear it—we've never heard it before!"

"Carol!" said Martin Lane under his breath. "Carol!" He whispered it again: "Carol!"

The boatdeck on a passenger liner in the tropics—and the moon. The soft airs, the wonders of the sky. How many officers had pointed out the constellations to fair passengers! How many flirtations had a boatdeck known! It had been since ships began. Quite the ordinary thing!

No! Martin Lane's hands clenched. It hadn't been the ordinary thing. Not to him! Nor to her—in one sense, at least. Perhaps it might have been different if he had not been a fool. No, not a fool—mad! She had never by look or word misled him—but there had been the sort of friendship between them that might have ripened on her part into something deeper, that something his soul had craved and still craved, if he had not been—been for the moment mad. He must have been mad, for certainly he had not been himself.

Moisture that was not from the rain was on his forehead; his face had whitened and showed like a grayish blotch in the darkness. His eyes strained seaward—to port. She was over there somewhere—perhaps. That was where she had been going. Whether she had ever reached her destination, or, reaching it, had remained there, he did not know. She had left the ship at Bombay. Eventually she was to reach Batavia, and after that, by some sort of trading vessel, and in accordance with arrangements made for her by her uncle, she was to arrive at that diminutive dot on the chart which represented an island and her uncle's home. It was not an easy journey, or, perhaps, one altogether safe for a girl alone. He had said so at quite an early stage in their acquaintanceship, and she had laughed at him. She loved the sea, and she loved the out-of-doors. If she did not like it there, she would return to New York where she was born—but where she no longer had a home.

He remembered the wistfulness in the clear hazel eyes when, with perhaps unwarrantable insistence, he had pressed an anxious disapproval of

her voyage; he remembered almost her exact words:

"I know, Mr. Lane; but then, you see, there really isn't anything else to do, is there? There's only uncle left. I was only a child when my mother died —I—I'm afraid I hardly remember her. And then when I was nearly through boarding school my father died. I went back to school afterward to finish. I was there another year. Meanwhile my uncle, my father's brother, had been communicated with, and he asked me to come out to him and make my home there if I liked it, but in any case to come for a visit. I'm sure there is nothing to worry about, for uncle has made all arrangements."

"Is your uncle married?" he had asked her.

"No," she had answered. "He lives all alone with his natives and his copra, except for a sort of white overseer, a man he calls Starling, who has been with him, I believe, for the last twenty years."

"But what kind of a life could you possibly live there?" he had protested. "Perhaps once in six months a trading boat comes in. You are absolutely cut off from the world—not a woman of your own kind—no companionship of your own age. You'll be frightfully lonely, I'm afraid."

She had turned her head away then as she had answered:

"Ah, that! I don't know. But uncle is no longer a young man, and I want to see him."

Martin Lane brushed the streaming rain from his face as though mechanically to clear his vision. Somewhere out there was old Silas Gray's island. To port—a hundred and fifty miles away. She *was* there. It wasn't perhaps—he *knew* she was there. Did it matter?

As the voyage had progressed they had been a great deal together on his watches off; and then had come that night—in the Gulf of Aden. They had been standing in the space between two of the boats, a favorite nook of theirs, secluded from the rest of the deck, and the moonlight lay soft upon her, making of her a picture of dreamy sweetness, of loveliness, entrancing, stealing his senses away—her hair with the haunting scent of woodland violets, and a truant curl that brushed his cheek; her eyes wide open to the sea, misty with that strange, alluring wistfulness they so often held; the warm, sweet lips, half parted, smiling at him; the gloriously imperious tilt of the little chin; the contour of the white neck and shoulders; the daintiness of her; the wonder of her as the light breeze wrapped the soft, clinging dinner gown closer about her form.

Martin Lane cried out now, a choked, inarticulate cry. He could see her to-night as vividly as he had seen her that other night. It was as though she

stood here now, again, before him. While he lived that picture of her would live. It was all that was left.

He did not seek to find excuses for himself even now, for there were no excuses to find, but at least he had been innocent of any premeditation in what he had done. It had come on the instant. His soul itself had been intoxicated. He had been conscious only that he had swept her into his arms, that his lips were upon her hair, her eyes, her lips, her throat. He had been unconscious of her struggles; unconscious that in his strength, ungoverned and like himself beyond restraint, he had done her physical hurt as well—conscious only that what alone he desired of life was for the moment his; that she was in his arms, strained to him, that she belonged to him, that he had claimed his own. And at the end it was a limp figure that had slipped from his arms as he had released her, and, swaying, had caught at one of the boat's lashings to keep herself from falling to the deck. She had not been able to speak for a moment; and he had been as a man racked, undone from some mad orgy, his brain, his mind, his soul, shaken and adrift.

Strained, white, tortured, her face had looked when she had spoken then; her voice low, monotonous, save that she gasped for breath.

"I mistook you for a gentleman," she had said. "Let me pass!"

She had taken a faltering step forward, and, fearing that she would fall, he had reached out to catch her. She had instantly shrunk back.

"I—I would not care to have it known that—that I have been in your arms," she had said in a dead tone. "Are you going to force that shame upon me too—make me call out for protection?"

He remembered that a voice had spoken. It wasn't his voice though the sounds had come from his lips:

"Carol—have pity! I love you!"

"*Love!*" She had flung the word back at him, her small hands clenched, her eyes blazing then. "To such as you it is evidently only the instinct of the beast! And—and you dared to think—"

Her voice had broken; but, with her strength back, she had turned and run suddenly along the deck to the companionway. And he had stood there, as he stood now, as he lived that scene again now, here, with his hands covering his face.

He had never seen her, never spoken to her again. She had remained in her cabin thereafter unless perhaps at such hours as she knew him to be on duty on the bridge. A note that he had sent along to her had been returned unopened. She had left the ship at Bombay.

"Oh, God!" Martin Lane cried out into the night.

He had chucked the passenger run on his return to England, as that inner voice had so jeeringly stated. It was perhaps unreasonable—but he had not reasoned about it. Mailship life had become abhorrent to him—the boatdeck had not been empty of other couples on the homeward voyage. And then, back in England, he had played, perhaps, in a little luck. The *Bonara*, a new cargo boat of the same line, was just going into commission; her route the sea lanes of the world, her ports where cargo offered. It appealed. He applied for the transfer and got it—and in a sense, too, got promotion. He became chief officer of the *Bonara*. And to-night, after two years, spanning the countless leagues that since had lain between them, the *Bonara* in her wanderings from end to end of the world had brought him, by dead reckoning, to within a hundred and fifty miles of her again—like a hand's throw from her, it seemed.

CHAPTER II
OUT OF THE FOG

TWO bells—five o'clock!

Martin Lane turned as a step sounded on the starboard bridge ladder.

It was Captain Botts.

"Still thick, Mr. Lane," said the old man, as he stepped on the bridge. "I was hoping for something better with the glass rising."

"Yes, sir," said Martin Lane. He muttered something, quite mechanically, about the hope of getting longitude sights in the morning.

"I hope so," agreed Captain Botts with mild fervency. "I'd feel the easier for it, Mr. Lane. Most peculiar weather—damme, most peculiar! I think I mentioned it must be the tail of a very unusual disturbance somewhere to the nor'east."

"Yes, sir," said Martin Lane.

"H'm!" said Captain Botts mildly. "Damme!"

Martin Lane shook himself together.

"I don't think there's anything to worry about, sir," he said cheerfully. "I'm quite certain her position's all right."

"It's the islands, Mr. Lane," said Captain Botts. "Ticklish business anywhere in these seas even in clear weather. Damme, they even seem to shift their moorings. You take a plate of soup, Mr. Lane, and a pepper pot, and shake the pepper in good and hard, and, the pepper being the islands, Mr. Lane, you've got as good a chart of these waters as you'll find anywhere."

Martin Lane smiled.

"You're not far wrong, at that, sir," he said.

"No," said Captain Botts; "I'm not. And speaking of islands, I've just been—h'm—I've just been reading about that affair over at Samatoa in the Polynesian group. And a rascally piece of business it was, I must say, Mr. Lane. Fancy making a clean sweep of every agent's safe on the beach—six of 'em!"

Martin Lane stared.

"Agents' safes!" he ejaculated. "You mean robbed, sir? I don't remember that our wireless ever picked up anything about it."

"Quite so," said Captain Botts mildly, "but, as I've had occasion to remark, the wireless is sketchy at best, and there's a lot you don't get anyhow. You should read the papers, Mr. Lane. I think I've said so before. You're welcome at any time to help yourself in my cabin."

"Thank you, sir," said Martin Lane hastily. "But when did this happen, sir? It must have been before we left port, else it wouldn't have been in your paper, but I didn't hear any talk about it in Singapore."

"Well," said Captain Botts, "come to think of it, the paper I was reading this in to-night was one of the older ones I brought aboard. I fancy the excitement had died out, if there ever was any, seeing that Polynesia isn't exactly next door to Singapore by several thousand miles. Allowing for the date of the paper I'd say it was a matter of five or six weeks ago."

"I see," nodded Martin Lane. "But whoever did it got caught, of course. Not much of a game to try to get away with in a place like that!"

"Caught!" Captain Botts repeated. "No chance! There wasn't anybody caught; or, at least," he amended, "not at the date when the paper was published—and I haven't run across anything else about it in any of the others. It was professional work, Mr. Lane. I'm not saying the average run of safes you'll find in the islands aren't jim-crack affairs at best, but these were all opened with neatness and despatch in one night, and not a blessed quid left in 'em in the morning. What do you make of that, Mr. Lane?"

Martin Lane pushed his sou'wester to the back of his head—it had stopped raining again. He was glad of the old man's presence, and rather a little interested in the yarn. He had been in Samatoa. It was one of the larger islands—about eight or nine thousand people, if he remembered correctly—mostly natives, of course; but along the beach road circling the bay that made the harbor, the agents of a number of trading companies, mostly English and American, had their offices—bought copra from the natives, exported cocoa and all that sort of thing—quite a few steamers, passenger steamers too, touched there.

"Well, I'd say, sir," he hazarded, answering Captain Botts' question, "that, if it was professional work, it might be some blighter sailing as a passenger maybe on one of the ships that touched there, and that he went ashore and cleaned up, and the ship steamed off with him and his loot."

"And you'd be wrong, Mr. Lane," said Captain Botts promptly, "because there wasn't any shipping in port at the time it happened."

"Is that so!" exclaimed Martin Lane. "What theory, then, does the paper advance, sir?"

Captain Botts shook his head.

"It doesn't advance any," he said. "Just a brief statement of the facts as I've given them to you. But I've a theory of my own, Mr. Lane. Simple enough, I'd say. There's a queer lot, off and on, drifts into the islands—beachcombers and the like. What's to have prevented one of that kind, who was a professional at home, doing the trick, then hiding the stuff, and then sitting tight for months if need be, playing at whatever job he'd taken up, until the excitement blows over and he finally gets away with nobody to give him a thought, and—"

But Martin Lane was no longer paying any attention to his commander's mental delving into the realms of crime. He was staring out into the black ahead, suddenly tense, listening.

"Excuse me, sir," he said quickly. "But did you hear anything?"

Captain Botts became instantly alert.

"No," he said. "What was it?"

"Perhaps a mistake, sir," said Martin Lane quietly. "I wouldn't be at all sure. Listen, sir!"

A moment passed in silence between the two men on the bridge. Then Martin Lane spoke again abruptly:

"There, sir! Did you hear anything then?"

"Well, I wouldn't be sure," said Captain Botts a little anxiously; "but I thought I did—like—like—the—"

"Creak of a boom," suggested Martin Lane.

"Yes!" said Captain Botts. "That's what I'd say it was, if it's anything. A point off the port bow, I'd say."

"It seemed to me to come from starboard," said Martin Lane tersely. He bawled suddenly through his cupped hands: "For'ard, there!"

"Aye, sir?" a voice floated back from the foc's'le-head.

"D'ye hear anything? Make out anything ahead?"

"No, sir," the man answered. "Save that there's another rain squall comin' down with the wind, an' it's goin' thick again."

"Damme!" said Captain Botts a little nervously. "Thick's the word! It's settling down again, right enough! But if there's anything out there, you'd have thought she'd have heard our siren and answered it. A trifle queer, Mr. Lane! Maybe it's no more than a bit of loose tackle aboard ourselves, but in

any case you've sharper ears than that chap, and you'll oblige me by going up for'ard there for a bit. I'll keep the bridge, Mr. Lane."

"Very good, sir," said Martin Lane.

He ran to the starboard bridge ladder and swung himself to the deck below. Was it imagination? The creak of a boom borne down on the wind—a faint sound like that out of the noises of the ship and the night! His mind had been full of fancies to-night—no, not fancies, nor imagination either—memories. Perhaps he was a bit jumpy. He smiled a little mirthlessly at himself, as he darted under the bridge and gained the head of the ladder to the low, flush foredeck. There *was* something out there—but it was a hundred and fifty miles away—by dead reckoning. He swore now at himself savagely, as he began to descend the ladder.

"I'm a fool," he muttered; "a damn fool to-night, on every count!"

From above him there came a series of choked, spluttering gasps of escaping steam, as though the whistle, preparatory to its regular-interval pronouncement, were clearing its throat—and then suddenly above this noise there came a shout from the foc's'le-head, a shout that he himself echoed wildly—and both shouts were drowned out as the whistle burst into its resonant roar.

He was halfway along the foredeck close to the rail. It came suddenly out of the mist and the sheeting rain like some great, ghostly apparition, towering, high, on-rushing, shapeless save that it had vast, outspread, fluttering wings of grayish white which seemed to seek to enshroud the *Bonara* as with a weird, unearthly pall. And on the instant there was a terrific crash; the rend and tear of wood; a snap of big timber like the report of a great gun; the squeals, like hurt things, of the foredeck iron rail-stanchions giving way; the rattle of falling blocks; the whine of parting cordage—shouts, yells, hoarse cries, a tumult of them.

It was quick as the winking of an eye. Something fetched him a blow upon the head, his feet were swept from under him, and there came tumbling upon him great smothering folds of canvas. The creak of a boom! He hadn't been mistaken! In a giddy sort of way he remembered that. A sailing vessel of some kind!

As he tried to free himself, half stunned though he was, his mind was correlating cause and effect. With the *Bonara* low in the water the flush foredeck had not overmuch freeboard, and that was the spot where the sailing vessel, of whatever kind or description she was, had rammed into the steamer, pushing her bowsprit upward and aboard, and, gouging the rail to

pieces, had snapped the bowsprit, bringing jib and jibtopsail, or whatever headsail she was carrying, down with a run.

Lord, how his head ached—and it began to swim around and around now! What was the matter? Why couldn't he free himself? His feet seemed to be entangled somehow in the cordage that kept tightening and tightening like a noose around his ankles. He felt himself being dragged bodily along the deck, and he could clear neither head, nor arms, nor shoulders from the weight of the folds of heavy canvas that enveloped him. It gave him a miserable, suffocating sensation. He began to fight still more desperately to free himself. But he seemed frightfully weak. Queer! The blow on his head seemed to have sapped his strength. He was being dragged along. Yes, he knew what that meant, even though his head was dizzy and spinning like a top. With way on the *Bonara* the vessels were rapidly separating, and, trapped in the sailcloth and cordage that was fast to the sailing vessel, he was being pulled over the *Bonara's* side.

He heard shouts; he could even catch snatches of the words themselves, though they came in a dead, muffled way through the canvas—a torrent of blasphemy, a broadside of ribald and unbridled epithets being hurled at the *Bonara* and all that pertained to her:

". . . You rusty-plated hulk . . . You scrougy, misbegotten son of Belial! . . ."

He shouted himself—but he didn't seem able to make himself heard. They must be talking through megaphones.

He heard Captain Botts:

"Shall I stand by?"

"Aye, stand by in hell!" a voice answered in a virulent screech. "You've no business tryin' to navigate anywhere else!"

And Captain Botts' mild voice rose for once in furious retort.

"Damme!" screamed Captain Botts. "Mr. Lane!"

Martin Lane made another attempt to shout, even though conscious of the futility of it. He was sick with the sense of falling—falling—falling—like a ghastly attack of nausea. Through his brain filtered the fact that he had at last been dragged overboard. He was plunging downward. But now the weight of canvas, the great folds of it that had wrapped themselves about him, that had half smothered him, seemed suddenly to belly out and float away. He clutched wildly, frantically, madly—at nothingness. He struck the water helplessly, doubled up, and seemed to continue on down and down interminably.

He had been called a good swimmer, far and away above the average for that matter, but it seemed to stand him in no good stead now, for something was dragging at his feet, pulling him along—keeping his head and shoulders submerged. Yes, he knew what it was—the cordage entangling his legs—some of the gear that had come down with the canvas. His lungs were bursting. He struggled now in a sort of panic desperation to reach the surface—and his head bobbing suddenly above water, he drew a gasping breath. And then he was under again, but his feet now seemed to be jerked straight upward, and it was as though he were standing on his head. He was being hauled up. He came out of the water dangling head down. He bumped against something—again—and yet again. He put out his hands to protect himself. Yes, that was it—a vessel's side. He fended himself off weakly. They were getting the wrecked gear aboard, and he was being pulled in with it. If that tangle of cordage around his feet and ankles gave way, became untangled—

He tried again and again to cry out; but he was not certain that he made any sound, for it seemed now, more than anything else, that he was fighting to prevent consciousness from slipping away from him. His head throbbed as though a thousand devils were beating a tattoo upon it, and flashes, sickening, giddy flashes, swam before his eyes. He felt himself bumping over something; felt himself grasped by the knees and by the collar of his oilskin coat.

A voice, strangely truculent, bawled out:

"Gawd, look what's come aboard!"

From a prone position on what his fleeting senses still realized must be a vessel's deck, Martin Lane struggled as far up as to get upon his knees.

The truculent voice bawled again:

"Say, who t'hell are you?"

"I—I'm the mate of the *Bonara*," mumbled Martin Lane weakly—and collapsed.

CHAPTER III
A ROGUES' COUNCIL

WHEN MARTIN LANE came to his senses again, his surroundings were strange. He could see little or nothing, because it was but faintly light like the first gray of dawn; but his hands, feeling out and around him, had rewarded him instantly with a sense of unfamiliarity and confusion. Perhaps it was his head. It hurt brutally, and spun around in a crazy fashion. No; it wasn't his head. He was lying on a bunk, but it certainly was not his bunk on the *Bonara*; and he could hear the running swish of water against the hull, and there was a peculiar motion—certainly not at all the motion of the *Bonara* in no matter what kind of sea. He sat bolt upright suddenly—and, in dizziness, grasped as suddenly at the edge of the bunk for support. The sensation passed. He remembered now. He had been hit on the head, probably by a falling block, and, caught in the tumbling canvas and cordage when the ships had come together, had been dragged overboard—and finally had been hauled aboard the sailing vessel as a sort of extra piece of salvage along with the wrecked gear.

His hands began to explore again—over himself now. They had taken off his wet clothes, and in their stead had supplied him with a pair of trousers, and a rough shirt of some kind. His feet were bare. Then, obviously, they had laid him down on this bunk here. Very decent of them! Who were they?

He sat quite still for a moment while questions began to hammer at his brain. What ship was this? How much damage had been done? What kind of craft was she?—brig?—schooner?—what? Where was she bound for?

Well, why not go and find out? He felt a bit rocky perhaps, but there wasn't any reason why he should lie here like a bally invalid! He swung one foot over the edge of the bunk, then the other, and stood up. He smiled grimly. He was pretty bad—weak as a kitten, as the saying was—but that was bound to pass off.

His eyes roved around him. There was just enough light beginning to filter in through the porthole to enable him to make out the boundaries of a very small cabin, and to locate the door two or three steps away. With his hand on the wall for support, he reached the door, opened it, and stepped out. He found himself standing in an extremely narrow alleyway. It was not so dark here because, a few yards away at the end of the alleyway in one

direction, a door, evidently on the hook, was partially open, and through this there streamed a ray of yellow, artificial light.

The sound of voices reached him from this doorway, and he began to move in that direction. It was not far, only a few yards, but he had not traversed half the distance when he halted suddenly. The voices were quite distinct now.

"I wasn't for it then, and I ain't for it now," came in thin, snarling tones. "You should have cut the fool loose and let him sink. This ain't no place for him with what we got on hand. And it ain't too late to get rid of him now. Drop him overboard—the crew's for it. Who's to know on that steamer what happened to their mate? He just went over with the wreckage at the time—get me? We never saw him, did we? You ain't got no love for him, have you?"

There was silence for a moment. Martin Lane, in a sort of curious perplexity, passed his hand across his eyes. They were talking about him—because he was the mate of the *Bonara*—talking about throwing him overboard. Absurd! Some sort of a joke, of course! Mechanically he went on again. His bare feet made no noise. And now, by hugging back against one wall of the alleyway, he could see in through the opening of the door without being seen himself. Though not very large, it was evidently the vessel's main cabin. Two men, their side faces to him, sat opposite to each other at the table under the swinging lamp. One was a big, blotched-faced, thick-set, heavy man with red hair and a short, rust-colored beard; the other was slight, rat-eyed, with a thin, hatchet-like face of yellow, pasty, unhealthy color, the more unprepossessing for its several days' growth of dirty, black stubble. Martin Lane again brushed his hand across his eyes. In a kind of subconscious way he stated to himself that they were as hard looking a couple of blighters as ever he had clapped his eyes upon.

It was the big, red-haired man who spoke now.

"No, it ain't for love of him, Muggy MacGuire," he said in a deliberate, truculent growl. "It's love for our own skins, and in partic'lar for my own."

Martin Lane nodded to himself. Yes, he was quite sure that was the voice he had heard bawling its fluent stream of profanity at the *Bonara* and Captain Botts.

"Yes, but ain't I tellin' you," snapped the other, "that there ain't any risk to your skin by bumpin' him off even now. If you don't, he'll queer the whole works. He ain't so sick but what he'll get a line on what's goin' on."

"That's just the idea," growled the big man in retort. "That's what I want him to do, or, leastways, that's what I want him to think he's doin'. If he was

really sick, you could heave him overboard and be damned to you and him!"

"Eh?" The so-called Muggy MacGuire opened his mouth and stared.

"Yes," said the red-haired man with even increased truculence, "and before we go farther I'll say this to you. Every man to his job. When it come to crackin' safes ashore, that's your business, and I knows better than to stick my nose in and lay out the course for a professional crook navigatin' in his own waters; but aboard the *Molly Deane* here I'll have you know there's only one master, and that's Captain William Dorsay, which is my name, and which same I'll thank you to remember, and I'll thank you not to put any notions into the crew's heads, for if you do, by Gawd, I'll crack that face of yours wider open than ever you cracked a crib in New York!"

Muggy MacGuire leaned back in his chair, and, though his little black eyes narrowed, forced a laugh that was evidently intended to placate the other.

"That's all right, captain," he said hurriedly. "I ain't tryin' to start anything. I'm only tryin' to play safe; and knowin' it ain't because you're chicken-livered about it, I don't get you, that's all."

"H'm!" said Captain William Dorsay a little more graciously. "No, it ain't because I'm chicken-livered; it's because I sometimes look a little ahead of my nose—a habit, if you'd only had it, which might have saved you from runnin' like a scared cat from the U.S.A. with a fleet of cops at your heels!"

The little rat-eyed man grinned in an oily way.

"But then I wouldn't have met Captain William Dorsay of the *Molly Deane* at the Peep-of-Day Bar in Trinidad," he said smoothly, reaching out to where a bottle and glasses stood on the table. "And I think we'll drink to that, just to show there's nothing to get sore about."

"Aye!" said Captain William Dorsay with sudden heartiness. "We'll drink to that! I'll not say but what it's been a rare good thing for both of us!"

Martin Lane leaned heavily against the wall, staring into the cabin. What was all this about? Perhaps he was delirious, imagining it, while in reality he was off his head and still actually lying on his bunk.

"Here's how!" said Muggy MacGuire.

"Here's chin-chin!" said the red-haired man. He swallowed the contents of his glass at a gulp, and wiped his lips with the back of his hand. He stared for a moment in speculative fashion at his companion, then nodded his head brusquely. "So you don't see why I ain't for heaving that mate overboard, eh?" said he. "Well, I'll tell you why. But first I'll preface my remarks by stating that that little business at Samatoa was well done and no traces left

behind. And I'll say this, you did some amazin' neat work, but we had luck with us, too, that nobody spotted the *Molly Deane* lyin' offshore—not that there's so much luck in that, for, it bein' a big place, so to speak, we had to choose the right kind of a night as to weather—but luck that nobody twigged anything goin' on ashore, and that we got away clear."

"I'll say we did," observed Muggy MacGuire complacently. "And we cleaned up three or four of the one-man islands since then."

"Where we didn't have the same luck, and which is what I'm comin' to," said Captain William Dorsay gruffly. "Not that the *Molly Deane* was recognized, or us either; but there was a bit of shootin' here and there, and more than the openin' of a safe or two to answer for, and it's bound to be known that it was done by a schooner—like us. Savvy?"

Muggy MacGuire screwed up his eyebrows. He reached for the bottle again.

There was a sudden queer pounding in Martin Lane's pulse, as he still stood leaning against the alleyway wall. The skipper and his newspaper!

"Samatoa!" he whispered to himself.

Muggy MacGuire poured himself another drink.

"Go on, captain," he invited. "I get you on all those counts, but I don't see how the bird we've fished aboard is goin' to help us out any."

And then suddenly the red-haired man laughed out in a hoarse and unpleasant guffaw.

"Him!" said he. "Blimy! He's the witness for the defense if we ever needs one, which mabbe we're likely to. He gives us a clean bill of health. It's like this, y'see? Samatoa's a regular port of call for some of the passenger boats and it's known long ago all over the lot what happened there, but it ain't known how it happened. Well, the bits of islands where we've picked fruit since then on the way along do know, some of 'em, *how* it happened to *them*, but they ain't got any means of outside communication for months mabbe until the first tradin' vessel puts in. Savvy? But in time the news of it'll trickle out, and by and by there'll be a gunboat nosin' around lookin' for a schooner whose description might answer to us. Two and two makes four, Muggy MacGuire, and whoever did it to one, did it to all. If you've got an alibi on one count you're clear on all of 'em. It's as plain as the nose on your face. And what with me havin' had some little dealings off and on with blackbirdin' and the like in the past, I ain't sure I'm not goin' to be questioned, seein' it's bound to be known I've been in these parts at the time. Not that there's any proof against us, but an alibi is by no means to be sneezed at."

"Sure," agreed Muggy MacGuire, "all that's straight enough—but pickle me pink if I see what you're drivin' at yet."

"Well," said Captain William Dorsay with a harsh chuckle, "it's simple enough. With a jury rig for'ard where that swine took our bowsprit off, and with the help of the auxiliary, we'll rise old Gray's island at the proper hour after dark to-morrow night. That'll be our last port of call before we run into civilization to refit. There's nothin' to it! This mate of—what'd he call her? —the *Bonara*—is goin' to tell the world that we treated him with real, honest-to-God, Christian kindness, and that on the night old Silas Gray was stuck up for his cash, we was sailin' along as best we could makin' for port to repair damages after smashin' into his ship."

Martin Lane was conscious that he was no longer leaning for support against the wall. He was standing stiff and rigid, his face set, his hands clenched at his sides.

The red-haired man thumped the table in a sort of triumphant self-applause.

"Bill Dorsay wasn't born yesterday, as they'll tell you in these seas," he announced blatantly. "That's why he's got the crew with him he has. Savvy? This mate's got a crack on his head, and was half drowned, and he's groggy. He'll come to after a bit, and he's goin' to lie there knowin' he's alive and the ship's sailin' along, and all that, but he ain't goin' to feel *quite* well enough to leave his bunk and go on deck—not for several days yet—not until we're through with old man Gray, and are shapin' a clear course for port to refit. And the reason he ain't goin' to feel well enough is because he's goin' to get a drop or so of laudanum out of the medicine-chest dumped into his tea now and then for the next two days, judiciously administered, as the sayin' is, Muggy MacGuire—not to make him too dopey, but just dopey enough to keep him from feelin' like gettin' up, and so he'll think it's his hurt and the maulin' he's had that's delayin' his convalescence. And to-morrow night, if, with the help of an extra drop or two, he falls off into a little sounder sleep so's he won't know we've anchored, it ain't goin' to damage his testimony any, because with him figurin' that he's been restless with his hurt anyhow, he'd be willin' to take his davey that, as a sailorman, even if he'd been in the soundest sleep he'd ever slept, no ship he was on could ever come to a stop and anchor without bringin' him up all standin' and him bein' wise to it the minute it happened."

Muggy MacGuire thrust a hand impulsively across the table.

"Wow!" he ejaculated. "Shake!"

The red-haired man reached for the bottle instead of the proffered hand, and drank again at a gulp.

"And that's that!" said he with a complacent grin. "But to ease your mind in case anythin' did happen and he found out what was goin' on, which he ain't in no ways likely to, I'll say this, that you can drop him overboard then without hesitatin' any about it, and furthermore that I'll see to it you do."

"I get you!" said the little rat-eyed man. "I guess there ain't anythin' to it now except how much we get, and accordin' to you this bird Gray keeps a wad there."

"Aye!" said Captain William Dorsay. "So they say. It's common talk that he keeps a good few thousand pounds by him. Why, I don't know. I've never seen it, of course, though I touched there once for water a few years ago; but I seen the old safe he's got, and it won't bother you no more than if it was made of the galvanized iron he's got on the roof of his house." He warmed suddenly to his subject, and rubbed the palms of his hands together pleasurably. "It's the last little tradin' visit we make this voyage, but it'll be the easiest and pleasantest of all, I make no doubt. We'll run in on the other side of the island from the house where there's deep water close in by the shore, and at which partic'lar point it ain't much more'n a mile across. And the natives countin' for nothin', there's only two whites on the island, Silas Gray and an old fellow he's had there as boss for years, except mabbe a girl, a niece of his, that I heard had come out to live with him a year or so ago."

The little rat-eyed man leaned forward, a sudden ugly smirk on his face.

"A girl—eh?" he said. His lips parted in a slow smile—he touched them here and there with the tip of his tongue as though they were parched. He mouthed the words again: "A girl—eh? Well, I never kick at my luck because there's a girl thrown in and . . ."

Martin Lane found himself groping his way back to his cabin. He couldn't kill those two men in there with his bare hands. It was quite impossible—he was too damnably weak. Mechanically he reached and closed the cabin door silently behind him, and staggering to his bunk flung himself face down upon it.

"Carol!" he said aloud. "Oh, my God—Carol!"

CHAPTER IV
THE *Molly Deane* DROPS ANCHOR

IT grew light. A step sounded along the alleyway and Martin Lane's cabin door opened. The red-haired man came in.

Martin Lane lifted his head.

"How're you feelin'?" demanded the red-haired man pleasantly.

Martin Lane's eyes fastened on a small tray the other held in his hand. He shook his head.

"Here's a mug of tea for you, and some biscuits, son," said the red-haired man.

"Leave 'em," said Martin Lane in a voice that simulated weakness. "I'll take 'em by and by."

"Right you are!" said the other heartily. "Just you buck up, and you'll have the hair on your teeth again in less than no time." He set the tray down on the cabin floor beside the bunk. "Anythin' you'd like?"

Again Martin Lane shook his head.

The red-haired man went out of the cabin.

Martin Lane listened until the retreating footsteps had died away, then he reached over for the mug of tea, emptied it under the mattress of his bunk—and ate the biscuits.

"I've got to get my strength back," said Martin Lane in a queer, judicial manner to himself, "and I've got two days and one night to do it in."

He sat up on his bunk after a while, haggard-faced, staring across the small cabin. What could he do, after all? What chance had he, alone, unarmed, against an entire crew who, through their captain as a mouthpiece, were self-acknowledged sea-pillagers, whose trade was robbery, to whom murder, if expedient to their lawless plans, was merely an incident? The majority of them were probably Malays, maybe a few Chinese, and the whites the scum of the world's waterfronts. A hell's brood!

The sense of incredulity was past. The refusal to believe that he was dealing with reality no longer obtruded itself. These waters had always been notorious as the haunts where crime was spawned by piratical Malays and renegade whites. Crimes as vicious and sinister still persisted in the great centers of civilization, in London, in New York; and, equally, they had never

been stamped out here, probably never would be while such curs existed as that little man with the small, black, shifty eyes, with the dirty stubble on his face, who licked his lips at the mention of—of—Carol!

White-faced, Martin Lane was on his feet—rocking there. What chance had he alone? A curious, inarticulate sound came from him—a low cry, passion born. Chance enough! Chance enough at the end, if he could do no more, to strangle the other with his naked hands!

He began to walk up and down the short length of cabin. He must get his strength back—exercise—he mustn't lie there on the bunk—he had to-day and to-night and to-morrow. . . .

His unshod feet made no noise—and besides there was the creaking of the ship. But he mustn't be caught—if he, too, was to go ashore to-morrow night. He would have to swim for it. There was no other way. And to do that he must get his strength back—that was the one vital thing now. He listened as he walked. After a while he lay down on his bunk again.

At intervals through the day food and drink were brought him; sometimes by the red-haired man, and sometimes by a disfigured Malay who had a white scar across one cheek bone—and each visit found him restless, tossing on his bunk, or, by way of variety, apathetic and drowsy. The food he ate. If it were water that was brought, he drank it, for water would disguise no foreign taste; if it were other than water, it followed the first mug of tea under the mattress.

And that night he slept well, tired with exercise and because his strength was returning, and the pain and giddiness were going from his head.

He awoke with a grim sense of physical well-being the next morning, and, as he watched the daylight lengthen through the porthole, his mind became intent upon two things: A pair of shoes, and a weapon—but most of all a weapon. Where was he to get one? He could hardly expect to find anything of the kind here in the cabin, and to be caught prowling about the schooner now would be fatal. If they became suspicious for a moment that he knew their game, it was all up—not only with himself—with Carol!

The scar-cheeked Malay brought his breakfast.

Martin Lane began the routine of the day before, but added thereto a search of the cabin. Shoes and weapon! The only place here in the cabin where there could be anything that was not already in plain sight was the locker there under the bunk—two big drawers on top of which the bunk was built. He started to open one. It wasn't locked; but it came away with difficulty as though it were packed with something extremely heavy. He stared a little in amazement when it was wide enough open to permit him to

inspect the contents. It was full of ankle- and wrist-irons—thick, heavy, rusty bands, some locked, some unlocked, each pair connected by a short, rusty piece of chain. He pulled out the other drawer—it was equally full of the same thing. He nodded sharply to himself. The red-haired renegade had not lied in any degree about one of the favorite pursuits of the *Molly Deane*!

"Blackbirding!" said Martin Lane—and nodded his head again.

There were no shoes and no weapons—unless one of these things might be called a weapon. He picked up and examined a pair of the wrist-irons. They were better than nothing. At close quarters they would at least deal a much uglier blow than a bare fist—not the ones that had been snapped together; they were too small in circumference for the purpose—but with a pair where the jaws were open he could encase his knuckles rather neatly, make them, as it were, iron-shod. He chose a pair of the latter, thrust the manacles into his trousers pocket, and closed the locker drawers again.

The hours went slowly—but they brought strength.

The red-haired man was increasingly solicitous. He came more frequently—and went away satisfied.

At dusk the Malay brought supper. There was a mug of tea. When the man returned for his tray the tea had disappeared, but the food had scarcely been touched. The figure on the bunk had the appearance of being indifferent to everything.

It grew dusk. An hour passed. Suddenly Martin Lane raised himself on his elbow and listened. The next instant he lay prone again, his head on an outflung arm, his face to the bulkhead. Queer how, above the creak of timber and the noises of the vessel, he had come to recognize unerringly the footstep of the red-haired man in the alleyway there outside!

He felt the schooner swing quickly to a more even keel, as though she were coming sharply up into the wind. He heard the hurried patter of feet on the deck above his head. He heard the slatting of canvas. And then the door of the cabin opened.

It was black inside here, utterly black.

"Hello, son," inquired the voice of the red-haired man, "how goes it?"

Martin made no answer. A footstep crossed the cabin. Then he felt the other's hand on his shoulder, shaking him gently. He made no movement. A head was bent low, a breath was on his cheek; eyes, he sensed, were peering at him fixedly in the darkness. And then impulse, born of a mad surge of passion, seized upon him. He was strong enough now; he could do it. With a single movement he could lock his fingers in a strangle hold on the other's throat. He fought the impulse back. It would do no good. It would change

nothing except that this man would be dead, and that presently he would have the crew swarming upon him and he would be dead in turn, and the night's program would go on just the same. He would rather kill the man who licked bestially at his lips and—

"That's the boy!" said the red-haired man with a low chuckle. "We're just goin' to let go the mud-hook, but I thought I'd make sure first it wouldn't disturb you, 'cause you've had a hard time of it, and you need the few snatches of sleep you've been able to get!"

The footsteps retreated across the cabin. The door opened and closed. Martin Lane came up on his elbow again—listening intently. The footsteps died away along the alleyway. And then Martin Lane was on his feet. In a second he was across the cabin, and, with the door closed behind him, was standing in the alleyway listening again. There was commotion on the deck above his head, a good deal of it. Then he heard the plunge of the anchor going overboard. How far to the shore was it? They would go in a boat, and he would have to swim for it. Every minute counted now.

The door to the main cabin from the alleyway stood wide open, and the swinging lamp gave light. The companionway to the deck was there, of course. He stole forward, gained the threshold of the door, and, pressed back against the alleyway wall, halted again for an instant. So far the way was clear. The cabin was empty and deserted.

He darted through the cabin and up the companionway; but, just at the top of the companionway and before emerging on the deck, he halted once more, and went down on his hands and knees. It was very dark. He could scarcely see anything, but there were sounds, many of them, that were eloquent enough! The crew seemed mostly busy forward, housing the foresail probably; and there was the clank of anchor chain and hand windlass; and amidships, to port, what sounded like the creak of davit falls and tackle. The mainsail hung like a gray and flimsy curtain before him, and he noticed that the main boom had swung well to starboard of amidships. If there was anybody aft, anybody still at the wheel, which wasn't likely, the mainsail would afford, at least, a little protection.

He crawled out now on the deck making for the starboard rail, and, gaining this, searched around, still on hands and knees, for a bit of rope. Almost anything would serve his purpose, which was to avoid the sound of a splash as he went overboard. His lips grew tight with impatience. He had not been seen yet, but every second was inviting discovery.

And then his lips relaxed. His hand was on a loose rope's end. Feeling along he found it to be the slack of a rope that was fast to a belaying pin inside the rail. He worked with desperate haste now, paying out the rope's

end over the rail; then, swinging himself over, he lowered himself down and slid silently into the water.

He swam under water until forced to the surface for breath. And now for the first time he obtained his bearings. With the tree tops curiously like the jagged teeth of a saw, the black, serrated, irregular mass of the shore line showed a little to his right against a sky line that was scarcely less black. It did not seem to be very far away, but it was almost impossible to gauge the distance in the darkness. And there was a stiff wind blowing, too, if those ugly, scudding clouds meant anything; though here, in some sort of a cove, probably, the water was comparatively calm. The weather hadn't cleared very much, if any, in spite of the *Bonara's* rising glass—or maybe there was another storm coming up—a bad season of the year in these waters, anyhow!

The schooner was indistinct, and he had therefore little fear of being seen himself. And then, as he began to swim on again, a sound caught his ear—a low, steady, rhythmical splash. Oars! His lips compressed. It wasn't that he was afraid of being seen by the boat, he could evade that in the darkness easily enough; but he had hoped that they would not have left the schooner so soon—that he might have reached shore first. There was no hope of that now. The greater the distance, the farther he would be left behind. From the sound, the boat was pulling a good many oars. He found himself wondering how many of the cutthroats, apart from the red-haired man and the little rat-eyed fugitive from justice, were in her. Perhaps seven or eight. The schooner wasn't very large. She wouldn't have a crew of more than ten or twelve all told, and a few would certainly be left on board. What did the exact number matter? There would be enough of them, anyway!

He caught a glimpse of the boat—just a black smudge passing across the face of the water over there to his right. A feeling of bizarre unreality swept over him. It was full of intense, unholy humor. He hadn't even a pair of shoes; and the weapons with which he was to slash and slay his way to victory single-handed were a pair of rusty old manacles!

He swam on and on. The shore, that jagged line of tree tops, never seemed to get any nearer. All sound was lost now—from the boat—from the schooner. A tremendous sense of isolation seemed to have fallen upon him. He was in a world apart, bent upon a mission that was fantastically impossible; a dream from which he would awaken to find himself—where? Mentally he roused himself. He tried to estimate the elapsed time since he had left the schooner. Twenty minutes? The boat would long ere this have reached the beach, or, if it hadn't, then he had still a very long way to swim.

And then his feet touched bottom, and presently he drew himself up on a stretch of sand. He was conscious of great physical lassitude, a desire to lie down and rest. But, instead, he ran onward, stumbling at first, but seeming steadily to regain vigor under the mental lash with which he drove himself along. A girl's face swam before his eyes. She seemed to be angry with him. His nails were biting into the palms of his hands.

"On the other side of the island—about a mile across"—that's what the red-haired man had said.

He was running through a wooded tract; through vegetation that sought maliciously to bar his way, where creepers and undergrowth tripped him at almost every step. He fought and twisted his way through this for a long time.

He came out into a clearer space, and ran on. It was easier here to keep one's direction. But there were no stars, nothing to guide him. He was not sure that, due to his twisting and turning in and amongst the trees back there, he was now running in anything like a direct line across the island. The thought tormented him. There was no sound save the *pad* of his bare feet. In a subconscious way he was aware that, for some reason or other, they gave him pain. He must have come a good three-quarters of a mile. But he wasn't sure of his direction. Another stretch of wooded land loomed up ahead of him. He plunged into it. It was worse than the first. If he could only see! Why wasn't there a window-light in the house to show him where he was going? Where was the house? Why wasn't there some sound from it—they always played gramophones on these islands in the evening!—and it was still very early—

He stopped short. Out of the utter stillness there had come a single shot. And now there came another and another, quickening into a fusillade—and the night became suddenly hideous with yells. The sounds came from slightly to his left, and from still some distance away. He swerved in that direction and plunged on once more. The shots and yells continued. And now occasionally he heard low cries and the sound of speeding feet here and there about him, a branch snapping, native words gasped out, terrified exclamations—as though the woods were suddenly peopled with unseen ghosts. He nodded. He understood. That's what the red-haired man had said. The natives didn't count. Wherever they had come from, they were now in full flight.

Flashes stabbing the blackness, vicious little tongues of flame, showed through what was now but a fringe of trees separating him from the scene of the firing; and, beyond this fringe of trees and across what seemed like a clearing, he could make out a long black shadow from which, here and

there, came answering spurts of flame. That was the house, of course—and there were no lights in the windows except when those little tongue-flames spurted out. The red-haired man had evidently failed to take the household unawares, and so, taking cover here at the fringe of the woods, he was attacking it from this point. The only chance then for him, Martin Lane, to get to the house, was by working his way around to the other side. They would have arms in there, plenty of them, and—

A strange, bewildered look spread over his face. It seemed as though he had been dealt a terrific blow on his upper left arm and shoulder. It spun him half round like a top, and the whirl, short as it was, made him ridiculously dizzy. He flung out his right hand to grasp at a tree for support—and then he felt himself sliding toward the earth as though he were melting into it. And then sound and sight were blotted out.

CHAPTER V
THE PRISONERS

MARTIN LANE became conscious first of all that boisterous singing, outbursts of hilarity and jubilation had given place to the screams, yells and shots that had been ringing in his ears. He next discovered that he was lying full length on the ground. He raised himself up to a sitting posture—and bit his lips with pain. He put his hand to his shoulder. It was wet, sticky, hot; his left arm hung helplessly at his side. He sat still for an instant trying to collect his senses. He had been hit by a stray bullet, of course—that was obvious. And the shot must have been fired by some one in the house—that was also obvious—but it was also absurdly ironical that he should have been shot by some one in the house. How long had he been lying here on the ground unconscious? There was no telling, naturally, but long enough so that in the meantime the attack on the house had succeeded, and instead of shots— A low cry came from him. He staggered to his feet. It was over, then! He was too late! Where was Carol? What had they done to her? No—not too late! Not too late to get his fingers around the throat of that evil-eyed rat! A smashed arm! Well, suppose it was smashed!

He moved out to the edge of the trees. There was a light now in one of the windows of the house at least—just opposite where he stood and perhaps a couple of hundred feet away; while, much farther off and over to the right, three or four lanterns kept moving around and bobbing up and down—and it was from this latter direction that the sounds of raucous singing and hilarity came. It was very shadowy and indistinct, but thanks to the lanterns he was able to make out another building there, quite detached, of course, from the house itself. A storage shed probably—but certainly being looted, whatever it was. And from the sounds it was fairly obvious that amongst the contents had been found spirits of some sort.

He dropped down on his knees and began to crawl toward the lighted window of the house. They couldn't see him if he kept close to the ground. He halted, however, before he had gone five yards. His left hand kept dragging and bumping on the ground, swinging his arm like a pendulum that was out of control. He lifted his left hand with his right, tucked the former into the bosom of his shirt, improvising in that fashion a sling, and crawled on again.

The window was open, and as he reached it he heard the sound of voices from inside. It was only shoulder high, and, standing up, well at one edge of the window frame, he peered in.

Something indefinable, save that it was primal, elemental in its merciless fury, stirred within him. He had seen death before—many times—but never one by murder. Strange that he should first come upon it here on a lonely little island! A gray-haired man with face upturned, a smudge of blood across temple and cheek, dead, lay upon the floor. And his requiem was a coarse laugh. The red-haired man was laughing. He stood over in the far corner holding, by one of its two handles, a handbag that gaped open; and, kneeling in front of him, was the furtive, rat-eyed, little MacGuire, working with some tools at a safe, which, though large, was many years out of fashion.

"You made too much noise gettin' in the window, Muggy," laughed the red-haired one grossly. "For a swell New York footpad it must have been painful to have come a cropper like that! But you sure crowded on all sail when you came out again—with the wind of a bullet blowing you along. You looked like you was in a hurry! I'm laughin' yet!"

"Aw, go to blazes!" said Muggy MacGuire politely. "It wasn't my fault. It was the girl that spotted me and let out a screech. She'll wish to Gawd she hadn't! I'll fix her when I'm through with this piece of tin junk!"

"There's no one else left to fix," said the red-haired man roughly. "There was only the three of 'em—and old Gray's probably gone out by now, too. All the information the natives can give is that a ship came here—and anybody'd know that. But I ain't sure"—he laughed again in the same gross way—"that, havin' clapped eyes on the girl myself, I can't see where you've got any personal and preferred claim to her. She's some looker!"

"You don't, eh?" snarled the other.

"No; I don't!" returned the red-haired man, mimicking the other's tone.

Muggy MacGuire turned a face suddenly distorted by a thin and evil-mouthed grin.

"Well, anyway," he said, his leer broadening, "we don't have to fight about it. She can't be taken on board on account of that bird from the *Bonara*, but—"

Martin Lane was moving silently away from the window, edging the wall of the house. He was conscious of two things: One, a desire to kill—this possessed him—hugely, savagely, remorselessly, he desired to kill. He lusted for it. And as though it seeped through senses drunk with this

intoxicant, the other thing: *She* was in there somewhere . . . somewhere in there . . . somewhere in there . . .

The house here seemed to make an L. He turned the corner and suddenly crouched down, motionless and still. Against the wall in the shadows of the angle it was very black and he was quite safe from observation, but farther along the shadows were less opaque and he could make out a man's figure pacing slowly up and down.

"Got a guard here, eh?" said Martin Lane to himself in a curiously detached and unemotional way. "Wonder if it's to keep Carol from getting out, or the rest of the lot from getting in until those two devils are ready to let 'em!"

The man struck a match, bending his head to light his tobacco. It threw his face into relief. Martin Lane smiled unpleasantly. It was the scar-cheeked Malay who had brought him drugged tea for two days. He began to creep cautiously forward again, hugging the wall. The match-light had disclosed more than the other's face. There was a door there just opposite to where the Malay stood.

The man resumed his pacing up and down, now bulking up out of the shadows, now lost in them. Martin Lane crept forward. There mustn't be any noise about it—just quiet. But there mustn't be any mistake, either. There was certainly a door on the other side of the house, because the other side must be the front facing the sea, and if there was a guard here there would certainly be one on the other side, too. There mustn't be any noise about it.

From his pocket Martin Lane drew out his rusty pair of manacles. He encircled the knuckles of his right hand with them. He mustn't miss! There would be no second chance, if the man grappled with him—his left arm must be broken at the shoulder—he felt a bit sick with the pain of the thing—but he had to fight that, too!

He marked the limit of the Malay's approach—and reached that spot while the man was pacing slowly in the other direction. The Malay was coming back now—nearer—still nearer.

And then, from where he crouched in the shadows, Martin Lane sprang, and struck—struck with every ounce of his weight behind the blow. And there was no sound—save a queer little crunching sound as the iron-shod knuckles met flesh and bone just back of the other's ear.

There was a crumpled thing on the ground. Martin Lane bent over it, felt over it. He thrust the manacles back into his pocket, and, in their stead, stood up with the Malay's revolver in his hand. He stepped quickly, silently then to the door, opened it noiselessly, and entered. A ceiling lamp, burning low,

lighted the place dimly. He was standing in a wide hallway that obviously made the entire breadth of the house and ended in another door that fronted on the side facing the sea. The hallway, he noted, was evidently used as a sort of lounging-room, judging from the wicker chairs and tables with which, throughout its length, it was furnished. To his right was a closed door—the red-haired man and the little crook were in there, of course. There was another door, also closed, on his left. He stepped cautiously toward this one, and opened it.

It was quite dark inside except for the faint light, not enough to enable him to see, that now filtered in from the hallway behind him—but a strange, confused murmur of voices reached him from, apparently, somewhere across the room. He moved forward again. The voices became more distinct. He felt his pulse quicken fiercely. He could distinguish a girl's tones. It must be Carol—it couldn't be any one but Carol!

He brought up against the opposite wall of the room. It *was* Carol's voice. Through the thin tropical partition he could hear every word now as he felt along the wall for the door that obviously must open into still another room beyond.

"No, no—I won't! I can't!" Her voice was low, broken—a half sob. "I—I can't leave you here, uncle, like this—no matter what happens."

A weak voice answered her—a man's voice—the words coming almost in gasps:

"They're counting on that—that you wouldn't leave me—that's why they've left you alone so far. It's the only chance. You must take it, Carol—at once. Try and get out of the house. Take the boat at the dock. Find some of the natives in the woods to row you—only twenty miles straight across to Marston's island. You'll be there before daybreak. You mustn't think of me—you mustn't—do no good. They've done for me—like—like Starling. I—I haven't got much longer—your only chance—you mustn't think of me—I—"

Martin Lane found the door, opened it, and stepped into the other room. The light of a small, shaded lamp, that stood on a table beside a bedstead in the far corner, threw into a sort of filmy relief only its immediate surroundings. The rest of the room was in shadow. But the light showed a man's face on the bed—an old man's face—waxen, deathlike in pallor; and, kneeling on the floor beside the bed, the drooped shoulders of a girl.

"Carol!" There was a catch in Martin Lane's voice—like a dry sob. He stepped toward her. "Carol!" he said again.

With a low, startled cry, she sprang to her feet, and, turning, faced him. He was in the shadows; she was not. He could see the hazel eyes wide with amaze—and then, suddenly, snatching the lamp from the table, she held it up until the rays were in his face. He saw the color fade from her cheeks, and whiteness come, and deepen into an ashen gray. He saw the lamp tremble in her hand.

Her lips moved. Contempt, loathing, the bitterness of despair were in her voice.

"I heard you had left your ship," she said. "So you have come to this—a marauder!"

For a moment his mind seemed stunned, his brain to refuse its functions. And then it cleared.

"Carol!" he whispered hoarsely. "You don't think—you can't think that I—that I am one of these devils!"

She made no answer. She replaced the lamp on the table, and, turning her back, knelt again at the bedside. And the old man on the bed raised himself on his elbow, and made a pitiful effort to shake a clenched fist, as he choked out a curse.

Martin Lane lurched a little on his feet. His mouth was dry. His words came thickly:

"Carol—it's impossible that you should think anything like that!"

"Is it—since you have come here with them?" she said in a monotone. "And, furthermore, it must have been you who led them here. I noticed you have been wounded—I suppose that is what kept you from appearing on the scene until now; and why, until now, I have been left alone."

Martin Lane brushed his hand, that still held the Malay's revolver, across his eyes. There wasn't much time, none to waste—and he was wasting it. He could hardly blame her. It was quite natural—very natural—but absurdly grotesque, of course, when he wanted to save her if he could—not simply because she was a woman, but because she was the woman he loved—only she wouldn't believe that—he had been mad, insanely mad once. Curse that shoulder—it was trying to get the better of him again! And there wasn't an instant to spare now—that Malay out there might be dead—or he might only be stunned, and, coming to life, raise the alarm. Or the red-haired man—

"Well, I am not one of them." He found himself speaking in a cool, quick, incisive way. "Do you hear, Carol? I am not one of them. There is no time for explanations now. They can come afterwards—if there is an afterwards. You must run for it. Quick, Carol! The way is clear for the

moment to get away from the house. I can't answer for even the next minute."

She answered, still with her back to him, still in the same hard monotone:

"I desire no explanations. I would not leave my uncle no matter what you said. I shall stay here."

His shoulder was bullet smashed, his hand tucked helplessly in the bosom of his shirt. He couldn't carry that man there on the bed. That was impossible. And, even if he were physically able to do so, it would be a beastly thing to tear her away from her uncle, though the man was dying and wouldn't live probably more than a few minutes anyhow—and the man *was* dying, going fast—he couldn't even speak any more, though he was trying to—and making only contortions with his lips.

An instant longer Martin Lane hung there, and then, as a sudden, desperate inspiration came to him, he turned and, without a word, half ran, half staggered from the room. Though she wouldn't leave her uncle, and no matter what her attitude toward him, Martin Lane was, there was still a chance perhaps to save her. If it failed, then that was the end of them both—that was all. He wasn't sure how much of a chance it was. He was sure only that in case of failure the end would not come for them alone. It was queer that those manacles were the basis of that inspiration—that they might be put to still another use to-night, and perhaps now mean the way to freedom. Manacles—freedom! Sounded foolish, that! Damn it, he was shaky—a bit sick—but he couldn't afford to crash.

He reached the hallway and paused now to listen. There was no sound from the Malay guard outside. The voices of the red-haired man and Muggy MacGuire came discordantly from behind the closed door in front of him. He released his hand from its sling. A good deal would depend on what he could do with it—if, for instance, he could raise his forearm from the elbow. He tested it. It brought sweat beads out on his forehead, gave him excruciating pain, and he bit his lips to suppress a cry—but the forearm came up from the elbow, and, by supporting it against his hip, he could keep it there. It was enough—quite enough. He let it dangle again at his side.

He stepped now to the door from behind which came that sound of voices. It took an instant, no more, to fling the door wide, and stand inside the room. The safe was open now, and the two men crouching before it, in the act of transferring its contents to the handbag, swung sharply around—to stare at a bare-footed, blood-stained and bedraggled figure who smiled coldly as he covered them with a revolver. There was a look of stunned bewilderment on the red-haired man's face as he lurched to his feet—a quick

snarl and a torrent of blasphemous invective from the little rat-eyed man, who, instead of making any attempt to gain his feet, jerked his hand toward his pocket.

"Don't do that!" Martin Lane's voice was level, ominously without inflection.

The man's hand dropped back.

Martin Lane spoke again—as though there had been no interruption:

"The only chance to live you two have got is that you do what you are told, and the only chance I have to live and get out of this depends on the same thing. It's an even break. If you raise the alarm and bring the rest of your cutthroats here, I am perfectly well aware that it is the end of me and that girl in there—but the point is that if you force the issue you two will die *first*. It's rather plain, isn't it? The cards are on the table. Now"—his voice rang suddenly sharp and imperative—"stand up beside each other, face the wall and put your hands above your heads!"

Sullenly, slowly, the two men obeyed. The little crook had become speechless, though his lips worked as if in a sort of dumb fury. The red-haired man had found his voice—he cursed without cessation in a monotone, but one that he took care to keep guarded and low.

Martin Lane stepped up behind them, transferred his revolver to his left hand which he raised to his hip, and with his right hand he relieved the two of their weapons. These he tucked inside his shirt, and from his own pocket drew out the pair of manacles.

"Now," he ordered curtly, "each of you put the hand that is nearer the other down behind your back!"

Again sullenly, slowly, they obeyed.

The manacles snapped over their wrists.

"You may turn around now," said Martin Lane sharply, "and finish your work. Put the rest of that cash into the handbag! You came for it, and there's no reason why you should go away without it—instead of leaving it for the rest of your blood-spilling lot. And"—his voice of a sudden rasped and snarled—"shake a leg! You've no time to spare. If I'm caught in here, I fire—at you."

They mouthed, they cursed, they raved at him; but they worked. They knelt on the floor again, and what of cash and papers that were left in the safe they placed in the handbag—and the while, it seemed to Martin Lane as he glanced in that direction, the upturned face of the murdered man near by brooded upon the scene with strange and gruesome contemplation. Martin

Lane turned his head away, his lips twitching. If it were not for Carol—! He restored his wounded arm to its improvised sling.

"Take the bag between you now with your manacled hands," he ordered. "Each a handle! Yes, like that! And now listen to what I say! The bag swinging between you won't interfere. You are like one man now with his two arms still free. You will go into that room where the girl and the wounded man are, pick the man up from the bed, carry him down to the beach in front of the house, and put him in a boat that is moored there at the dock. If any of your crew see you, or attempt to interfere, you will inform them that it is all right, and order them away. If they do not obey your orders, you know the consequences—for *all* of us." He stepped behind the two men, and shoved his revolver muzzle into the nape of the red-haired man's neck. "Now—march!" he said coldly, and gave the man an unceremonious push forward.

CHAPTER VI
THE LAST ROUND

PRODDED on by Martin Lane's revolver, the two men crossed the room and went out into the hall, not graciously, but silent now under the spell of a grim logic that they could quite appreciate was flawless, and on which depended their tenure upon life. And then they came into the inner room beyond.

Martin Lane's lips were like a tight-drawn line; pain from his wound, the loss of blood, seemed to come striving with renewed effort to rob him of his senses. He fought it back with all his mental strength. He walked behind the two, a little unsteadily upon his feet. But they could not see that. If her uncle were taken away, Carol would go too of her own accord—anywhere; she wouldn't leave her uncle—that was the idea.

They were nearly across the room. Carol was still kneeling by the bed, her back turned. She neither moved nor looked around.

The two men hesitated. Martin Lane jabbed at them with his revolver.

"Go on!" he said between his teeth. "You know what you've got to do. Pick that man up!"

And then the girl was on her feet, facing them defiantly.

"You shan't!" she cried out. "Let him alone! You shall not touch him!"

The red-haired man brushed her aside, and bent over the bed. He made a sudden sucking sound with his teeth, and gave vent to an ugly grunt.

"He's dead," said the red-haired man.

"Dead!" Martin Lane leaned over the red-haired man's shoulder. For a moment he stood there staring at the form on the bed. It was true—quite true. The old man was dead. He found himself striving as though against great odds to think clearly and rationally. Carol would come now—there was no reason for her to stay here any longer—the man was dead—nothing to be gained by it. "Come away, Carol," he heard himself saying.

"No!" she answered wildly. "I don't believe it! He's not dead—he's not! I won't go!" She flung herself on her knees, her arms outspread over the bed as though both to protect and cling to the form that lay there, and broke into sobs.

"But you must, Carol." Martin Lane's voice was breaking; he tried to steady it. "You must come at once. Can't you believe me—oh, my God, can't you believe me? It's the only way. Look! You can see that I have these two men handcuffed."

Her sobs turned to laughter—a wild outburst of it—mad, hysterical laughter. She seemed suddenly beyond self-control.

"Carry her!" said Martin Lane hoarsely.

The red-headed man and the rat-eyed little crook strove to pick her up. She turned upon them, gaining her feet again, and fought them off madly, battling with them, pounding at them with her fists, laughing, crying as she struggled.

"My God!" moaned Martin Lane miserably. "My God!"

She had gone down in a limp, pitiful, unconscious little heap on the floor.

"Carry her!" said Martin Lane again hoarsely.

They picked her up. The bag had dropped from their hands. Martin Lane raised it so that they could grip it again between them.

"Go on!" rasped Martin Lane. "Quick now!"

They passed out into the hallway, and along to the door facing the sea. Martin Lane opened this, stepped aside, and took up his position again close behind the two men.

"Go on!" he repeated under his breath.

It was dark out here, but out of the darkness a footstep sounded, coming quickly in their direction. Martin Lane's jaws clamped. Yes, of course! He had expected some one to be on this side of the house, just as the Malay had been on the other. Close against the red-haired man, his revolver muzzle bored into the small of the other's back.

A voice called out:

"That you, cap?"

The revolver muzzle increased its pressure.

"Yes; it's all right," the red-haired man snarled.

The step came nearer.

"What you got there—the girl? I heard her yowlin'. Let's have a look."

The revolver muzzle at the small of the red-haired man's back again increased its pressure.

"Damn it!" shouted out the red-haired man in a sudden frenzy. "Get out of here and mind your own business!"

"Oh, all right, cap," snickered the voice. "Keep yer shirt on! I ain't buttin' in!"

The step retreated. The revolver muzzle released its pressure.

"Straight down to the beach!" whispered Martin Lane.

A path leading toward the shore was just barely discernible in the blackness. They followed it. It led to a small dock where, at the foot of the steps of a little landing stage, a boat was moored. These they descended, and at Martin Lane's orders, Carol Gray was lowered into the stern of the boat, and the handbag deposited beside her. He smiled a little grimly as he noted the outline of the craft. It was a fairly large boat—the kind in general use amongst the islands where man power was abundant, and which was usually rowed by from four to six natives.

"Cast off that line for'ard!" Martin Lane directed briefly; and then, as he was obeyed: "Now get in yourselves—up there toward the bow!"

"No!" The red-haired man mouthed a sudden oath, and held back. "What for? We done what you told us so far because we couldn't help ourselves, but that's an end of it—though some day I'll make you wish you'd never been born for this!" He broke into a flood of furious profanity. "You take these cursed things off our hands, and let us go!"

"Get in!" Martin Lane clipped off his words.

"Don't you do it, captain!" snarled the little rat-eyed MacGuire. "He don't dare fire any more, 'cause he's got his chance to get away now, and he ain't goin' to risk it."

"You're quite wrong," said Martin Lane evenly. "I can't row the boat, as unfortunately my left arm has been hurt. You two are going to do it. You are going to row twenty miles across to an island out there."

"Twenty miles! Out there!" The red-haired man wheezed his words, he seemed to suck them in and out, half in fear, half in fury. "Why, you fool, you'd never get there! Not to-night! There's a storm brewin'. It'll be bad out there before mornin'."

"It would be worse ashore." Martin Lane spoke without movement of the lips. "Get in!"

They made no movement.

Martin Lane spoke again—with ominous patience:

"I can't go without you—you see, it is still an even break. Shall we all go—or all stay?" His revolver muzzle cuddled suddenly behind the little rat-eyed man's ear. "I will give you until I count three. One—"

The little rat-eyed man squealed and lunged forward. He drew the red-haired man after him as the manacles jerked tight. They half sprawled, half clambered into the boat.

Martin Lane's head was going around.

"That's better!" He swayed a little. "Now sit down beside each other on that seat, and ship an oar apiece!"

He fumbled with the stern line, cast it off, and stepped into the boat himself.

The boat slipped out past the dock and headed for the open sea.

Martin Lane's mind seemed to be trying to *evade* itself—most curious! —trying to lay down on its job—quit! There were two things he must do—ship the tiller, and make Carol comfortable. He succeeded after difficulty with the tiller; he had nothing other than the handbag for Carol's comfort—to use as a support for her head and shoulders as she lay there beside him in the stern-sheets.

He lashed at his brain again, driving it to service. There weren't any stars to steer by—only the wind—the direction of the wind—he hoped it wouldn't shift, no matter how hard it blew. Straight across to Marston's island—straight across, the old man had said—twenty miles—there by daylight.

He laid the revolver on the thwart beside him that he might steer with his one good hand. The girl stirred now for the first time—sat up—but she did not speak.

There was a cross-sea. And now, losing the lee of the island, the wind was fresh. The boat was heavy. The manacled pair toiled at the oars. After a while their efforts slackened—the little rat-eyed man seemed weary.

"Pull!" Martin Lane heard himself say sharply.

They began to quarrel with each other.

"You see what we've got for this!" the little rat-eyed man's voice shrieked out suddenly. "I told you to throw him back into the water as soon as we'd hauled him aboard after that collision with his damned ship!"

"Hold your cursed tongue!" shouted back the red-haired man.

"Hold nothin'!" screamed the other. "Dope him up and use him as a witness to prove we're regular Sunday-school kids! You saw a long way ahead of your nose! Yes, you did—not! Do you see now what kind of a witness he'll make? We'll swing for this—that's what we'll do—"

The voices floated away in a gust of wind.

Then broken fragments of a sentence, low, guarded, but caught in a momentary lull, came again:

". . . bash of an oar . . . kill . . ."

The boat began to ship water. The waves were running higher. Martin Lane nodded in a sort of mechanically judicial way to himself. She'd swamp, naturally, if he kept her on this course, and it got much worse; but she must be kept on the course—that was the way to this Marston's island. What were those two up to now? It was very black, of course—but what were those two fools doing standing up like that—were they trying to capsize the boat and—

"Martin!" That was Carol's voice—ringing—clear—imperative. "Martin—look out!"

It was like some weird, double-headed giant stumbling toward him—like the pictures in his books at home when he was a kid. And it was brandishing a long club—no, that was an oar—in each hand.

"*Martin!*"

He let go the tiller, and snatched up his revolver and fired—and fired again. The flashes hurt his eyes. There came a scream of pain. The boat rocked and shipped a great quantity of water. The giant retreated, seeming to drag the smaller half of his body with him.

Martin Lane was conscious of a very queer feeling—as though he were mentally clinging in extreme desperation to the edge of some great abyss—and his hold was slipping—slipping—slipping—

A voice screeched out of the darkness, maddened with fear—the red-haired man's voice:

"She'll fill! She'll fill! Take off these damned irons! Are you goin' to let me drown like a rat? He's shot in the knee."

"I have no key," said Martin Lane. His answer was mechanical. There was something else he wanted to say before something, he didn't know what it was going to be, but something, happened to him. His arm didn't ache—queer it didn't!—it was more like a sort of torpor creeping upon him all over. Oh, yes, he had it now!—to get the water out of the boat. "Bale!" said Martin Lane. "Bale—use your hat—bale!"

He sagged against the tiller, and was conscious that an arm went suddenly out around him in support. That must be Carol—Carol's arm.

"Martin—oh, Martin!"

She was sobbing brokenly. Why was she sobbing? There was life for it yet—plenty of it—just keep on baling with hats—

"I know now—I know. I heard what they said. Oh, Martin—Martin—Martin—"

But Martin Lane's chin had crumpled on his breast.

The red-haired man baled, frantically, fiercely, fear gnawing at him; the little man shackled to him lay half across a thwart and moaned.

The hours dragged on. Dawn came. In the stern-sheets a girl, with drawn, white face, sat with a man's head pillowed on her lap. She held a revolver in her hand. The man was motionless, inert, his eyes closed. A bandage made from a torn skirt was about his left shoulder.

The day passed. Another came . . . another . . .

There was no water in the boat save that which swished in the bottom to the rise and fall of an oily swell.

Still another day.

The gold-laced skipper of a mailboat leaned over his bridge rail and peered down to where, at his lowered gangway, one of his own boats was towing a battered-looking craft of about its own size alongside. He rubbed his eyes. In the forward part of the boat two men, outstretched and motionless, appeared to be manacled together; in the stern, seemingly lifeless, were a man with a bandaged shoulder and a woman—the woman's arms around the man, the sunlight glinting on a revolver that lay on the seat beside her.

The ship's surgeon standing up in the boat hailed the bridge:

"Two of them wounded, but there's life in all of them yet, sir. I think they'll pull through."

The promenade deck was lined with excited passengers crowding anxiously, eagerly, curiously, against each other. A cheer went up.

The skipper, still leaning over the bridge rail, rubbed his eyes again as he continued to stare down into the boat.

"My word!" he ejaculated. "Now what the devil sort of a yarn is at the bottom of all this, I wonder?"

THE IMPOSTOR

In the heart of native Singapore it began, this feud, between a devil of the Orient—Ram Gulab Singh—and a merchant from the Occident—Wallen. It raged from Singapore to 'Frisco and continued through the years, until Wallen fell, an assassin's bullet in his stout heart. But even then the vengeance of the Oriental was not satisfied, and in a night of terror, deep in the Pacific's tropics, young Stacey Wallen and faithful Gunga made their last stand against it.

CHAPTER I
YELLOW JACK

AN oily sea! Stillness—absolute stillness, save for the groan and creak of the yards and booms, as the barque rolled lifelessly on the long, glassy swells. Not a breath of air; only a stifling heat that beat upon the decks until the pitch in the seams bubbled; only a waste of waters that reflected the merciless tropic glare of the sun and hurt the eyes cruelly.

Under an awning in the stern a man in cotton shirt and trousers, who was huddled in a chair by the cabin skylight, lifted his head and mumbled through cracked lips:

"Twenty grains of calomel, twenty-four of quinine—magnesia, peppermint-water gone."

His hands fumbled with the drugs from the ship's medicine-chest that strewed the skylight, and, guessing at the quantities, carried portions to his mouth. He swallowed with difficulty, and relapsed into a huddled position.

After a little he raised his head once more, and began to count upon his fingers. Was it five or eight days, or ten, or a month that the calm had lasted? He did not know. He had lost all track of time. But it worried him, and to his sick brain assumed very vital proportions. The ship's log would tell him.

He had entered up the log himself, and, like the medicine-chest, had kept it handy for the last two days. It was there at his elbow on the skylight. He reached for it, and, beginning to scan the entries, suddenly brushed his hand heavily back and forth across his eyes. The words seemed to dance about on the page in red flashes that stabbed at his eyeballs, and some of the words and some of the dates he could not read at all:

> October 10. Still becalmed. Intense heat. Native boatswain took sick this morning.
>
> October —. Buried boatswain last night. Four more of the crew down. We've got yellow fever aboard. God help us if we don't get a breeze!

His eyes went down the page in an irresponsible way, skipping entries here and there unconsciously:

> Still becalmed. God have mercy on us! Crew all down. Chinaman named Won Su, after making a murderous attack in his delirium on Wallen, the first mate, jumped

overboard.

Yes, he remembered that. He was Wallen—Stacey Wallen—the first mate of the barque *Upolo*. It had been a horrible sight. The poor devil had rushed at him, screaming, and— He shuddered a little. He did not want to think about it.

What was this entry here?

> The heat is horrible. Survivors too weak to bury the dead. Captain Mitchell died at 2.10 a.m.

That was the last entry. It bore no date. He couldn't remember whether it had been yesterday or the day before. He must have missed something in the log, or else he hadn't read it properly; it hadn't told him how many days they had been becalmed. Well, what did it matter; and, anyway, it was time to make rounds.

Rounds!

What rounds were there to make? Everybody was dead. Johnson, the second mate, had died that morning, though he hadn't made the entry of Johnson's death in the log. What was the good of it? There wasn't any more use for a log. Everybody was dead except himself—the other two white men and the crew, who were all natives. And now he was down, too; he was only waiting for the fever to run its final course—and that would take maybe only a few hours more.

A voice within him seemed to keep whispering:

"Rounds! You've got to make rounds . . . make rounds . . . make rounds."

For two days or two nights, or whenever it was since Johnson had been too sick to move, he had made rounds unceasingly with the medicines; that was why the medicines were on the skylight—so that he wouldn't have to go below.

But making rounds was over now; there was no one to make rounds for—there was only himself.

"Rounds! Make rounds; it's time to make rounds!" the voice insisted.

He roused himself. Yes, that was so! The last time he had gone along the deck Ting Wah had still been alive. But, even so—he huddled wearily down in his chair again—what of that? The man would probably be dead now; and, anyway, the medicines weren't any good. It was air, God's air, that was needed.

"Rounds! Make rounds!" persisted that inner voice.

He staggered up from his chair, collected some drugs, and reeled to the ship's side. Then, with the rail to keep him from falling, he made his way painfully forward to where another awning was stretched over the foredeck. He had kept his eyes in front of him; there were shapes about the deck covered with anything that had come to hand—shapes that should not and would not have been there except that, at the last, Johnson and he had been too weak to do anything but throw coverings over them. He didn't want to look at the shapes.

There was one form, only one, that was uncovered, and he knelt beside it. Ting Wah was still alive.

"Medicine," said Wallen hoarsely.

The Chinaman pushed it away.

"No can take," he answered weakly. "Me finish."

Wallen steadied himself with an effort, and looked at the other closely. The characteristic flush an inch below and an inch above the eyes was gone now, and the skin was cold and damp. It was obviously near the end; but still, as under certain conditions it sometimes did, the disease had left the man's intelligence unimpaired.

"Look here, old chap," said Wallen cheerfully through his own cracked lips, "you never know. Buck up! Take the medicine." He stooped to lift the other's head gently—and nearly toppled over on the deck himself in doing so.

A sudden gleam of gratitude came into the Chinaman's eyes.

"You glood man," he whispered. "You all same glood man. But no can take—all same finish now." He pushed the medicine away again, and then plucked at Wallen's sleeve in an effort to get the mate's head down closer to his lips.

The man was going fast. Wallen, with a kindly smile, lowered his head.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Listen!" said Ting Wah. "Mabbe you die too. Mabbe no. All same me tell—you glood man—last night you bling mledicine all night. You glood man—me—me—tell—"

His voice trailed off weakly.

"Yes?" prompted Wallen.

The man tried to speak, tried again, but without avail.

Wallen's own head was reeling, premonitory of coming nausea.

"It's all right, Ting Wah, it's all right," he said soothingly. "Better not try to talk."

But now Ting Wah, with a desperate effort, raised himself to his elbow.

"Yes, me talk!" he gasped out. "But must talk quick. Me here, Won Su here, four more all same Chinamen come on bloard and make crew on ship here for all same knifee you."

There was contortion on the man's face, a pitiful struggle to fight back the weakness and exhaustion that was upon him. Wallen stared at the other for an instant as though he had not heard aright, and then, as he grasped the full import of the Chinaman's words, an uncanny, nervous excitability, accentuated by his own weakness, came surging upon him.

"Kill me, Ting Wah?" he cried out. "What for? You—you don't know what you're saying, do you? You don't mean that!" The Chinaman's elbow was slipping gradually away from beneath him and his eyes were closed. The medicine spilled from Wallen's hand onto the deck and he caught at the other, propping him up. "Ting Wah! Ting Wah!" he cried again, shaking the man to rouse him. "What do you mean? Ting Wah, don't you hear me? What did you want to kill me for?"

There was no answer. The man was— No, not yet! Ting Wah's lips were moving. Wallen bent his head still closer to catch the words:

"Dlink-House Sam—Singapore—him know—him do it."

That was all. It was over now. Wallen straightened up unsteadily and lurched to the rail for support.

Six Chinamen had shipped as part of the crew so that they might murder him. Why? He laughed in a sick fashion. What did it matter? They were all dead, those six—and every one else—and in a few hours he would be dead, too. He laughed again, a little hysterically. This Drink-House Sam of Singapore, whoever he was, ought to be well satisfied with that!

He stared over the rail for a long time at one of the ship's boats that, rising and falling with the swell, bumped, bumped, bumped against the vessel's hull. How had the boat come to be there in the water?

Oh, yes, he remembered now. Yesterday—was it yesterday?—he had decided that the only chance was to leave the plague-stricken ship, and he had managed to swing out and lower the boat. And then he had been too weak to get Johnson and two of the Chinamen who were then still alive into the boat, and so the boat was still there. And now it wasn't any good to him either; he hadn't strength enough to row it, and he would die more comfortably where he was.

He clawed his way back to the afterdeck, and dropped into his chair again. Six Chinamen had shipped as members of the crew so that they could

kill him! It wasn't a pleasant thought, even if the whole six were dead now, and that he himself would be dead, too, before long.

Oh, yes, he believed what Ting Wah had said, right enough! And not alone because of that murderous attack Won Su had made upon him, though at the time he had thought Won Su had been merely delirious. Memories of years ago that came crowding suddenly into his mind now furnished reason enough, God knew! to leave no doubt concerning the truth of Ting Wah's story.

Out of the shimmering heat waves that rose along the deck and seemed to hover so weirdly over those covered shapes that ought not to have been there, another scene gradually took form. It was a stone house, a gray stone house, all by itself, without neighbors, isolated, a silent place. Yes, he remembered it! It seemed to bring a chill upon him now—the cold, dreary, lifeless house had done its best to crush even a laugh out of his boyhood with its eternal, silent, brooding mystery. That was why he had run away ten years ago, when he was fourteen.

All his earlier recollections were of that place.

His mother wasn't there; he had never seen his mother. There had been just his father, and that tall, swarthy Eastern servant, who had frightened his boy's heart—just those two and himself. He had never seen any one else there. No one ever came to the house. Gunga, the servant, fetched the supplies from the near-by village.

His own education had been superintended by his father. But there had never been any intimacy between his father and himself. He had been alone, all alone—he remembered that when he was very young he had cried himself to sleep each night because he was always so lonely and frightened.

He had never questioned his father but once. He remembered the deadly whiteness on that occasion that had spread over the morose, taciturn face, the grip of iron upon his shoulder, the hoarse passion in his father's voice.

"You are too young to understand," his father had said. "When you are older, when the time comes, you shall know. Until then, never speak to me of this again."

Wallen swayed unsteadily in his chair. The sun was like a ball of molten fire that was suspended directly above the awning, and all its heat seemed to be focused in a circle that centered on his head, and the canvas that should have afforded protection was only a maddening, burning-glass.

How much longer was this to last!

What a frightful stench the ship possessed—or was it only his imagination! What was it he had been thinking of? Oh, yes, the six

Chinamen who had come to kill him, and the gray house where there were so many bars and locks, and where every night his father and Gunga had turned the keys, and the chains had rattled on the doors as the two men had fastened them.

He raised his hand and passed it across his eyes in a startled way. How vividly it came back to him, that night—as though it were just happening now, as though he were in the very act of living it again!

A crash in the dead of night through that silent house, and he had sat up, trembling, in bed. Then a cry, the report of a pistol shot, and the echoes of the shot rumbling and reverberating through the house, striking terror into his young heart. And he was crawling out of his bed, and out into the hall and down the stairs in his nightshirt.

And halfway down he had stopped in horror.

Below, in the hallway, had stood the giant form of his father holding a candle, and on the floor had lain stretched a huddled shape, and Gunga, with a revolver, had been bending over the Thing that did not move. Then had come his father's voice, in a strange, queer note of tense eagerness:

"Look again, Gunga! Has he one finger on the left hand?"

And Gunga had shaken his head as he had answered:

"I have looked, sahib, and the hand is whole."

Spellbound he had stood there on the stairs, a lad of fourteen, and Gunga had lifted the Thing in his arms and had gone away with it; and the great figure of his father, dressed in pyjamas, had stood motionless for a long time, then, turning, had faced the stairs and had caught sight of him—and suddenly had sent a wild, unnatural laugh ringing through the house.

"You there, eh, Stacey?" his father had laughed out, as though unmanned. "Well, I'll tell you something now. Never go to the East! Remember that—never go to the East!" And then his father had pulled himself together, and his face had set sternly as he had pointed up the stairs. "Go back to your bed!" he had commanded sharply. "Go back to your bed instantly!"

"Yes," said Wallen aloud to himself. "That's what he said: 'Never go to the East—never go to the East.'"

But he had gone to the East, and six Chinamen had shipped aboard the *Upolo* to kill him. His father had been quite right in telling him not to go to the East. He pushed his hand in a worried fashion across his eyes. He was in the East now. How had that happened? He had run away from that gray house in California soon after that night, and he had never heard of his father again.

He had gone to San Francisco, and gone to sea. He had been at sea ever since in all kinds of ships, and he had done pretty well. He had his master's certificate already.

But that did not account for his being here in the Java Sea, and for those six Chinamen. He had been fourth officer of the *Tokamahu* when they had touched at Shanghai a few weeks ago. She was a fine ship, the *Tokamahu*, the biggest passenger liner in the fleet—only a fourth officer's pay was very small.

He had met Captain Mitchell of the *Upolo* ashore there, and Captain Mitchell had persuaded him to ship as first mate on the *Upolo* for double the pay he had been getting. The *Upolo*, of course, traded through the Java and Banda Seas—that was what his father had meant by the East—touching at Shanghai as a port of call in a liner wasn't the same thing.

And then, besides, when he had shipped with Captain Mitchell, he had not thought about his father. There wasn't anything strange about that. It was ten years since his father had told him not to go to the East.

How that sun burned through the awning! It seemed to stab and drill into his skull causing him exquisite pain. He could get away from it, of course, by going below into the cabin, by putting the deck between himself and that torturing ball of fire that was always there, and that made a hideous dull red blaze on the canvas above his head; but in the cabin one couldn't breathe.

One couldn't live in the cabin—Captain Mitchell was there, and Captain Mitchell was dead.

Why was his brain working in a cycle like this? Here he was back to Captain Mitchell again. It was Captain Mitchell who had persuaded him to give up his berth on the liner and take to cruising in the East. Had Captain Mitchell anything to do with those six Chinamen? Or anything to do with Drink-House Sam in Singapore? And where was it those six Chinamen had joined—at Shanghai like himself?

If he could remember that, he would know whether Captain Mitchell had had a hand in the cursed game. Hadn't Johnson said something about new hands? But then native crews were everlastingly shifting about. It was a long way from Singapore to Shanghai.

Who was this Drink-House Sam? What was it Ting Wah had said? "Dlink-House Sam—him know—him do it."

"Him know, him do it, him know, him do it"—the words began to run through his mind, in sing-song, crazy repetition—and then a passionate, merciless anger seized upon him, and the splendid, six-foot bulk of the man heaved up from the chair, and, clenched fist raised, he swayed upon his feet.

They had got him! Not the way they had thought to get him—but they had got him. And he could not fight—there was no one to fight—he could only die like a trapped rat, while this Drink-House Sam laughed a thousand miles away.

"Him know—him do it"—the words coursed like fire through his brain. He shouted aloud, and the nails of his fingers bit into the palm of his hand. He could not choke the life, as his own went out, from this devil in Singapore that he had never seen—he could only die.

The uplifted arm, as though too heavy for him, fell to his side, and a pasty whiteness spread over his face. He reeled, clutched at the skylight to save himself—and slipped prone upon the deck. It was the nausea upon him again.

The virulence of the attack passed after a while; but for a long time he lay where he had fallen, weak and exhausted. His mind seemed to be getting quite out of control. Only one thought remained dominant and logically consistent—when the red ball that he could see now between the taffrail and the edge of the awning was gone, he would be gone too.

It would be over then anyway. Perhaps it would be over sooner. Medicine? Occasionally, in a vague, fleeting way, the word came to mind, but it possessed no definite or concrete meaning—it only annoyed him because it kept recurring and meant nothing.

He was semi-delirious when he stood up again and hung limply against the skylight. Medicine—yes, that was what it meant—that stuff there spilled all about. He put some into his mouth. One was supposed to take medicine.

His eyes fastened on the ship's log open in front of him. He stared at it in a troubled way, sweeping his hand continuously over his eyes. What kind of a book was that? What was it doing there? Had he been reading? He couldn't read when he was sick.

It was very strange! No; he remembered now, he had been writing in it. Whenever any of the crew died he wrote it down in the book. He wasn't sure why, only he remembered now that was what the book was for.

And now all of the crew were dead, and he would be dead too very soon; therefore he should also write his own name down while he could still write. He remembered it all perfectly now—that was what the book was for.

He lurched forward, and picked up the fountain pen from where it had rolled into a broken package of powdered quinine. He lurched again heavily as he leaned over the book. A nervous twitch of his hand gouged the pen-point into the page and left a blot.

He shook his head in a gravely puzzled way.

It was queer that the pen wouldn't write as it had written before, it seemed to travel all over the page, and—he paused, his hand going to his eyes again—it was queer too that he couldn't think of his own name!

He was first mate, he knew that, but—yes, his name came back to him now. He wrote on laboriously. He finished the entry, dropped the pen, and stared at what he had written, nodding his head.

Died to-day. S. Wallen, first mate.

He read the words aloud, and nodded his head again. It was quite true. When that damnable sun that was tormenting him through the awning was gone, that would be the end of to-day, and he would be dead.

His eyes strayed forward along the deck—and widened with fear. What were those shapes there! He began to mumble to himself, and suddenly shrieked out aloud. It was a horror ship.

It was all horror about him. They were all rising now, those shapes, and coming toward him, clamoring for medicine.

He shrieked aloud again, rushed to the rail, and, in the delirium of his mind, crouched low to hide himself from the dead throng that raved like demons for medicine, ran screaming to where the ship's boat bumped monotonously in its rise and fall against the vessel's hull.

A new strength, a strength born out of delirium, a strength of frenzy, was upon him. He hurled himself over the side, cast the boat loose, and, snatching at the oars, began to pull like a madman away from the ship. Two hundred yards off, he stood up and shook both fists, and yelled tauntingly—they could not reach him now. But why not? Suppose they should *swim* after him! He flung himself to the seat again and plied the oars furiously.

And then slowly the strokes lessened, and presently an oar fell from his grasp, and after that, with a moan, he pitched forward into the bottom of the boat—and all was blackness.

CHAPTER II
ON THE ROAD TO POBI

"MON," expostulated the Scotch trader, "but ye're fair daft! Ye're but out of the jaws of death, and I'd no say ye're all the way out at that. Bide a bit, there'll be another in a month—or in two anyhow."

Wallen, standing in the center of the little galvanized-iron storehouse, his eyes on the native who had entered a moment before, shook his head.

"I've got to get away, MacKnight," he said earnestly. "There's no use talking about it. What kind of a ship does he say it is?"

MacKnight flung out a question in the native tongue.

"He says it's a big smoke-boat," translated the trader; "which will be by way of saying it's some measly steam coaster that's so small it's no able to accommodate its own cockroaches, d'ye mind! Mon, pay no attention to it. What's another month or so—and ye'll be strong then, and—ah, mon, but I hate to have ye go!"

Wallen, gaunt and thin from his illness, shook his head decisively again, though the other's words had brought a quick responsive smile to his lips. Six weeks ago, a proa from the village here had picked him up at sea and brought him to this big-hearted man's door. He owed his life to MacKnight.

"It's no use, MacKnight," he answered. "I've got to go."

"It'll be that black devil in Singapore!" ejaculated the trader, screwing up his wizened face and pulling viciously at his beard. He swung suddenly on the native. "Get out of here!" he shouted savagely—and then his two hands fell upon Wallen's shoulders. "Ye'll no play the fool, Wallen! It's not fit ye are to go. Listen to me, mon, it's a matter o' twenty miles across the island, as ye know well, and no conveyance, d'ye mind. And 'tis no regular trader that's called, for none is due—she'll have but put in for water or the like, and'll be sailing again at daybreak."

"I can make it by daybreak, MacKnight," Wallen stated quietly.

For a moment MacKnight stared at Wallen, then his hands dropped from Wallen's shoulders.

"Well, go, and be damned to ye, then!" he said gruffly, deep down in his throat to hide his emotions—and turning, stepped abruptly outside.

There were not many preparations to make—very few.

Wallen's worldly possessions were the clothes he stood in, and those were his only through the generosity of the trader. But MacKnight's generosity did not stop at that, for, five minutes later, as they wrung each other's hands at parting and MacKnight indulged the while in earnest profanity, Wallen found a Malay guide, well loaded with supplies, ready to accompany him on the night's tramp across the island.

At the edge of the clearing, Wallen looked back.

The sun, already low in the west, was bathing the sweep of sea in a golden glow. A group of Malays were on the beach busy with their curiously shaped little boats, while others moved here and there about the cluster of native huts—but it was upon the great bearded figure leaning against the door frame of the solitary trading-station that Wallen's eyes lingered.

The man waved his hand and shouted:

"Mon, ye'll no forget MacKnight o' Arru! Ye'll no forget MacKnight, mon!"

And suddenly a mist dimmed Wallen's eyes. He tried to shout back—and could only wave his own hand in return. And then the trees hid the trader from view.

Forget MacKnight! The man who had nursed him back to life as a mother would nurse her child! Forget that lone human outpost of civilization—a man with an iron fist, a barbed-wire tongue, and a heart as tender as a woman's. No; he would not forget MacKnight!

He forced a smile to his lips. One made strange friendships in these far parts of the world, and made them under strange circumstances. The chances were a thousand to one that he and MacKnight would never meet again—but, for all that, it was a friendship that would last.

Twenty miles across the island before daybreak!

He set his shoulders, called out cheerily to his native companion, and quickened his pace. One thing was fortunate, there was at least a road, or, more properly, a path—MacKnight got some of his supplies and all of his mail from the village of Pobi on the other side.

Wallen fell to wondering what sort of a ship it was, and, more pertinent still, what sort of a skipper was on the ship that had put into Pobi. He had refused MacKnight's offer of an advance of money and he hadn't a penny—but he was satisfied that he would not be refused a passage in any case. He could work his way if necessary!

A white man who knew his business was worth his weight in gold on a ship any time in these parts. It was true, he wasn't any too fit yet; but he was

fit enough for that, fit enough—a dull flush came into his face, and his eyes hardened—fit enough to get to Singapore somehow!

He had not forgotten that last afternoon in the reek of the pest ship, nor the Chinaman who had died in his arms whispering of Drink-House Sam of Singapore! Forget! He had thought of nothing else all these weeks; he had even raved of it in his delirium so MacKnight had told him. And now MacKnight's words came back to him from that evening they had spent together over his story in the early days of his convalescence. He could see MacKnight again wrinkling up that wizened face, and tugging earnestly at the scrawny gray-streaked beard.

"Mon, gae canny!" the old Scotchman had said. "'Tis my advice to ye. Trust no man nor woman, and say no word o' it—and, better still, get out o' the East. There's things here best left alone, and I'd no be saying this Sam o' Singapore ain't one o' them."

Wallen smiled again—but this time in a way that was prompted by no thought of friendship. There was one thing dominant in his life now—Drink-House Sam of Singapore, the man who had tried so mysteriously to take his life, to stab at him treacherously, without warning, out of the dark.

Singapore! Singapore! It was never out of his mind now. To get there, to force the truth, the motive, the reason, the story behind all this from the human spider that lurked in his web, and then—his fists clenched fiercely—and then settle with the man himself!

And that was why he must get to Pobi before daybreak, before this steamer sailed.

It wasn't a regular trader, MacKnight had said, and, who knew! it might be his luck to find that she was even bound for Singapore. Anyway, he could always tranship somewhere, and it was a chance to get away from the island that might not come again in another two months.

He walked on steadily, without sense of fatigue, his mind abnormally active. And then, with a little shock of surprise, as the Malay made signs to halt and set about kindling a fire, he noticed for the first time that it had grown almost dark.

And also, to his surprise, he noticed that where he had experienced no fatigue before, he was, as he sat down, suddenly grateful for the rest.

He scowled a little over his dipper of tea that the Malay had prepared—and rubbed his leg muscles vigorously. They twitched nervously as he put his weight upon his legs. That was bad! His lips set grimly. Well, bad or not, they'd have to take him across the island before daybreak.

They started on again.

An hour went by, and he was obliged to rest—and after another start, and many more after that, to rest again and again with alarming frequency. He could see nothing. It was black in the tropical forest, and he stumbled constantly in the vines and creepers that everywhere overgrew the path, and, besides, it was miserably hot. He was at last forced to admit that he was not making much more than a mile an hour, and twenty miles at a mile an hour was— He groaned.

But it was breaking day before Wallen finally gave up—gave up when will power, and the grit of the man that did not know defeat, no longer sufficed in nervous energy as a substitute for the physical strength necessary to carry on any farther. He felt himself weak in every limb, and in his weakness the sweat poured from him profusely. MacKnight had been right; he was not fit yet for such a journey, and he had only made a mess of it. He was still a long way from Pobi, and it was daylight now.

The Malay, regarding him anxiously, offered by signs to carry him on his back. Wallen, from where he had flung himself down upon the ground, half rose to accept the offer, then shook his head. It was no use attempting that; it was too far, for he was bitterly convinced that he had accomplished but little more than half the distance.

But there must be some way out. He wasn't beaten yet. He had to catch that steamer. His head ached fiercely, as he remembered it had ached in his semi-conscious state before that long, slow convalescence. He held it in his hands and stared at the ground.

Suddenly he looked up.

Yes, of course! He had been a fool not to have thought of it hours ago when he had first begun to realize that he was playing out, instead of thinking of it only now when it might be too late, when the steamer might be already gone! He couldn't speak the Malay tongue, but MacKnight would have told the man why they were crossing the island. He could send the Malay on ahead and follow himself as fast as he could. Furthermore, if he could write a message he might even get them to send him help from Pobi.

He felt in his pockets. Nothing! Well, the Malay was an intelligent fellow. The Malay would get word to the ship, and a written message after all wouldn't make any difference—it all depended on the ship's skipper. The skipper would wait, or he wouldn't, after hearing the Malay's story, whether there was a written message or not.

He began to make signs; pointing first to the other, then in the direction of Pobi, then to himself, and then to the ground indicating that he would stay behind.

"And hurry—quick—Pobi," Wallen ended imperatively.

The Malay nodded.

"Pobi—quick," he repeated—and started off at a run along the path.

Wallen watched the man disappear, and, after a little while, started on again himself—and then gave it up completely. He was down and out, and he was furiously angry with himself for the state he was in. Was he to be everlastingly sick! He stared at his thin wrists and clenched his teeth. This Drink-House Sam would laugh again if he could see him now. How he ached in every inch of his body!

Singapore! Singapore! What devils of perversity were blocking his way now to Singapore! What damnable weakness, that even a child would be ashamed of, not to be able to walk twenty miles across the island without coming a cropper over it!

And then, sharply, he pulled himself together.

"Don't play the goat!" he muttered fiercely to himself. "It won't get you to Pobi, or anywhere else!"

With a short laugh he stretched himself out full length on the ground. There wasn't anything to do but wait. He might make a mile before the Malay got back—but what good was that mile?

One thing was certain, any further exertion would bring serious consequences. A tropical island was no health resort for a fever-shot body, and a relapse of the slow fever that had followed his recovery from Yellow Jack would be—he put it pithily in his mind now—good-night to Singapore and everything else!

And so Wallen, a grip upon himself now in the shape of a sort of enforced philosophical calm, waited while the time dragged by. Occasionally, because he was very weak, he drowsed; for the rest of the time he lay quietly—and this in spite of the fact that his thoughts had taken a new and disturbing turn.

He might as well admit it to himself—he wasn't fit to work his passage. He began to regret that he had not accepted MacKnight's offer of money. After all, he could have paid it back to the trader by mail, sooner or later. But that was a vain regret. He hadn't taken the money—the thought that he would not be able to work his passage if necessary had never entered his head. And now, even suppose he reached the ship, would they take, not only a penniless passenger, but a sick one as well?

He shook his head at that.

"I guess my luck's out for a spell," he informed himself with a wan smile.

He had no means of judging the time there in the forest, save that it grew hotter as the morning advanced. Nor had he any idea how long it had been since the Malay had left him, when, at last, at the sound of voices, he sat up suddenly, supporting himself with his back against the trunk of a tree.

Came then the *pad-pad* of horses' hoofs, and the Malay, running, burst into sight around the bend of the path a few yards away; while a girl's laugh rang out—and was instantly checked as she, and a man riding beside her, also came into view.

"Oh!" she cried. "There's some one here! That must have been what the native meant. And—and I think he's hurt. Quick, Mr. Mott!"

She had slipped from her saddle and was running toward him—a little figure in white, brown-haired, brown-eyed, whose face now mirrored genuine anxiety and dismay.

Wallen made an effort to stand, accomplished it with difficulty, and smiled in a bewildered way as he looked at the girl, then at the Malay who was chattering and gesticulating excitedly, and lastly at the girl's companion, who, hastily dismounting, had joined the others.

He wondered a little vaguely who these people could be, where the Malay had found them—and somehow he didn't like the man's face.

"Hello!" exclaimed the man. "What's wrong? Hurt?"

"No," said Wallen, a little weakly. "Done up, I guess. That's all. Nothing serious. I—could you tell me if the steamer that came into Pobi yesterday is still there? I overdid it a bit trying to get in from MacKnight's across the island in time to catch her."

"MacKnight's!" echoed the girl quickly. "Why, that's where we're going! Isn't it, Mr. Mott?"

"Yes," her companion answered, looking curiously at Wallen; and then to Wallen: "We met this native fellow on the road, but couldn't make out what he wanted. He was going toward the town, but turned and came back with us, and kept running on ahead. You needn't worry about the steamer—we're from her ourselves. I'm second officer—but, I say, you're too seedy to stand up there and talk!"

Wallen was swaying unsteadily as he leaned against the tree.

"I'm all right," he said. "Just giddy for a moment. I'm—I'm rather anxious to make the ship."

"Well, there's no hurry now," Mott returned. "She won't sail without us. Look here! You've come from MacKnight's, you say? We heard at Pobi that there was a survivor from the barque *Upolo* there, and we were taking the

ride over—Miss MacKay and I—to investigate. Is there any truth in the story?"

Wallen gasped. What interest could they have in the *Upolo*!

"A little," he said with a faint smile, "seeing that I'm the survivor."

"What!" ejaculated Mott. "The deuce you are! Well, then,"—excitedly—"can you tell us what became of Stacey Wallen, who was the first mate on her?"

Wallen stared blankly. He wasn't quite sure that he had heard aright. This was strange—the strangest thing he had ever heard! He laughed almost hysterically.

"I am Stacey Wallen," he said.

There was a cry of amazed excitement from the girl. Mott, gazing in utter surprise at Wallen, tilted the vizor of his cap back, and mopped mechanically at his forehead with a handkerchief.

Wallen's laugh died away, and he looked from one to the other anxiously.

"I—I don't understand, of course," he said. "But the point is, do you think your skipper will give me a passage? I—I didn't save anything from the *Upolo*, and I was figuring on offering to work my way, but I'm afraid I'm hardly up to that for a spell."

"Could you ride a horse, d'ye think," inquired Mott with apparent irrelevancy, "if this Malay here and I held you on?"

"Yes," said Wallen eagerly. "Yes; but the skipper—"

"Oh, I guess that'll be all right!" said Mott queerly. "As near as I can figure it, you're the one man on earth the skipper wants to see."

CHAPTER III
ACCIDENT—OR MURDER?

MACKNIGHT'S caustic estimate of the steamer's size had not been very far wide of the mark. Wallen, lying in a bunk now, and awake after a most refreshing sleep, had not as yet, it was true, had an opportunity to see anything of the vessel except what he had seen as they had pulled out to her in a boat from Pobi; but that cursory inspection had neither charmed nor delighted his sailor's eye. The *Monleigh* was certainly very small, and certainly a frowsy, unkempt and weather-beaten little craft; and her general appearance bespoke her as one of those homeless, vagrant waifs of the ocean that knew no schedule—that took the crumbs of the world's commerce where she could find them—and was grateful for the crumbs.

Wallen lay gazing dreamily about the diminutive cabin. There was an immeasurable sense of relief upon him—incident to the fact that the only physical discomfort he felt was an excruciating soreness in every muscle of his body. He had been afraid that morning that he was in for a relapse, but he had neither fever nor any of that disquieting giddiness in his head now, and—he smiled happily at the thought—a few days at sea would put him back again in his old form.

He sat up in his bunk as the ship's bell sounded from forward. Two bells—five o'clock in the afternoon. He got up, went over to the washbasin, and plunged in his head.

How had Helen MacKay—she had told him her name on the way down to Pobi—come to be, not only on a tramp like the *Monleigh*, but here at all? He hadn't seen any other woman on board; but then—he was spluttering deliciously in the water—he hadn't seen much of anything, for he had no sooner come over the side than Helen MacKay had side-tracked even that thin-faced, queer-eyed skipper, and had insisted that he should go immediately to bed.

Wallen's thoughts began to run riot as he completed his toilet. The ship, and every one connected with it whom he had seen—except Helen MacKay!—had somehow got him wrong. He hadn't, for instance, liked that fellow Mott's face from the moment he had set eyes on it in the forest. The man had been civil enough—in fact, more than civil, almost effusive in his attentions

on the way down to Pobi; but he didn't like the man. And his momentary interview with the skipper, despite the same effusive attentions, had produced the same intuitive distrust.

Wallen stared for an instant out of the porthole. They were still at anchor off the three traders' storehouses and bungalows that were dignified by the name of Pobi. What, after all, did it mean? What was the *Monleigh* doing at Pobi? There was no sign of any cargo being handled. And, above all, how had they heard of him and the *Upolo*? And what interest had they in him that would account for the second officer being sent across the island to MacKnight's to question a supposed survivor of the barque about him?

"Drink-House Sam of Singapore!" The words, unbidden, came flashing through his brain.

Wallen whistled in a low, perturbed way under his breath. Could there be any connection? It seemed absurdly impossible! And yet what had happened was obviously not mere coincidence.

"It's a bit queer when you come to think of it," he muttered slowly. "I guess I'll hear what the skipper's got to say."

He opened the door of his cabin, and stepped out into what was evidently the vessel's main saloon. Here, a long table with revolving chairs ran down the center; and on each side of the saloon itself were cabin doors, six in all, identical with the one he had just closed behind him. The furnishings of the saloon, like the exterior of the ship, were decidedly shabby.

There was no one in sight. Wallen crossed the saloon to the doorway and paused to get his bearings. A narrow alleyway ran to port and starboard, terminating in open doors that gave on the maindeck. Directly in front of him a short companionway led upward. He mounted this, and found himself in a small, box-like smoking- or lounging-room with doors on either side that opened on a boatdeck which was fairly spacious for the size of the ship. He stepped out on the deck, and, passing a small wireless house, walked forward to the captain's cabin under the bridge.

And here, as he knocked, he got his first sight of any life on the ship. He could see down on the foredeck—a flush deck, ending in a high forecastle, where two or three hard-visaged men lay sprawled indolently about.

"Come in!" bawled a voice gruffly.

Wallen entered to face the little man with the thin face and queer eyes—he promptly modified "queer" by "evasive" now—whom he recognized as the captain.

"Hello!" exclaimed the captain in a tone that had suddenly become gracious. "If it ain't Mr. Wallen! And on your pins already! Sit down! Sit down!" He waved Wallen to a seat, and pushed forward the bottle and glasses that were on the table. "Sit down, Mr. Wallen, and help yourself!"

Wallen shook his head as he seated himself.

"Thanks just the same," he said; "but I'm still sticking to quinine."

"Quinine, eh?" repeated the other. "Yes, of course! Yes, right you are! Well"—he poured a glass for himself—"here's to you, and just as hearty even if I do drink alone. And I'll add, Mr. Wallen, that it's the rummiest meeting that ever I've known in my life!"

Wallen's eyes swept around the cabin, but, suddenly glancing at the captain again, intercepted a furtive glance that the other was stealing at him over the rim of his glass.

"That ever I've known," repeated the captain hastily as his eyes dropped. "There'll be a lot to say to each other, Mr. Wallen."

"Yes," Wallen agreed. "I'll confess I'm puzzled on several counts, Captain—Laynton, isn't it? I'm not sure I caught the name correctly when Miss MacKay introduced us."

"That's right," said the other. "Laynton. Captain Laynton—Mark Laynton."

"Well, Captain Laynton," said Wallen, "your reference to our meeting being a rum one only leaves me a little more up in the air than ever. I can understand, of course, that you might have heard the *Upolo* was missing—or reported lost; but I can't understand how you knew I was on her—or, knowing that, what interest you could have in me."

Captain Laynton laughed in a constrained way.

"I didn't know anything about the barque's loss until I put in here yesterday and heard there was a survivor from her on the other side of the island—but I knew about you, fast enough!" He paused, shot a swift, restless glance at Wallen, then began to pace, three steps one way, three steps the other, up and down the narrow cabin. "Damn it, man!" he said abruptly. "I've got bad news for you. Your father's dead."

For a moment Wallen neither moved nor spoke. It was difficult to grasp the full significance of the words. His father—dead! What did this thin-faced man, with the little black eyes that always refused to meet one's own, who was now tramping nervously up and down a little cabin on a rusty tramp steamer here in the Java Sea at the other end of the world, know of his father, who never left the four walls of that lonely, gray house in California? Dead! It brought a shock—not poignant grief. He had never really known

his father. But that this man here should know—there was something strange, something almost ominous, about that.

"What do you know about my father?" he asked tersely at last.

Captain Laynton halted in front of the table, pulled the drawer open, took out a sheet of paper, and handed it to Wallen.

"You'll get the drift of this yourself, I fancy," he ventured.

Wallen stared at the paper for a moment in a bewildered way—and then, in a sudden flash of comprehension, he was on his feet. It was a list of the ports of call scheduled for the ill-fated *Upolo* on her last voyage—ports of call that she had never made.

"How did you come by this?" he demanded in a low voice.

"Your father gave it to me," the captain answered. "And now, if you'll listen for a minute, I'll give you the whole story and you'll see for yourself. First, I might as well tell you, though, that I own this ship. Well, I was in Honolulu—light, you understand, when your father came aboard one evening and offered to charter me for a three months' cruise down here. He made the price right, paid the money down in advance, and I closed with him. He gave me that list of ports, saying his son was on a trading barque called the *Upolo*, that he wanted to get track of him as soon as possible, and offered an extra bonus for all hands if we made a quick job of it. That's all I know about the reason for the cruise. Well, to cut a long story short, we started away, and were down just south of the line when the accident happened."

Captain Laynton hesitated, fumbled with his empty glass on the table, and coughed to clear his throat.

"Go on!" prompted Wallen, a little sharply.

"It was about four o'clock in the afternoon," Captain Laynton continued. "Your father was alone down in his cabin. We heard a shot, rushed below, and, thinking it strange that he didn't show up in the excitement, called to him—but got no answer. Well, we burst in his cabin door, and found him lying dead on the floor."

"You mean," said Wallen through tight lips, "that he committed suicide?"

"No! Wait!" Captain Laynton shook his head. "It wasn't that. God knows how it happened! The thing went off—that's all. He was cleaning one of those patent automatic pistols. There was a bottle of oil, a cleaning rag, and a wire swabbing brush on the floor. And"—Laynton poured himself another glass from the bottle, gulped it down, and wiped his lips with the

back of his hand—"well, I'm trying to give it to you in a few words—we buried him at sea, of course."

Wallen turned his back, and stared out of one of the forward portholes. Captain Laynton repelled him. How much was he to believe? That his father had chartered the *Monleigh* and had sailed with her—yes; but that his death was an *accident*—he thought of the background of his father's life, of the recent attempt upon his own life. An accident? Never! There was no room for doubt. "Never go to the East!" It was not an accident! His father had been *murdered* on this ship.

And then suddenly he swallowed hard. It was to save *him* that his father had chartered the *Monleigh* and come East! For, according to that list of ports, his father somehow had been in touch with his movements, somehow had known the danger he was in, and, trying to avert it, had been murdered himself. A cold, merciless passion surged upon Wallen. Some one on this ship was the murderer! Was it this man here? What was at the bottom of it all? It was a long arm of vengeance that reached out to that gray, lone house in California, to Singapore, to this ship, to that sweltering, plague-stricken barque of which, strangely enough, he was the sole survivor! The score he had to pay had mounted beyond computation—his father's life! Well, he would pay it!

He turned slowly, outwardly calm and possessed, to face Captain Laynton.

"Did my father bring a native servant with him—a man named Gunga?" he asked.

"No," the other replied. "He was alone."

Wallen nodded.

"What else is there to tell me?"

"Not much—except what you can probably figure out for yourself," Captain Laynton said. "I ran down through the Macassar Strait and made for the nearest port on that list—Pobi here. Your father had paid me for the three months, and, if I say it myself, when I make a bargain, I stick to it. If I could find you inside the three months I was going to do it. I don't know what your father was so anxious about, though I understood, of course, that he chartered me because, out here, with you touching at those trading-stations, he couldn't reach you by mail or cable; but I made sure it was something pretty mighty important and I thought you'd know what it was."

It was almost an interrogation, put naturally, nonchalantly enough—save for a trace of eagerness in the man's tones that was not entirely disguised.

"I haven't the slightest idea," said Wallen smoothly.

"You haven't?" Laynton's eyes for once fixed steadfastly. "Well, that's blamed queer! A man don't as a rule go to the expense of chartering a ship like this without a pretty good reason, and—"

"I dare say my father knew," suggested Wallen quietly; then briskly: "The question now is, what are you going to do, captain?"

"Why," said Captain Laynton, "I thought I'd made that plain enough. When I make a contract, I keep it. It's up to you, Mr. Wallen. There's still, say, a matter of two months before that charter expires, and the *Monleigh's* yours until it does—in your father's place. That's square, ain't it?"

Wallen did not answer at once. On the face of it, it was both square and honorable. He began to wonder if he had misjudged the man. As a matter of fact, the other's story had been perfectly straight; and, according to the story, the captain had acted only as any honest man would have done. And yet he had reason enough to distrust not only Captain Laynton, but every soul on board a ship where he was morally certain his father had been murdered! Two months—if he accepted the captain's offer. There would be two months in which to get to the bottom of this deviltry—and, equally, two months in which he exposed himself to the same unknown attacks that had finally accomplished his father's death. If he only had something to work on. Something? Yes, he had something! Drink-House Sam of Singapore! That settled it!

Captain Laynton spoke again.

"Look here!" he said in almost hurt tones. "I can't make you any fairer proposition than that. Can I?"

"No," Wallen answered instantly now. "And I'll accept your offer, captain, and thank you heartily for it."

"Good!" returned Laynton promptly. "Well, with that all ship-shape, what's the sailing orders? I don't suppose you want to keep the mud-hooks down here in Pobi, do you? We've got steam up, and can get away the minute you say the word."

Wallen walked to the cabin door and opened it.

"Then, by all means, get away at once!" he returned. "And, as for sailing orders, I think you'd better shape up for Singapore. Yes, call it Singapore for a starter."

"Right!" agreed Laynton. "Singapore it is! But here—wait a minute, Mr. Wallen." He hurried to a small iron safe that was built in under his bunk, opened it, and returned with a bulky manila envelope, which he handed to Wallen. "These are your father's papers," he explained. "I collected them together and put them away for safe-keeping. The rest of his things—clothes

and such like, which maybe you'll be glad of until you can get another outfit for yourself—are still in the cabin next to yours."

"Thank you," said Wallen gravely, as he stepped out on the deck.

CHAPTER IV
THE HAND SINISTER

WALLEN turned toward her eagerly as she joined him at the ship's rail—stealing an admiring glance at her face now in the moonlight as he had stolen one at every opportunity across the supper table in the saloon a few hours before. The quick responsive smile that came so spontaneously to the lips and eyes was a delight; the resolute little chin, the self-possession and self-reliance that showed, too, in the lips and eyes were charms in themselves; and there was fun lurking in the face, making it delightfully piquant and alluring; and in the deep, wondrously deep, brown eyes, that looked at one so fearlessly, was a gauge of implicit trust; and the brown hair that tumbled and tossed in the fresh breeze was bewitching in its truancy.

"I know you're just dying to find out how I came aboard here," she greeted him laughingly. "Or have you already found out from the captain?"

"No," Wallen answered; "I very much preferred to find out from you. The supper table didn't particularly lend itself to that sort of conversation, and I don't know where you disappeared to afterwards, but I've been waiting here on deck for ages to ask you—well, all sorts of things. I was just beginning to be afraid you weren't going to show up this evening at all."

She did not answer at once—she was leaning over the rail, her eyes fixed on the bubbling phosphorescence as it glided past the ship's hull.

"You are a Western man, as we speak of the West here, Mr. Wallen," she said at last seriously; "and perhaps you do not know the East very well—that is, the outpost East, as I call it. Conventions here are—are quite different. You, I am sure, are mentally disapproving of my presence on board; you are thinking that I should be accompanied by my mother or my father or a brother, or, at least, by a female companion of some sort, instead of which I have only—this."

She drew her hand from her suit pocket, and in the open palm, as she rested it on the rail, lay a small, but very serviceable, automatic pistol.

The act was unexpected, abrupt; and it startled him. He stared blankly at the exquisite silver chasing of the thing as it glinted in the moonbeams.

"But—but to be where that is—is necessary?" he ventured, a little awkwardly.

She shook her head as she returned the weapon to her pocket.

"I do not mean it in that sense—that it is necessary," she answered. "Those of us who live in the islands of the Peninsula are brought up with firearms almost from the time that we can walk, and conventions with us follow the code framed by the conditions which surround us. If one lives, for instance, with one's next door white neighbor a number of miles away, the question of chaperonage—or even the consideration of it—becomes absurd. One has to"—she smiled at him quickly—"chaperon one's self. It's quite different from"—she laughed outright, merrily now—"from Vassar, for example. I was there two years. And so you see, Mr. Wallen, if one wants to go anywhere down here, it is simply a question of availing one's self of the first opportunity, whatever it may be. Why, time and again, I've even sailed alone with the Malays on father's schooner for weeks on end. And"—again her laugh rang out in merriment—"it's really a much preferable life to that of Vassar!"

He laughed with her now.

"And so?" he prompted.

"It's a very homey and commonplace explanation," she said. "I am going to pay a long-promised visit to my uncle and aunt in Sumatra. We live—that is, father and I—on Menado, just north of the Macassar Strait. We have a medical missionary and a small settlement there, but all we see of the outside world is an occasional trading schooner; and so, when Captain Laynton put in to ride out a few days' bad weather, with him came the opportunity I was speaking of. He said he was to touch at a number of ports beginning with Pobi and work down to Singapore. Well, at Singapore I can get passage across to Sumatra, and that's the whole story. You see"—she was demurely serious now—"I have been very precise because I understand that you are really in command now, and if you disapproved too terribly you might order me ashore at the first port."

"Order you ashore!" exclaimed Wallen with a laugh. "Not much! Besides, we're not touching at any port before Singapore. And"—with sudden inspiration—"I'll tell you what, Miss MacKay, we'll run you over to Sumatra from there, if you like."

"Oh, will you?" she cried excitedly. "That will be splendid. But"—hesitantly—"that's asking altogether too much."

"It isn't asking anything at all!" he assured her warmly. "The debt will be on my side. I suppose you've heard all about it. It seems that the *Monleigh* is at my disposal for the next few months and—well, I'm only sorry that the run from Singapore to Sumatra isn't longer, that's all."

"It's perfectly splendid of you!" she said again enthusiastically. "I don't know how to thank you." Her hand, cool and soft, touched his lightly upon the rail.

He clasped it frankly.

"Then that settles the bargain, Miss MacKay!" he declared.

She withdrew her hand, nodding her head prettily; and then the dark eyes that were smiling into his grew suddenly troubled.

"I have never heard so strange a thing before as this," she said; "of you, and—and your connection with this ship. And—I've been trying to say it, and didn't quite know how—about your loss—your father's death—I am so sorry, Mr. Wallen."

"Thank you," he said quietly—and turned away for a moment. His father's death! He had not even yet come to realize it, except in that cold, merciless desire for vengeance upon the man or men who had been guilty of his father's murder. And now her words brought that thought again uppermost in his mind. He faced her once more. "Could you tell me anything about him—about how it happened, Miss MacKay?" he asked gravely.

"Only what Captain Laynton has probably told you already," she answered slowly. "It was before the ship reached Menado, you know; before I came aboard."

"Yes, of course!" said Wallen; then abruptly: "Did you ever know Captain Laynton or any of the officers before, Miss MacKay?"

She shook her head.

"Why, no," she replied. "I don't think the *Monleigh* has ever been in these waters before. I imagine from what I've heard the captain say that he was mostly on the Central and South American coasts. They've all been extremely kind to me, though, and treated me with every courtesy since I've been on board."

"I'm glad to hear that," said Wallen. "They struck me as a bit of a rough lot—I mean the crew." He had shifted his position, leaning now with his back against the rail, and, glancing along the deck, his eyes fixed suddenly on the wireless house. There was no light showing from within. He jerked his hand toward it.

"It's rather queer, come to think of it," he observed, "that I haven't seen the wireless operator—he wasn't even at supper."

"Oh, yes, 'he' was!" she laughed. "I'm the operator."

"You—*what!*" He gazed at her in amazement.

"Well, no, not really," she amended. "I'm only joking, or, at least, half joking—though, indeed, it's too serious a matter to joke about at all. Poor Mr. Kane! It's true, however, that I do what little operating there is to do—which naturally is practically none at all, for ships like this, as you know, only carry wireless because the law compels them to do so. You see, it happened in that bad weather I spoke about a few minutes ago. Mr. Kane, the wireless operator, slipped or fell—nobody seems to know quite how it occurred—down one of the ladders onto the lower deck. They found him lying there unconscious—and he was still unconscious when the *Monleigh* put into Menado. Our medical missionary said it was a fracture of the skull, and the only chance for Mr. Kane was to leave him ashore there where he could have medical attention, for, of course, there is no doctor aboard here."

"Yes—but you?" Wallen questioned quickly. "What do you know about a wireless?"

"Conditions of the East again," she told him smilingly. "Father installed a small station on our plantation a few years ago, and a friend of his on another island did likewise. It's been heaps of fun, and, of course, I learned to operate it. But now, sir"—with sudden severity—"we are forgetting that you are still an invalid; and, instead of persuading you to take better care of yourself—which is really the reason I joined you at all when I saw you standing out here on deck—I am, in reality, keeping you up. Please take me below, Mr. Wallen."

"Below! But—no!" he protested. "It's early yet."

"But—yes!" she insisted, gayly imperious, and led the way across the deck. "You shouldn't even have been allowed up for supper, you know!"

Wallen, because he could do nothing else, followed her down the companionway and into the saloon. And there, despite his good-natured grumbling, she stood and watched him in a quaint, motherly way until, perforce, he was obliged to go to his cabin door—and then, with a cheery "Good-night" she was gone.

"By Jove!" said Wallen softly to himself. He locked the door, closed the porthole securely, switched on the light, and, seating himself on the edge of the bunk, stared at the floor. "By Jove!" he repeated softly; then lugubriously: "And it's only three days to Singapore, and—she didn't say where in Sumatra—but that couldn't be more than another three days at the outside."

He sat up suddenly and pulled out of his pocket the envelope that Captain Laynton had given him. He had not examined it yet. He tore the

envelope open, shook the contents out on the bunk, and whistled low, under his breath.

Among other things, but catching his eye instantly, was a packet of crisp, new, American hundred-dollar gold certificates. He counted them wonderingly—five thousand one hundred dollars. He laid them down and picked up a wallet. It contained some silver and a few dollars in small bills.

Wallen passed his hand a little dazedly across his eyes; and then continued his examination. There was a photograph, a little faded, a little old-fashioned, the photograph of a very beautiful woman. He turned it over. On the back was written: "Elizabeth Powers Wallen."

His mother! He had never known his mother. He held the photograph for a long time in his hand, gazing at the face that now seemed to smile back at him—then put it reverently aside.

There remained, perhaps, a dozen documents; mortgages in his father's favor, stock certificates and securities of various sorts, the total running into many thousands of dollars—three hundred and sixty thousand he put it at a guess, figuring the certificates at par value.

Lastly there was a small sealed envelope. He opened it with a curious sense of excitement. Here, perhaps, was the secret that had bound up his father's life so mysteriously, and— No! It was his father's will, a terse, short document, bequeathing everything "to my son, Stacey Wallen, whom I charge with the care of my faithful servant Gunga as long as the latter shall live."

Wallen got up and began to pace the little cabin. Gunga! The will was dated at San Francisco two years ago. Where was Gunga now? Dead, perhaps, since the two were inseparable and Gunga had not come aboard with his master at Honolulu—or so Captain Laynton had stated. Captain Laynton! Wallen stared at the articles that were spread about on the bunk—the conviction slowly dawning upon him that he had woefully misjudged the *Monleigh's* commander, and mentally owed the other an apology for jumping so hastily to conclusions.

He began to go over in his mind the events that had happened since that morning, forcing himself to consider them calmly and logically.

There was not even a shadow of proof that his father's death, after all, had been anything but accidental. His suspicions had arisen naturally enough in view of the past, and his own recent escape; but he was convinced that they were not only ill-founded in respect of Captain Laynton at least, but that Captain Laynton was a thoroughly trustworthy and honorable man, who was living up to the strict letter of his bargain in regard to the charter of

the ship for no other reason than that he felt in honor bound to do so. And here was the proof of it. If Captain Laynton had been in any degree dishonestly inclined, he would have put those thousands lying there on the bunk into his own pocket, and no one would have been the wiser!

Wallen smiled suddenly, stretched his arms above his head as though a leaden weight had fallen from his shoulders—and held them there, poised. Over the steady pound and throb of the engines, the musical swish of the water against the hull, came the ship's bell striking the hour; and muffled, faint, the look-out's reassuring echo:

"A-a-all's well!"

"And I guess that's right!" said Wallen—and with a vision of brown eyes and gloriously truant hair before him, and the thought of to-morrow when the vision should materialize into reality again, he turned into his bunk.

And, Captain Laynton being already eliminated, the "to-morrow" and the two days that followed not only dispelled all lingering suspicions of any one else on board from his mind, but found him responding frankly to the general good-fellowship which he discovered was existing in the cabin.

They were unquestionably a hard lot forward; but so far as Captain Laynton and his officers were concerned, there was not one of them, with the possible exception of Mott—whom he had caught on more than one occasion scowling at him from the bridge as he and Helen MacKay had paced the deck—but showed a friendly disposition toward him, even to Larsen, the first officer, a morose, silent, pock-marked man, who had a yarn to spin, and an occasional invitation to his cabin for a hospitable glass.

They passed quickly, those three days—too quickly. And they were the happiest days Wallen had ever known—because Helen MacKay made them happy days, and because a new glad thing had come into his life.

Had she, too, come to care? He did not know. Sometimes, in little intimate ways, in a smile, or a glance, or a word, or a quick, trustful touch of the hand, he dared to hope that she had. Short days they were, all too short—in the wireless house, where she laughingly manipulated the apparatus and their hands became entangled through his subterfuges at pretended assistance with this and that; under the awnings, lazily contented, lotus-dreaming in the heat of the afternoon; under the clear star-studded sky, pacing the deck in the moonlight with her arm tucked cozily within his own.

And so they had passed those days, and it was the fourth night now since he had come aboard—and to-morrow they would be in Singapore.

He lay tossing in his bunk. It was very late—near morning. He couldn't sleep. A tumult of thought kept his brain active and alert. Singapore! What

would Singapore bring him? Who was this Drink-House Sam? It mattered a great deal more now than it had mattered before. For before, with a sort of Berserk rage, he had been willing to take a gambler's chance, and, win or lose, stake his life against this man, whoever he might be, that had tried to strike him down without warning, without a chance to defend himself; but now his life meant more to him—he wanted to live—for her.

And now, too, more than ever before, it was necessary that this thing should be cleared up. He could not ask her the question that had been trembling on his lips all that evening while this hung over him. He could not bring that glorious young life into the shadows that menaced his own. Wallen's fists clenched. It reached far, this unaccountable vendetta against him—and it stood now between him and the woman he had come to love.

"Thank God," he muttered, "that at least everything is all right on board here!"

He turned over, and tried again to compose himself to sleep—but now his eyes insisted on remaining fastened on a queer little white patch by the door. What was it? It wasn't the moonlight through the porthole reflecting on anything. He raised himself up on his elbow several times to make sure of that. Finally, in a fretful way, he got out of his bunk to investigate. It was a piece of paper that had evidently been pushed in under the threshold—but whether it had been placed there ten minutes or two hours ago he had no idea, for he had at no time heard the slightest sound.

He picked up the paper, switched on the light—and suddenly it seemed as though his immediate surroundings had vanished, and he was living again a scene of many years ago. He was standing, a trembling child in his nightclothes, on the stairway of that grim, gray, lonely house in the dead of night, and below in the hall, holding a candle, was his father, and Gunga was bending over a form on the floor, and his father's voice was in his ears: "Look again, Gunga. Has he one finger on the left hand?" And then Gunga's answer: "I have looked, sahib, and the hand is whole."

Wallen's face was strangely white. Crudely traced on the piece of paper that he held was a human hand—and the fingers, save for the forefinger, had the appearance of having been hacked away.

CHAPTER V
DRINK-HOUSE SAM OF SINGAPORE

IT was already dusk as the *Monleigh* dropped anchor in the roadstead of Singapore, and Wallen paused for a final word on the threshold of Captain Laynton's cabin.

"It's understood then, Captain Laynton," he said quietly. "No shore leave for anybody—and steam up. I'll only be ashore a few hours, and we'll be away from here again before morning."

"Oh, all right!" agreed Captain Laynton. "It sounds a bit queer to me, and I must confess I don't quite understand; but"—he shrugged his shoulders—"you're giving the orders aboard here, Mr. Wallen."

"There's nothing to understand," said Wallen, with an easy laugh. "I've a few hours' private business ashore, and then we'll get Miss MacKay right across to Sumatra—and I don't want a rowdy, drunken crew to do it with."

"All right," said Laynton again. "Whatever you say, Mr. Wallen."

Wallen, with a nod, stepped aft along the deck, entered the lounging-room preparatory to descending the companionway—and came face to face with Helen MacKay.

"Of course," she said demurely, "I think it's perfectly splendid that you are going to run the ship all the way to Sumatra on account of little me; but I think it's sinfully selfish of you to go ashore all alone this evening when we're only going to be here for a few hours. Please, Mr. Yacht-Captain, won't you take me, too?"

It was the first time he would have avoided her if he could have done so. He stared at her now—and promptly stammered:

"I—you—that is, well, you see, Miss MacKay—I—I can't very well."

"How delightfully lucid!" she teased him laughingly. "You know you've been most awfully grumpy to-day. I've been treated like a naughty little child. Is this my crowning punishment? What have I done?"

"Look here!" cried Wallen impulsively—and caught her hands and held them. "I know you're more than half serious, and that you are keenly disappointed at not going ashore. It's true, I'm afraid, that I haven't been quite myself to-day; but I've been worried. This morning I had almost made up my mind to run to Sumatra, and not touch here at all; but—but there's a

little business that I felt I must attend to this evening, and—well, that's what I'm going ashore for. You—you understand, I'm sure, Miss MacKay?"

Her eyes widened, partly in merriment at his confusion, partly in a puzzled way.

"You had almost made up your mind not to come here at all?" she repeated questioningly.

"Yes," he said.

"Oh!"—there was only bewilderment in her eyes now. "I—I'm not quite sure I understand. I thought it was all settled when we left Pobi that we should come here."

"Yes, so it was," he acknowledged awkwardly. He avoided her gaze. Why had he spoken of that at all! He could not bring terror to her, alarm her with his own fears, could he? He could not tell her that his brain was sick with the effort to grapple with a peril that he knew now beyond question lurked aboard the ship, and that, because it was unseen, because he could not identify it in the form of any one, or two, or all aboard the ship and fight it in the open, had made a nightmare of the hours since morning. "I'll—I'll explain to-morrow, Miss MacKay," he said hurriedly. "You mustn't—"

"I'm not!" she laughed. "I'm only keeping you." And pushing him playfully toward the companionway, she ran out on the deck.

A moment later, Wallen, at the foot of the ship's ladder, was running his eyes critically over the half-score of shore boats that pushed and bumped against each other and the gangway's platform, and whose occupants at the prospect of a fare were screaming and yelling in a frantic effort to attract his special and undivided attention.

A Malay boatman had the strategic position alongside the grating, but Wallen unceremoniously pushed the Malay's craft away with his foot and beckoned to a Chinaman who was next in line. As he clambered into the boat he looked up. Helen MacKay was leaning over the rail of the boatdeck.

"Take good care of yourself!" she called out merrily. "Singapore means 'the city of lions,' you know. Don't run your head into one of their mouths!" And with a wave of her hand she was gone.

It brought a sudden, premonitory shock to Wallen—and then a twisted smile. The city of lions! It was only a joke with her, a little light-hearted fling—with him, God knew, it might prove a grim reality!

At first when he had found that paper on his cabin floor, he had thought, as he had told her, that he would take her straight to Sumatra and get her off the ship; and then second thoughts had convinced him that the danger which threatened him did not threaten her. She was safe there on board; and he did

not want to let her go until he had torn down, if he could, the barrier—of whose existence she knew nothing—that the peril he was in had erected between them.

His lips thinned into a straight line. The devil, or devils, who had murdered his father—and that it had been murder was now finally an assured fact—were playing with him as the proverbial cat plays with the mouse! Why had nothing happened to him in those three days from Pobi, while he had been living in a fool's paradise of imagined security? Well, perhaps they would play too long! He would settle it to-night. When he came back to the ship he would *know*—or there would be one less scoundrel in Singapore! That was what he was going ashore for now—he was going to Drink-House Sam of Singapore.

Who was it aboard the *Monleigh* who had put that paper under his cabin door? She had called him grumpy all that day—and all that day he had been studying the crew, cataloguing in his mind every man aboard. It could not well be all of them—a plot involving the whole ship and crew seemed out of the question. But, taking the officers first, he had no reason to suspect any one of them above another, though it was true, and a somewhat disturbing circumstance now, that Captain Laynton, in turning over his father's effects, had not included the fatal pistol which, if the story were true, was obviously his father's property. But that might readily have been merely an oversight on the captain's part. He had not thought of it himself until, with the certainty of danger threatening him again that morning, he had found himself weaponless. Nor had he cared to force a possible issue by asking for it—until he had been ashore at Singapore. Well, then, there was Mott, of course—Mott who had grown more surly every day. Wallen shook his head. Mott's attitude was easily accounted for. The man, as witness the ride at Pobi, if it had not been glaringly evident on board since then, was attentive to Miss MacKay, and resented his, Wallen's, usurpation of what he evidently considered his prerogative. There was nothing about any of the other officers that brought them individually to mind.

What of the crew, then? Apart from the captain, the mates and the engineers, there were fifteen men in the crew. A close inspection of them that day had not inspired him with confidence; though, for that matter, neither had it afforded any more concrete a basis for suspicion than had the cabin. They were a hard lot and a polyglot one! The English and Americans amongst them had every appearance of being the sweepings from the slums of London, Liverpool and New York. The rest were of every nationality: Two of the coal-passers were Chinese coolies; the cook was from the West Indies; the steward was a Frenchman from Port Said; and two Danes, a

Swede, a Kanaka from the Sandwich Islands, and three Japanese completed the roster. An unlovely crowd, who had not hesitated to let him see that his excursions into the forecastle were intrusions his friendly overtures did not outweigh! He had learned nothing from them.

Wallen looked up, and fixed his eyes speculatively on his Chinese boatman. They were almost at the landing.

"You sabe Drink-House Sam?" he demanded abruptly.

The Chinaman smirked knowingly.

"Me sabe," he replied.

"All right," said Wallen. "You take me there. But first, you take me where the stores are. I want to buy some things, and I don't know my way about."

"Me sabe," said the Chinaman again. "All same velly glood gluide."

He proved to be. Within half an hour after landing, Wallen had completed the purchase of an excellent automatic pistol and ammunition, and was following the Chinaman along a dark street near the waterfront—and here, presently, the Chinaman halted before an uninviting-looking hostelry in the equally uninviting-looking neighborhood.

"Dlink-House Sam's," announced the guide. "Blimbly you all same go back ship? Me wait?"

"No," said Wallen, as he paid the other. "That's all. Good-night, John!"

The Chinaman disappeared.

Wallen surveyed the building before which he stood. From a background of murky yellow lights, the word "SAM'S" in painted, black letters, the paint much the worse for wear, stood out on a large window whose pane, in turn, was painted white, modestly precluding a view into the interior. The babel of noise that issued from within, however, was amply indicative of the bar-room.

The rest of the building was in darkness; but Wallen could see enough of it to form a fair impression of what it was like. It was one of those Easternized-European wooden structures, two stories high, the front rooms on the second story opening directly on to the veranda. At one time it might have known a certain respectability; but now it was run down, the veranda posts were askew, and, with the general air of being disreputably out at elbows, it bore all the earmarks of a sailors' boarding-house of the lowest type.

Wallen stepped forward, pushed the bar-room door open, and entered. The place was bluish-gray with smoke, and reeked abominably with the

fumes of rank tobacco, the smell of liquor and the unclean humans who filled it. A bar ran down one side; a number of small tables occupied the main portion of the room, and around these were clustered some twenty-five or thirty rough-looking hands, evidently on shore leave from the harbor's shipping—and making the most of it.

Behind the bar were two men, one of whom, Wallen made no doubt, was Drink-House Sam, and, from the sign, presumably, the proprietor—a big man in shirt sleeves, the sleeves rolled to the elbows over puffed, blue-veined arms, a man whose face was florid and hard-lined, with eyes close-set, and whose close-cropped hair, with little white skin-spots showing where the clippers had done their work too thoroughly, lent a peculiarly repellent aspect to his general appearance. A steel-like glint held for an instant in Wallen's eyes—and vanished. Drink-House Sam of Singapore!

There was a sudden speculative silence in the room, as all eyes turned upon him—those here, with few exceptions, had a very personal and individual interest in a stranger so obviously above their own class! Wallen smiled a little grimly. On more than one occasion, when serving on the *Tokamahu*, the sailing hour perilously close, he had dug his own men out of holes like this. He crossed to the bar, and confronted the big man in shirt sleeves.

"Are you the proprietor here?" he asked. "The man the coolies call Drink-House Sam?"

"That's me; Sam Marle, by rights," the other admitted curtly. "What can I do for you, mister?"

"Well," said Wallen, lowering his voice, "I'd like a few minutes of your time, somewhere in private."

"What for?" demanded Marle.

Wallen leaned across the bar.

"It's about the *Upolo*," he said confidentially.

The man stared at him for a moment, a curiously mingled expression of cunning and surprise creeping into the small, black, red-rimmed, shifty eyes—then he stepped abruptly out from behind the bar, led the way to an empty table at the end of the room by the rear door, and flung himself into a chair.

Wallen followed, but remained standing on the opposite side of the table. The drinking and talking in the place had been partially resumed; but uneasy and none too friendly glances were still being directed his way. He was quite obviously the center of attraction.

"I can't say I call this very private," he protested.

"It'll do till I know more of your business!" grunted Marle. "Take it or leave it. I ain't for sneakin' off and havin' every last one of these swine here get to figurin' I'm puttin' up some sort of deal to shanghai his particular carcass. And sit down, mister—you're showing more'n is necessary of your good clothes."

It was true. By standing there after the other was seated, Wallen realized that he only served to attract further attention to himself. A crowd at the next table was already indulging, *sotto voce*, in uncomplimentary and drunkenly offensive remarks.

"Now shoot the works!" prompted Drink-House Sam. "What about this 'ere *Upolo*?"

Wallen did not answer at once. His hands, that were thrust into his trousers pockets, clenched fiercely. This man before him, just a few feet away, with just the table-top between them, was Drink-House Sam at last, the man he had dreamed of night and day in his long convalescence at MacKnight's as the man who some day he would treat as he would treat a poison snake! Queer that he was seeing that screaming, maddened wretch, Won Su, jump overboard again! His mind seemed to grow almost ghoulish. That flabby neck of the man in front of him was Drink-House Sam's, the man who had loosed a pack of Chinese thugs upon him—how far in would his fingers sink? But the odds were too hopelessly against him here. He must get the man away alone somewhere—by trading, say, on a combination of the other's curiosity, cunning and self-interest. Suppose he said that he was Stacey Wallen and that Ting Wah had sent him—and then suppose he refused to say anything more except in strict privacy? Yes, that ought to do the trick! Drink-House Sam would naturally conclude that, though Ting Wah had failed, he was still faithful, and was delivering him, Wallen, into his employer's hands. "Strict privacy" should just about suit Drink-House Sam down to the ground, then! It was a risk, of course—but he had come prepared to take risks. Once alone, it would be *he*, not Drink-House Sam, who would spring the surprise and strike first.

"Well, you got lock-jaw?" growled Drink-House Sam. "This 'ere *Upolo*, you was sayin'?"

"Yes," said Wallen, and forced an engaging smile. "It's a bit of a longish story, but I'll cut it short with a word—yellow jack cleaned her out somewhere in the Java Sea."

"Huh!" snorted Marle. "Everybody knows that. Most of us can read, mister. She was picked up by the gunboat, *Phyllis*, a few weeks ago; and a 'orrid mess she was, accordin' to accounts."

"Is that so? I hadn't heard she'd been picked up," said Wallen slowly. "But that's nothing to do with what brought me here. You knew a Chink aboard her called Ting Wah, didn't you?"

The thrust was unexpected, as Wallen had meant it to be. Marle, with an involuntary start, leaned sharply forward over the table; and then, with a clumsy attempt to cover his agitation, spoke viciously:

"Say, what the 'ell you givin' us? How would I know him?"

"You don't know him?" ejaculated Wallen in well-simulated surprise.

"Never heard of him," declared Marle; but the rat-eyes were stealthily searching Wallen's face.

"That's strange!" Wallen puckered his brows in assumed perplexity. "I'm quite sure I haven't made a mistake. The man was dying, of course, and pretty far gone and talked thickly, but it was Ting Wah sent me to you. He"—Wallen's fists, in his pockets, clenched a little harder—"said you would know."

"Did he?" inquired Marle, with a sneer. "And who are you, mister?"

"I'm Wallen, Stacey Wallen, the first mate," Wallen replied readily. "I'm the only one left. I got away from the barque in a boat—but this isn't any place to talk. I can't afford to take any chances of being overheard. Let's get away somewhere alone, and—what's wrong, Mr. Marle?"

The florid face, a miserable fear stamped upon it, had turned a grayish color, and the man, jaw sagged, was staring across the table. A fierce joy swept over Wallen—and then uneasiness. Perhaps, after all, his strategy had been faulty. Drink-House Sam was evidently placing a far different interpretation on Ting Wah's dying message than he, Wallen, had intended. And then, to Wallen's amazement, as abruptly as fear had come into the other's face, it was gone; and in its place was sudden relief, genuine enough for all the shrewd, cunning gleam of the eyes that accompanied it.

"You say you are Wallen, eh, the first mate?" asked Marle craftily.

"Yes," said Wallen composedly.

"Then you're a liar!" Marle shouted instantly, and sprang up from his seat.

There was an echoing creak of chairs as they were shoved back all over the room, the scuffle of heavy boots as men rose to their feet. Wallen, suddenly hard-faced, taken by surprise, hastily pushed his own chair back, and stood up.

Marle was laughing brutally now, but in a strangely hysterical way in which relief again was dominant. It puzzled Wallen—but there was little

time to think of that. The men from the nearest table were pushing forward.

"What do you chaps say to this?" Marle bellowed out, pointing toward Wallen. "This 'ere cove says he's Wallen, the first mate of the *Upolo*, the barque you've all read about as was picked up by the *Phyllis*!"

A chorus of derisive jeers, oaths, and guffaws greeted the announcement. They were evidently a well-trained lot, these hangers-on of Drink-House Sam! Wallen's hand slipped into his coat pocket, and closed over his automatic. They were crowding down the room, closing in around him now. He glanced quickly over his shoulder to locate precisely the position of the rear door, should it come to a row—and instinctively stepped back a pace as a hulking, raw-boned fellow, half drunk and carrying his liquor belligerently, lurched forward.

"Hif 'e says that, wot we says is that 'e's a bloody himpostor!" announced the man truculently. "An' wot's more, we doesn't like the looks of 'im when he comes in—does we, mytes? An' wot's more—tyke that!" He made a sudden wicked pass at Wallen's face.

A yell of applause greeted the act. But the blow never reached its mark—Wallen had dealt too long and too intimately with the forecastle not to recognize the breed around him that was the forecastle's curse and the curse of the better men who honored it. With a quick sidestep he evaded the blow, whipped his left in a lightning drive to the other's chin, and, as the man staggered backward into the crowd, Wallen leaped for the rear door behind him.

He reached it, but not before they were upon him like a pack of wolves, snarling at him, tearing at him, their breaths in his face, pounding at him, trying to trip him up, to throw him to the floor. The place was in pandemonium now. Again and again, Wallen's clubbed pistol rose and fell, again and again his fist shot in and out, and still he kept his feet; but he could not free himself long enough to get the door open—and then something seemed to lend him added passion, added strength.

The face of Drink-House Sam! It was just out of reach—just out of reach.

He flung two men from him and lunged forward. If he could only mark that face! A yowl of fright from Marle greeted the savage onslaught; but, hemmed in by those behind him, the man could not retreat, and Wallen's fist smashed straight between the red little blinking eyes. The suddenness of the attack brought an instant's respite, an instant's pause—and in that instant Wallen leaped back again, reached the door, and this time wrenched it open.

And then Wallen laughed, not pleasantly; and his pistol, not clubbed now, swept the crowd.

"I'll be out here somewhere in the darkness," he told them grimly as he backed away, "and the first man that steps across the threshold I'll drop the way I'd drop a mad dog."

They stared at him sullenly, but without a word—until they could no longer see him—and then they answered him with catcalls, hoots, profanity, and brave defiance. But no man crossed the threshold, though Wallen, a dozen yards away now, could still see them clustered there in the lighted doorway.

He moved backward cautiously, making no sound, edging always in a sidewise direction—and suddenly, to his own surprise and relief, where he had expected to encounter a fence or some other obstruction, he found, instead, that he had come out on what was either a street or a lane. But while his escape was now assured, Wallen was in no happy frame of mind. He had yet to square accounts with Drink-House Sam. He had accomplished not only no part of the purpose for which he had come, but had, worse still, probably put the man thoroughly on his guard. But the night was still young, and Drink-House Sam was still there! He was not through with Drink-House Sam yet; the ill-luck of his first attempt changed matters not at all! He would never be through with Drink-House Sam until—that murderous sweep of passion was on him again—until he had not only forced the secret out of the other, but had paid the score between them as well. And this time he would see to it that the privacy of their interview was of his own making, and such that it would serve Marle little to assert that he, Wallen, was not who he claimed to be—which seemed to be Marle's pitiful idea of protecting himself.

Wallen made a wide circuit of the place, which, owing to his ignorance of the neighborhood in which he lost himself several times, consumed fully half an hour. But at the expiration of that time he was stealing along the opposite side of the street in front of Drink-House Sam's again; and, grateful now for the dinginess of the surroundings and the absence of lights, slipped into a narrow areaway, or, more properly, a space some three feet wide between the two buildings facing Drink-House Sam's, and lay down upon the ground.

Drink-House Sam's appeared to have recovered from its excitement and to have resumed its normal state of boisterous hilarity. He could see perfectly, and was securely hidden himself. Luck now seemed to be turning his way. He might have to wait a long time, but he was grimly conscious that his patience would not be exhausted. By and by Drink-House Sam would go

to bed, by and by that light in the bar-room would go out, by and by the hangers-on would be dispersed, and by and by somewhere in that house he would get Drink-House Sam—*alone*.

And so Wallen lay there, his eyes on the bar-room door across the street. Occasionally some one straggled in, occasionally some one straggled out; but it was many hours, while he grew stiff and cramped, before the place began to empty out—before Drink-House Sam himself at the doorway was ejecting, with some force and more profanity, what appeared to be the last of his guests.

And then the light in the bar-room was extinguished.

It was very late; but precisely what time it was Wallen did not know. Did it matter what time it was—or how long he waited until Drink-House Sam and whoever else was in the place had got to bed and got to sleep? This time he would leave nothing to chance!

A light appeared suddenly in the end room on the veranda over the bar-room—and Wallen's lips parted in a cold smile. Luck again! That was Drink-House Sam's room! The man, silhouetted against the light, was opening the veranda door, for air probably. The room obviously then had two doors, for Marle had entered it from the interior of the house. Wallen smiled again. *He* would enter from the veranda. Luck was coming now in greater measure than he had dared to hope.

The light in the room went out.

It was only a question now of giving Drink-House Sam time to get to sleep. The minutes passed, a quarter of an hour, a half, three quarters—and then Wallen slipped silently across the street, and quickly, agilely, swarmed up one of the veranda posts.

He paused to listen as he reached the rail. The rail was old and it had creaked a little, not loudly, but—who knew!—it might have been heard.

There was not a sound.

He swung over onto the veranda, and moved cautiously forward. In a moment he was at Marle's open door. It was pitch black in there, and he could see nothing; and, though he listened again intently, he could still hear no sound.

His face was set now, his jaws hard-clamped. His plan was simple—to choke this human devil into submission before he could make a sound, to get his fingers first of all upon the ruffian's neck and then wring from him all he knew.

He stole into the room, feeling out with his hands before him, and, touching the foot of the bed, guided himself along its side. He could see a

little now, a very little, just the white covers on the bed by contrast with the darkness—see them bulk a little over the hulking form beneath.

Warily, inch by inch, he crept to the head of the bed; and then his hands, lunging swiftly forward with his body weight behind them, closed on the man's throat—but the next instant he was staggering backward, a low cry of horror on his lips. His hands were *wet*—wet with warm blood!

He could not see, but he *knew* it was blood. Unnerved, shaken, he stood there for a moment, his mind in riot. Then, fighting desperately for self-control, he took a match from his pocket and lighted it. He closed his eyes on the sight. The man's throat was only a gaping wound.

The match in Wallen's fingers burned on, forgotten. Drink-House Sam's mouth was closed forever. There was something of more than stark irony in this ending to the night, something that— He drew in his breath sharply.

There was some one else in the room. Some one moved. The match in its dying flame spurted up. A tall, gaunt form loomed before him. That face! Where had he seen that face? The match dropped from his fingers. That face! It seemed to be associated with dreams—of long ago. And then a voice spoke:

"Sahib, come quickly!"

And then he knew.

It was Gunga.

CHAPTER VI
THE VENDETTA

"YOU, GUNGA!" WALLEN whispered hoarsely. "You—you did this! What does it mean? How did you come here? Where did you come from?"

"Sahib, there is no time for talk," the other answered gravely. "There is much danger. Come quickly. We will go back to your ship."

"You know about that—the ship?" mumbled Wallen. "How—"

"Sahib," Gunga pleaded anxiously, "*come!*"

There followed for Wallen a space of time that he could neither estimate in duration, nor out of whose events in the interval he could form any concrete whole. There were dark streets and darker by-ways, and always before him, wraithlike in his loose white garb, the turbaned figure of the East Indian; and then a boat from some dark corner of a jetty and they were in it, and Gunga was rowing.

His mind had been in chaos; picturing again and again that abhorrent sight in the glow of his burning match; trying to span the ten years since he had last seen this man; striving futilely, but with a sort of maddening, irresponsible insistence, to grapple with this and that question that came and went in lightning succession—and always reverting to that black room, the sputtering match, and Drink-House Sam upon the bed again.

And now they were far out in the harbor, and the water was very still, and a little ahead he could see the *Monleigh*; and Gunga lay upon his oars and spoke:

"Sahib, is it true what they say—that the master is dead?"

The question in its abruptness and its significance came like a physical shock to Wallen; but, too, it roused him and cleared his brain.

"Yes, it is true," he answered. "They say aboard that it was an accident; that my father accidentally shot himself while he was cleaning an automatic pistol."

Gunga's face was in the moonlight, and, as Wallen stared at it now, a whiteness came upon the swarthy features and the lips quivered tremulously like a child's; and then it seemed to be another face, distorted, an inhuman passion in the twitching muscles, the lips parted and tight-drawn across the

gums, showing the teeth as a beast might show them as it crouches to spring. And then this, too, was gone, for the head was bowed over the oars, and Wallen could no longer see.

Presently Gunga looked up, but now his face was impassive.

"It is fate, sahib," he said in a low, strange way. "Great is Allah! I have loved the master many years, and now I am the servant of his son. Sahib, will you pay blood with blood?"

"You mean," said Wallen, his own voice low, "that you, too, know it was not an accident—that it was murder? And that Drink-House Sam, though he was miles away, had a hand in it, and that was why you killed him?"

"Sahib," said Gunga softly, "I did not kill the man; *I was too late*!"

"You didn't kill him!" Wallen cried. "Then who—" He leaned forward and gripped the other's wrist fiercely. "Gunga, the time has come for me to know. Why was my father murdered, and by whom? Why did he live that strange life in that old stone house? Why did Drink-House Sam set a crew of Chinese murderers loose upon me? And this"—he brought out from his pocket the diagram of the human hand with its missing fingers—"what does this signify, and why was it slipped under the door of my cabin last night?"

In the moonlight Gunga's face was working again, and his eyes, narrowed, seemed to be searching intently the surface of the water around him.

"Among the crew, sahib," he asked, "is there a Kanaka, a tall man with great shoulders, and whose lip is scarred as though it had been cut across?"

"Yes!" The word came in a sharp intake of Wallen's breath.

"Then it is true," said Gunga. "To-night he slipped away from the ship and swam ashore; and it is in my mind that likewise he will swim back again. I lay hidden, sahib, where I have lain hidden for many nights, and he came there to this place, of which I will speak again, and told the story; and I, Gunga, listened unknown to him, and the light was gone from my life as he told how he had crept along the deck and fired through the porthole upon the sahib's father, and then had thrown the pistol and those things to clean it with, which he had first stolen, in upon the floor. And he told of you, sahib, and the strange way you came aboard the ship, and how twice he had tried to kill you, but that fate had not willed it so. And at last, thinking that your death was sure, either by his hand or by certain ones in Singapore, and thinking to torture you with fear, he put the paper with the hand upon it under your cabin door. And other things he told as well, sahib. Of how the captain and the crew thought strangely of the voyage; and of how, through him, they came to whisper among themselves that it was a treasure-hunt;

and how, on the day after you came on the ship, and before he knew the ship was going to Singapore, and so that you might not escape by going ashore at some place where they would not be in wait for you as they would be at Singapore, and so that you might even be forced by the captain to stay on board, he pretended to have found a slip of paper with a latitude and longitude upon it which he made pretense you had dropped from your pocket. This he carried to the captain, thinking that the captain would believe the treasure within his reach, and would search for it on his own account in spite of you, sahib, and so keep you on the ship, for the paper was the position Ram Gulab Singh had given the Kanaka, even as he had also given the Kanaka the drawing of the hand; but the captain only took the paper and gave orders to the Kanaka that he should say nothing, and—"

"Wait," Wallen interrupted quickly. "It is certain, then, that Captain Laynton and the crew had nothing to do with my father's murder—with Drink-House Sam?"

"All that is certain, sahib," Gunga answered. "Though, too, there are strange things about the ship—but that tale is for another time."

"And this Ram Gulab Singh?" Wallen questioned through thin lips.

Gunga's eyes were still searching the water around him in the same intent, curious way.

"Have patience, sahib," he said. "Time does not press now. It is well that the sahib should know all before he returns to the ship. Does the ship sail at once when the sahib goes aboard?"

"Yes," said Wallen.

"It is as the Kanaka said," Gunga nodded. "Sahib, yet another question: How did the sahib know of those Chinamen and Drink-House Sam?"

"One of the Chinamen on the *Upolo* that I had done the best I could for, a man by the name of Ting Wah, warned me about Drink-House Sam as he was dying," Wallen replied.

"Yes," Gunga nodded his head again. "But I will end first the Kanaka's tale so that the sahib will understand all else the better. The Kanaka had been a long time a member of the crew before the ship came to Honolulu. It was in Honolulu that for much money he was hired by one of Ram Gulab Singh's agents to kill the sahib's father. If he failed in that he was to stir up the crew to dream of the treasure-hunt, sahib, which, with so strange a voyage as was theirs, would readily be believed, so that it might come about that the crew and officers would take things into their own hands, and would take the ship to the place Ram Gulab Singh had set down upon the paper, and where Ram Gulab Singh would then work his will upon the sahib's

father and upon them all, sahib, for dead men tell no tales. But it so fell out that the Kanaka had no need for that paper until you, by Allah's will, came also to the ship as I have related. All this, sahib, I have learned to-night while I lay hidden."

"Go on!" urged Wallen tensely. "I begin to see—a little. My father, Gunga—and this Ram Gulab Singh?"

"The young sahib is twenty-four," said Gunga. "It began two years before you were born. The sahib's father was a great merchant here, owning schooners by means of which he traded with the natives; and Ram Gulab Singh was a native of great power in a group of these islands, and his wealth was beyond reckoning. But also, sahib, he was a murderer and a thief, whereby he had his wealth. The sahib's father lost one schooner, and then another, and many goods; and knowing in his heart that it was Ram Gulab Singh, he complained to the government. But because he could prove nothing, nothing was done, sahib; but all this came to the ears of Ram Gulab Singh, and he mocked the sahib's father by messengers in private.

"But the sahib's father was a brave man, and one of great cunning. He loaded a schooner with such richness of goods that all men talked of it; but also, in secret, he placed abundance of arms upon the vessel; and at night, as the schooner sailed, he himself came aboard in the darkness with many men to join the crew, and of these, sahib, I was one.

"It came about as the sahib's father had foreseen. He sailed to the islands where Ram Gulab Singh was; and Ram Gulab Singh, knowing it was the schooner that belonged to the sahib's father, and thinking it a prize of great value, fell into the snare. Sahib, Ram Gulab Singh came upon us with four proas, and our men lay hidden below the decks that they might not be seen until the pirates, led by Ram Gulab Singh himself, boarded us from the proas.

"It was a fight, sahib, that I would to Allah I might see again before I die, for my arm is still strong, and my blood is the blood of youth, and the years count not. No more than half of Ram Gulab Singh's men escaped, and those only by swimming to the proas, which, after all had come on board of us, we had cut away from the schooner's sides. But many times in the mêlée the sahib's father tried to single out Ram Gulab Singh that they might meet face to face, but it was only at the last that the sahib's father came upon the other as Ram Gulab Singh was climbing over the rail to escape; and it was then, when Ram Gulab Singh's hand was yet on the rail that the sahib's father with his cutlass severed three fingers from the hand of Ram Gulab Singh—such, sahib, is the reading of the paper with the one-fingered hand.

"Sahib, this time the government took heed, for the sahib's father had prisoners who confessed; but against these Ram Gulab Singh, who was saved by one of his proas, sent many to take the oath that he had been elsewhere at the time. And so again there was not the full measure of proof; but the sahib's father pressed the matter, and asked that an armed force be sent against Ram Gulab Singh. Sahib, if that had been done, all would have been well; but, instead, the government deemed it wise only to patrol the waters of the islands closely—and this they did for several years."

Gunga paused. The muscles of his face were twitching again—and the hard, flint-like gleam was back once more in the coal-black eyes that always swept the water, that never looked at Wallen. "Sahib, it was because of your mother, before you were born, that the sahib's father left the East. The heart of Ram Gulab Singh was black with hate—and revenge filled his soul. Great wealth was his; and those in his pay were everywhere. Twice he tried to bring worse than death upon the master by attacks upon your mother. And the second time, sahib"—Gunga's hands around the oars tightened until the knuckles were as white knobs protruding from the swarthy skin—"it was only when it was almost too late that she was saved. But, sahib, it killed her, even if it were months afterwards, when your father had hidden her in that gray house of which the sahib knows, for she was with child when she was attacked, and when you were born she died. And then, sahib, the master stayed on there to protect you, as he had promised your mother he would do. But even there it was not further than the arm of Ram Gulab Singh could reach. Does the sahib remember the night when as a child he crawled from bed and came down the stairs, and there was a man dead upon the floor? It was one of the men in Ram Gulab Singh's pay."

"I remember," said Wallen in a voice he did not recognize as his own. "And then, Gunga?"

"And then," said Gunga, "the young sahib went away; and the master had no longer any heart for anything but to stay on in the gray house. And the years passed by, sahib, and all this time Ram Gulab Singh gave no sign. And when next the master heard of you, you had been long at sea and on many ships, and he made effort then to find out where you were, and, out of that effort, he learned that you had just sailed upon the *Upolo*, which was to spend many months trading in the islands, and which would bring you before the end even among the islands of Ram Gulab Singh—and upon the sahib's father fell again the old fear, for he feared that here again might be the hand of Ram Gulab Singh. So I, sahib, he sent here at once to spy upon them, while he made settlement of his affairs and made ready to follow; and this I learned: Drink-House Sam, taking with him the Chinese of whom the

sahib knows, was sent to Shanghai to wait the coming of the *Tokamahu*, the sahib's ship; and there, at the time, the *Upolo* was in port. And Drink-House Sam bribed the man who was mate of the *Upolo* to leave the vessel, and also some of the crew that there might be room for the men he brought; and then, through others of Ram Gulab Singh's agents in higher quarters, the captain, who was an honest man, sahib, came to you to ask you to sail with him in the mate's place. But, sahib, all this I did not learn until the sahib's father had left California on his way to the East; so then, knowing that his ship would stop at Honolulu, I sent word by cable of that which I have related to the sahib. And the sahib's father, finding there was a small ship in Honolulu that he might hire, left the ship that was taking him to Shanghai, and made a bargain with the captain of the *Monleigh*, and went away at once on the *Monleigh* that he might find the *Upolo* in the islands and reach you before the evil work was done. And these things that the sahib's father did are known to me because of the message by cable that he sent before he left Honolulu on the *Monleigh*.

"Sahib, there is but of the murder of Drink-House Sam left to tell. Here in Singapore I have crept into the house of the banker Loo, an old and crafty Chinese fox, who is the chief agent of Ram Gulab Singh. And it was there I learned of Drink-House Sam who, though he was one of them, was hated by them because his demands for money were ever greater and greater, and because, sahib, with the years he knew too much to be refused. And it was there to that house that the Kanaka came to-night; and there, too, to that house there came word that the sahib to-night had made trouble at Drink-House Sam's. And, sahib, as wolves feed upon themselves, and because it would seem that the guilt would fall upon the stranger, upon you, sahib, who had come and fought already with Drink-House Sam to-night, they went to Drink-House Sam and did even as you have seen. Would the sahib, too, have paid with blood for his father's blood? It was in my mind to do that thing myself; but, because I could not escape from where I was hidden in the house until all were gone, I was too late. Sahib, the tale is told."

No word came from Wallen. For a long time he sat immovable—while a cloud obscured the moon, and the riding lights of the vessels gleamed and twinkled brighter in the greater darkness; and until the moonlight struggled forth again in a silver, wavering path—and until there came a little splash in the distance as though a fish had jumped.

Then Wallen raised his head.

At the sound Gunga, too, had stirred, for now he dipped his oars and rowed on toward the *Monleigh*. And then he spoke again.

"Wash your hands, sahib," he said in low tones, "for they are red."

At the gangway Gunga sent the boat adrift with a push toward the *Monleigh's* stern; and Wallen, with the other behind him, mounted to the boatdeck. There was steam up, a full head of it, for it was blowing off from the escape pipe; but there seemed no sign of life about, except that from the open door of the captain's cabin the light streamed out on the deck. There was no one on the bridge—and apparently no watch was being kept by anybody, for the boat had come alongside unnoticed.

Wallen, with Gunga beside him, halted in the doorway of the captain's cabin. There were empty glasses on the locker and an empty bottle. Captain Laynton, fully dressed, lay snoring on his bunk. He sat up with a start at Wallen's second knock.

"Hello!" he blinked. "Oh, it's you, Mr. Wallen! And"—he blinked again at Gunga—"who's this you've got here?"

"My father's servant—Gunga," Wallen answered. "You remember I asked you about him. Gunga, this is Captain Laynton."

The East Indian salaamed gravely and profoundly—and stepped respectfully back out on the deck, away from the cabin.

Captain Laynton stared at Wallen. Then he rubbed his eyes and stared again.

"My word!" he ejaculated. "You look as though you'd been in a bally free-for-all!"

"Do I?" smiled Wallen. "A few wharf-rats, that's all, captain. We'll get under way now, if you're ready."

"Aye, I'm ready," Laynton replied. "I was sitting up for you. I fancy that finding that chap was the business you were after, eh? Well, I— Good Lord, what's that?"

They came suddenly in rapid succession—two revolver shots from without. And then silence.

Wallen whirled and rushed on deck, with Laynton stumbling madly behind him. There was no one in sight save Gunga, who came running to meet them from the rail—though now, from forward, the crew being evidently aroused, there came sounds of commotion.

"What was it?" shouted Laynton excitedly. "Who fired those shots?"

"They seemed to come from there, Captain Sahib," Gunga answered impassively—and pointed forward.

With an oath, Captain Laynton jumped for the ladder and swung himself down to the foredeck.

Wallen's eyes met Gunga's.

“Sahib,” said Gunga softly, “shall a viper sting twice? I was watching in the boat, for I knew we were ahead of him. He swims well, but once he splashed. It was the Kanaka. He will swim no more, sahib.”

CHAPTER VII
THE WIRELESS MESSAGE

WALLEN stretched out his arms in a sort of glad relief as he came on deck next morning. He had breakfasted late and alone, because he had slept late—but he had slept well, once he had got to bed.

The ship was lifting to a moderate sea, as though in a glad-hearted way itself; and a glance around the horizon gave to his sailor's eye the assurance of a perfect day. A day that he could spend without restraint now—with her! Drink-House Sam no longer lived before him day and night, threatening, sinister; the ship itself, with the Kanaka gone, was purged of its menace; and he knew all now—and that knowledge, concrete, definite, tangible, robbed the peril which still existed of the dread, its worst feature, born out of impotence to combat the mysterious and the unknown.

True, there was still this Ram Gulab Singh; but Ram Gulab Singh for the moment was not a factor. Later, somehow, when he had talked more with Gunga, would come Ram Gulab Singh's reckoning; but now it was Helen MacKay and Sumatra, and the days that he promised himself ashore with her there; and he could tell her his story now with the knowledge that nothing threatened any one aboard the *Monleigh*, and tell her of that which had been crushed back so often on his lips—his love for her. How cloudless and blue the sky was! How the fresh, clean breeze filled the lungs as with some magical elixir! Life was good!

He had paused just outside the lounging-room, and now a crackle from the wireless house caught his ear. That accounted for no sight of her upon the deck!

"Good morning, Miss MacKay!" he sang out cheerily as he hurried forward. "Found some one to gossip with this morning? I—"

He was standing in the doorway of the wireless room now, and the words died on his lips. Her eyes, staring out from a very white face, eyes that seemed to hold a shudder of contempt and loathing in their depths, met his for an instant—then she turned away her head.

And then he was conscious that he was looking into the muzzle of Captain Laynton's revolver; and that Mott, too, the second officer, was there.

"We were just going to send for you," observed Laynton in an ominously velvet voice. "Come in!" And then, as Wallen obeyed mechanically: "Well,

my bucko, I guess your game is up! Nice work that private business of yours ashore last night! They want you in Singapore for that murder at the sailors' boarding-house, and I've told Miss MacKay here to tell 'em it'll give us a great deal of pleasure to put right back with you."

For an instant, stunned, taken by surprise, Wallen stared from one to the other—and then, with understanding, came a cold, angry composure. It was as Gunga had said last night—the devils of this Ram Gulab Singh were at work again.

"There is some mistake," he said calmly enough.

"Is there?" sneered Laynton. "What about you being so anxious to go ashore at Singapore alone, and telling me to keep steam up and be ready to get away the minute you came back? What about those wharf-rats of yours? They've got you dead to rights ashore, and you might as well make a clean breast of it. I've just sent a couple of men to draw the fangs of that East Indian snake of yours in the shape of any firearms he may have. I don't know whether you picked up any weapons ashore or not. Mott, have a look—and hand 'em over, if he has."

Mott, with a vicious grin, stepped forward, and, under cover of the captain's levelled revolver, took the automatic from Wallen's pocket.

"You're a rare bird, you are!" grunted Laynton as he pocketed the weapon.

Wallen's eyes went again to Helen MacKay. Her head was still turned away, and she was tapping nervously with a pencil on a sheet of closely written paper—the message, presumably, that she had just received.

"Who is the message from?" Wallen put the question to the girl, but she ignored it.

"The authorities," Laynton answered curtly. "And while you're digging round in your mind for a bluff on the murder count, dig for something else as well, you damned impostor! We know you now! A proper fool you were to try and palm yourself off as Wallen ashore last night. Johnson'll be nearer your name than Wallen, eh?"

"Johnson! What do you mean?" cried Wallen sharply.

"What I say!" Laynton flung back. "What everybody in Singapore knows since the *Upolo* was picked up. It's all there in the message. There were three white men on the *Upolo*, eh?—Captain Mitchell; Wallen, the first mate; and Johnson, the second. The bodies of two white men were found aboard—the third unquestionably left the barque, for one of the boats was missing. That'll be you, right enough! But you forgot the log, my bucko! Wallen evidently kept it, for the captain's death is recorded; and the last

entry was in quite another hand—which could only be Johnson's." Captain Laynton's eyes narrowed. "Do you remember that last entry, Johnson? 'Died to-day. S. Wallen, first mate.'"

"Oh, my God, is that it!" Wallen cried out wildly. It had burst upon him now in a flash. That was what they had meant in Drink-House Sam's last night! That was why they had called him an impostor there, too! He turned to Helen MacKay. There seemed to be no one else in the room but her—and he must make her understand. "You don't believe that, do you?" he pleaded. "You don't believe that? I remember now. I thought I was going to die. I was delirious. I wrote that myself in my delirium. What does the handwriting count for when I could scarcely hold the pen? You must, you will believe me!"

He was reaching out toward her, leaning toward her—and then he drew slowly back. Could a woman's face be so pitilessly hard! She had given him one disdainful glance—and then walked past him out onto the deck.

And Mott laughed jeeringly.

White to the lips, Wallen whirled upon the man—but Laynton was between them in an instant.

"Cut that out!" he snarled. "Mott, you shut that door! And you, Wallen, or whatever you want to call yourself—you sit down!" He resumed his own seat, fingering his revolver with a sort of suggestive carelessness. "I got orders there"—he jerked his hand toward the wireless table—"to stick you in irons and put back to Singapore, and I told 'em I'd do it, but"—he grinned suddenly and slipped his revolver back into his pocket—"I ain't going to!"

Wallen came bolt upright in his seat.

"You mean you believe me, then?" he demanded quickly.

"Now you cut that out, too!" ordered Captain Laynton threateningly, with an abrupt return to his former manner. "If you know what's good for you, you'll drop the bluff. I know blamed well what you're masquerading as Wallen for. As for the killing in Singapore, I'm not worrying about it one way or the other, it's no hunt of mine; but when young Wallen died on the *Upolo* you got a secret out of him, and that's where I come in. You thought you saw your chance to get away from Pobi when Mott here, or the girl—I don't know which—gave you the lead to claim that you were Wallen by saying that they were looking for him; and afterward, seeing it gave you the run of this ship, you stuck to it, and you'd have been a fool if you hadn't. Now then, I put it to you, all we ask is our share. After that, we'll land you anywhere you say."

Wallen looked first at Captain Laynton, then at Mott, who was glowering and sullen-faced, then back at Captain Laynton again.

"Look here!" he burst out violently. "Either you're crazy, or I am!"

"Oh, no!" retorted Captain Laynton easily. "Neither of us is! You ain't willing to give up gracious-like while you think there's a chance you don't have to split the pot, that's all. Maybe you think I'm bluffing? Don't fool yourself! We made up our minds from about the minute this hooker was chartered that there was a lot more behind it all than this search-for-a-son business. And now we're sure of it! I'll take you into my cabin and show you why in a minute. But first, to let you know I mean business, you can take a look at my cards. We wasn't saying anything till old Wallen got killed, for whatever he was after he was bound to lead us to it along with him, eh? Then he shuffled out, and there wasn't anything in his papers that was any good to us—except that money that I turned over to kind of woo your confidence, if you get the idea! But we figured that what he knew the son would know, so maybe you can figure out why we started to follow the *Upolo's* itinerary. Well, we played in luck—we found you. So long as we thought you were the son we let you have your head, just as we'd done with the old man, without trying to force your hand, because"—he grinned wickedly—"we're a patient lot. But now that I find we're birds of a feather, my lad, we ain't playing that game any more. If we wanted any more proof than what we've got that there was something good in the shape of treasure lying around loose and waiting to be picked up, we'd have it fast enough in seeing you thinking it was worth while to try and work the game yourself, and in pretending to be young Wallen. That sounds pretty straight, don't it? Now then, we know you were on the *Upolo* with young Wallen, and what I want to know is what he told you before he died that started you going. You come across with that, and we'll play fair on the divvy; if you don't, you'll wish to whatever saints you swear by that you were in the hands of the authorities answering for that throat-slitting business back in Singapore, instead of in mine! That's a plain statement—eh? Well, what d'ye say?"

"I say that I'm Wallen," said Wallen steadily. "That I committed no murder in Singapore, and that this treasure idea is pure imagination."

Captain Laynton scowled.

"You coax a mule first," he said, significantly; "after that you slam hell out of him. However, I ain't through coaxing yet. Come along to my cabin."

Wallen got up, and, at a sign from Captain Laynton, followed the second officer. His mind was the center of a vortex, as it were, of conflicting emotions that left him dazed and numbed. Fate had played him a grim trick, it seemed, when in his delirium he had signed his own death certificate in

the *Upolo's* log—and had failed to make any note about Johnson! Who would believe him here among strangers where there was no one to vouch for his identity? That look on Helen MacKay's face! Why should she have believed him? Under the circumstances it would have been almost incredible if she had! The murder of Drink-House Sam—how could he disprove that? All, everything, forged links into the chain of evidence to support this treasure-hunt obsession that nothing would shake out of Captain Laynton's mind, thanks evidently to the Kanaka who had done his work only too well in laying the foundation for it.

They entered the captain's cabin; and Captain Laynton, spreading out a chart on the locker, stabbed at it with his forefinger.

"Anything familiar about that?" he grunted.

Wallen leaned forward.

"Certainly," he replied in surprise. "It's the north coast of Arru, where MacKnight's station is—where I was brought ashore after I was picked up."

Captain Laynton snorted savagely, and, picking up a pair of dividers, indicated a position on the chart with exaggerated precision.

"To the nor'ard a bit, among those islands!" he snapped. "You know fast enough what I mean!"

Wallen shook his head.

"Don't you!" rasped Captain Laynton. "Well, how about this?" He pulled a piece of paper from his pocket and flattened it out on the chart. "They correspond, don't they? You dropped this out of your pocket. I had a Kanaka aboard then, who picked it up and gave it to me." He smiled at Wallen unpleasantly. "I haven't got that Kanaka now. He disappeared. There's somethin' blasted queer about that—and about those shots last night, wouldn't you say? D'ye think I'm a fool? D'ye think I wouldn't stake my oath that mealy-mouthed Indian you brought aboard with you fired 'em? But I still thought you were Wallen then, and I was still for giving you all the rope you wanted. The whole thing's open and shut. The real young Wallen got wind of the treasure, and got the chart bearings, and wises up his father—and his father charters me to pick up the *Upolo* and get his son, so's they could start off for the loot. And then young Wallen in turning up his toes passes on the dope to you, which accounts for *you* having this paper and not the old man; and, well, here's the latitude and longitude on the chart, and I guess in a general way we're pretty hot on the scent—it's only the few details that may be lacking when we get there that I'm asking you to supply. What?"

It was a moment before Wallen spoke. The position given on that piece of paper had come, Gunga had said, direct from Ram Gulab Singh. There were many islands around MacKnight's station, and among them, it would seem now, Ram Gulab Singh had his lair. It was strange that during all those weeks he had lain sick almost at that devil's door!

"Do you mean," he asked abruptly, "that you are going there?"

"Do you think there's any doubt about it?" returned Captain Laynton caustically.

"Then," said Wallen earnestly, "I warn you, you're running the head of every one on board this ship into a noose. If you want the truth of the whole business, it's this: Years back my father had trouble with a powerful native named Ram Gulab Singh, who was and is the head of many of the Malay pirates that infest these waters. The man swore revenge. The feud still exists. It was to save me from a plot Ram Gulab Singh had hatched to murder me on the *Upolo* that my father chartered you, for the *Upolo* was on a long trading cruise amongst the islands and out of touch with everything, and there was no other chance of reaching me. Furthermore, there was no accident aboard here when my father died—it was this Kanaka, that you say has disappeared, who murdered him. And it was this same Kanaka who started this cock-and-bull story about treasure because he is in Ram Gulab Singh's pay; and that paper he gave you was to lure the ship with my father on it into his master's claws if he was unsuccessful in doing away with my father himself. He did do away with my father, but he still gave you the paper for the same purpose, except, of course, that I was then substituted in my father's place."

There was an incredulous sneer on the faces of the two men.

"Sounds almost as fishy as you writing yourself down dead in the log!" commented Captain Laynton with an ugly laugh. "Of course, you don't want us to go there, eh? Well, that's all right, and thanks for the warning; but don't worry about us coming to any harm, though it does credit to your heart. We don't scare aboard this ship. Maybe if there was the prospect of a bit of a scrap it wouldn't stand in our way none, either! Have you by any chance taken note of the crew?"

A sort of savage anger came upon Wallen.

"I grant you they look like cutthroats," he said evenly.

"You're wrong!" rejoined Captain Laynton with evil smoothness. "You ain't half looked at 'em, and you don't do 'em credit. Fallen angels are saints alongside of 'em; and there ain't one of 'em but has been aboard here with me for the matter of a good few years—which proves that your yarn about

the Kanaka and this 'ere friend of yours, Ram What-d'ye-call-him, is another lie. 'Tain't likely you've ever heard of the *Monleigh* before, because we've got a superstition aboard here that keeping the same name too long is bad luck. When we carry cargo it's because times are infernally poor and the picking thin—the crew has got a preference for private pearl beds, or maybe the opium trade, or I've even known 'em to horn in on a bit of blackbirding by way of variety. We've been living under a kind of righteous restraint, Mr. Man, out of deference to who we thought you were, and I could see the crew was sort of chafing under it; but I guess you'll get a better idea of things from now on, and by the time we get down off Arru again you won't need to be told what to expect if you don't come around to our way of thinking." He turned suddenly and flipped the little slip of paper to the second officer. "Mott, get away with you, and work up that course—we've had enough pleasure cruising to last us for a while!"

And then for the first time the full significance of the situation dawned upon Wallen.

"Wait!" he cried hoarsely. "What I've told you is the truth. But if you're bent on your own destruction, then get Miss MacKay off the ship first—land her somewhere, anywhere."

It was Mott who answered.

"Oh, I guess not!" he said with a leer. "*I'll* take care of the girl."

There was something in the man's eyes as well as in his voice that brought the blood surging to Wallen's temples—and receding left his face deadly white.

"Mott," he whispered queerly, "as God lives, I'll—"

"You stow your jaw, Mott," Captain Laynton interjected with a flippant laugh, "or you'll be giving this wharf-rat champion an unfavorable idea of the discipline aboard here." He swung on Wallen. "The girl can take her chances," he declared brutally. "We ain't landing 'somewhere, anywhere,' much as *you'd* like it—we're too fond of your company to take the chance of you giving us the slip. Get away with you, Mott, and shape up that course—and tell the chief to crowd her a bit."

Mott helped himself without leave to the bottle on the locker, narrowed his eyes at Wallen over the rim of his glass, and, with a taunting laugh, left the cabin.

For a moment Wallen stared at Captain Laynton without speaking—then the words came with a passionate rush.

"You're mad!" he cried. "You're going to your own death—you're taking every one aboard this ship to theirs. This Ram Gulab Singh will have

means of communication with Singapore—by wireless, or cable, or some way, if even by ship, for you can't make more than ten or eleven knots and you could be out-sailed almost two to one by anything that had any speed at all. I tell you, you are running into a trap that you'll never get out of alive. And there's no treasure, and never has been except in your imagination."

"Ain't there?" breathed Captain Laynton softly. "We'll see about that!"

Wallen stood motionless for an instant. There was something stupendously ironical in the complacence with which the other was inviting his own death.

"What are you going to do with me?" he demanded abruptly.

"Nothing!" said Captain Laynton airily. "Nothing—until we get there, except to give you a chance to see the real life aboard the ship, and let you form your own conclusions as to whether you'd better open up or not?"

"And then?" asked Wallen quietly.

"And then," said Captain Laynton musingly, "if you haven't pried your jaws open by that time, I'll take that fifty-one hundred dollars back, and trice you up for a taste of the cat; and if that don't work I'll turn you over to the crew, you and that Indian pal of yours, and let them settle with you for the Kanaka's murder."

"You're mad!" said Wallen again.

"And, of course," added Captain Laynton, pouring rum for himself deliberately, "if you make any trouble meanwhile, I ain't saying what will happen."

Wallen, his face set, turned slowly toward the door.

Captain Laynton raised his glass.

"Here's a pleasant voyage to Arru—Mr. *Wallen*!" he said—and laughed as the liquor gurgled down his throat.

CHAPTER VIII
BACKS TO THE WALL

"ONE—TWO—THREE—FOUR"—WALLEN counted the strokes.

Four bells! Six o'clock. Astern, in a wonderful glow of rose and pink-tinged clouds the sun was sinking; ahead, low on the horizon, but opening rapidly, like a pencilled line on the smooth plane of sea showed the land—the coastline of Arru! And away off to port, like tiny dots, he could make out a group of islands.

Four bells! Wallen, tight-lipped, leaned against the port rail on the boatdeck a little forward of the lounging-room doorway. Four bells!

All the night before, all that day, figuring as accurately as he could by dead reckoning and the help Captain Laynton had unwittingly given him, he had calculated they could not do any more than just about sight Arru by four bells. He had staked everything on—four bells. So far, he had been right. Was it a good augury—for what was to come?

His eyes, searching, caught the flutter of Gunga's loose white garments, as the East Indian slipped past the corner of the wireless house on the opposite side of the deck—and then he turned and looked aft. Always careful to avoid his proximity, Helen MacKay was pacing up and down the deck.

Would she never go below! He had waited until the last minute, risked more than he cared to contemplate that it might be just within a moment or two of supper time before he put this plan of his, a desperate one at best, into execution. Ordinarily she went below ten or fifteen minutes before meals, but now, through some ironical perversity, she appeared to be waiting for the supper gong to sound!

A jangled, drunken chorus of song rose from the forecastle; the discord disgustingly assertive as a voice, a little more inebriated than the rest, attempted a maudlin tenor part.

Wallen glanced quickly at the girl. There was a look in her face that he had detected once or twice before in the last three days when she had thought she was unobserved—a gray look, that brought a pitiful weariness to the eyes. Wallen's lips moved silently, grimly.

On the bridge, Captain Laynton, Mott and Larsen were hanging over the weathercloth, busy with their glasses, their backs turned to him. Should he speak to her, ask her to go below? He smiled bitterly. No word had passed between them since that morning in the wireless house, when, after leaving the captain's cabin, he had gone to her—and she had turned her back upon him. Perhaps of her own accord, in another minute now, the next time she reached the lounging-room entrance, she would go below—if he asked her to do so, she would probably only remain where she was!

Where was Gunga now?

Thank God that group on the bridge was fully occupied!—another detail he had counted upon when Arru and the islands should be sighted.

Wallen shifted his position to bring himself a little more nearly opposite the lounging-room entrance. Tense with anxiety, he could feel the moisture oozing under the sweat-band of his pith helmet. Laynton's cunning had been Machiavellian in allowing Gunga and himself a pseudo freedom after disarming them! They had had an opportunity to observe for themselves—and there was no doubt about the moral status of the crew. The *Monleigh* was a floating hell! The days and nights had been periods of blasphemy, rioting and drunkenness, until the soul was sick with it, until he knew that, failing to lead them to what did not exist, he would pay for it with his life—until it must have rung terror to *her*, the woman whose love he thought he had awakened in response to his own, only to stand in her eyes as a murderer and a scheming impostor, only to be held as a fouler thing than the brutes around her!

But some things he could not understand. She, too, knew, she must know, the peril in which she stood. No human being could be oblivious to that. And yet, for the first day at least following that scene in the wireless room, she had cultivated Mott more than ever. There seemed to be only one explanation—a desperate hope that she might, in her extremity, have some one to depend upon, and was blind to the fact that the man she chose was the one she had most need to fear. But that explanation did not satisfy him, and he could not understand. Her woman's intuition must have enabled her to read the man; and, besides, to guide that intuition, she knew both everything that had transpired and was projected. She knew that they were no longer bound for Sumatra. She knew that Captain Laynton had lied when he had told her to answer that message and state that he was returning at once to Singapore. She knew what Captain Laynton was after, for, on discovering a few hours after that message was sent that there was no Singapore in sight, as there should have been if the *Monleigh* had put about, she had listened, if without comment, to Gunga's story.

Wallen flirted the sweat beads from his forehead with a sweep of his hand. For the rest, the days since leaving Singapore had been each one like some grim specter hovering over him, gibbering at him—pointing at *her*. A sort of sinister and facetious pleasantry had reigned in the cabin. On his plate at each meal he had found the ship's position marked down on a little card. There was nothing else on the card. Nothing else was needed. It spoke for itself. Captain Laynton was still 'coaxing.' They were just so many degrees, so many minutes nearer that moment when Captain Laynton would cease to coax, and the hellhounds around him would be turned loose. He labored under no false illusions as to what that meant. The days, as Captain Laynton had intended they should, had done away with all supposition or doubt on that score. And now they were off Arru and that "moment" was upon him, and—*would she never go below?*

He could see Gunga now peering cautiously out from behind the bridge ladder—only to draw back as Helen MacKay turned in her restricted walk to face in that direction; and then—he was keeping his eyes fixed on the bridge ladder now—as she wheeled again facing toward the stern, he saw Gunga dart across the few intervening yards to the door of the captain's cabin and disappear inside.

Wallen's hand upon the rail gripped tightly. What would the next few minutes bring for them all—for her? She had been unmolested so far, even treated with a certain decency; and, paradoxically enough, it was he, though virtually a prisoner himself, who until now had in a sense protected her. There was no other construction that could be put upon Captain Laynton's words which had been addressed to Mott, and which he had overheard the night before. "You keep your paws off the girl until we've got what we want out of that masquerading swine or I'll bash your face into a jelly," Captain Laynton had snarled. "He's sweet on her, and he's the kind of fool along those lines it ain't wise to stir up until you have to. You mind what I say, Mott! Afterwards—" He hadn't heard any more; but it was almost "afterwards" now unless— His eyes were straining forward, and suddenly it seemed as though his heart-beat stopped.

Captain Laynton, starting abruptly to leave the bridge, stepped onto the ladder—and halted near the top like a man stunned, as Gunga at the same instant emerged from the cabin. Then, with a bellow of rage and the agility of a cat, Captain Laynton swung himself under the hand-rail, leaping for the deck.

And Gunga's shout rang out:

"Quick, sahib! I have got them! Run, sahib—run!"

A second sometimes spans an eternity; and it seemed to Wallen that he lived it then as he sprang across the deck. Mott, from the bridge, was hurling himself down the ladder. Gunga was racing aft like a deer, with Captain Laynton, screaming blasphemy, in pursuit. And Helen MacKay was standing as if turned to stone by the lounging-room entrance as Wallen reached her.

"Run below!" he gasped out. "Quick! Into the saloon!"

She did not move. There was no time to speak again, to argue, to ask, to plead. He snatched her up in his arms, and plunged through the doorway. The sharp, vicious bark of a revolver shot echoed behind him; and Gunga called again:

"Go on, sahib! Go on!"

She was struggling in his arms, fighting with all the strength of her lithe, young body to free herself as he reeled and staggered down the companionway. Shouts and the pound of racing feet along the decks came from everywhere now, fore and aft. A face loomed up before him as he reached the bottom, and a form blocked his way. It was the French steward from Port Said. Wallen crashed into the man. The steward went back against the bulkhead—and was hurled from there to the floor, as Gunga, from behind, with the spring of a wildcat, leaped from the top to the bottom of the companionway and struck the man in turn.

The next moment they were in the saloon, the three of them, and, setting Helen MacKay upon her feet, Wallen slammed the door shut and placed his bulk against it. Still another moment, and Gunga came running back across the saloon carrying the door of Wallen's cabin that they had loosened from its hinges the night before. It fitted, as their measurements had promised them it would fit, at a rigid angle, making a solid, substantial brace between the saloon door and the iron base of the swivel chair at the end of the dining-table.

And now there was a rush along the alleyways and down the companionways, and a crash upon the door, a chorus of yells and oaths—another rush against the door.

Gunga was holding out two automatic pistols in his hands.

"They do not know yet that we are armed, sahib," he said softly. "Shall we fire through the door—to kill?"

Wallen stared at the two weapons for an instant—they were both of the same caliber. And then Wallen laughed as though at some grim jest, as he took one of the pistols from Gunga's hand. This was what Gunga had gone to the captain's cabin for. They had hoped to get one—and Gunga had got two. And this one was his own, and he had ammunition in plenty in his

cabin that he had bought in Singapore that they did not know he had; and the other one, since it was an automatic, was probably his father's—the one Captain Laynton had never returned. And he laughed again—and fired. And though he fired only at the floor, there was an abrupt cessation of attack upon the door, a sudden scurrying of feet to right and left along the alleyways outside, and a surprised chorus of shouts and oaths.

He turned to Helen MacKay, who, white-faced, had scarcely moved from the spot where he had set her on her feet, but who was holding her little silver-chased automatic in her hand now.

"Miss MacKay"—his laugh was gone, and his voice was sharp, almost curt now with anxiety—"please move over to one side of the saloon. They are likely to start firing through the door panels from the top of the companionway; you are in the line of fire, and—"

"He's hiding behind the woman's skirts—the yellow cur! Go on there—rush the door again!" It was Mott's voice, raised in an infuriated yell.

But there was no immediate rush.

Helen MacKay spoke.

"Behind the woman's skirts!" Her lips were curling, her voice low, the words a whiplash that cut to the raw. "So! Is that the reason for this?"

He stepped quickly toward her.

"Miss MacKay," he cried, his voice hoarse with sudden passion and bitter hurt, "whatever I may be in your eyes, you shall not talk to me like that! And you will listen now—you will never have to listen again—but you will listen now. I love you! That is why I have done this. I love you!" His lips were white, and the great form of the man seemed to quiver as with a sob. "Once"—his voice was quieter—"I had hoped to tell you that in a different way, and I had hoped—but it doesn't matter what I hoped. Even if you loved me there could be no hope now. Do you think that scum out there will let me out of this alive? Do you think that hiding behind your skirts will save me? There is food here—see, the table is set—that is one reason why I chose the moment that I did. They cannot starve us out. We are armed now, Gunga and I, and we can hold the door for longer than they will care to wait, and for a heavier price than they will care to pay. They are not fools. They know that. And that is the one chance for you—that they will accept the terms I have to offer."

"And am I safer here with a murderer, with an impostor who steals a dead man's name?" she asked evenly.

The red surged into Wallen's face and died away again, leaving it pale and haggard. His eyes met hers and held in a long gaze. They were hard,

those fearless eyes of hers, cruelly hard; but, too, they seemed to hold a strange challenge to him to refute what she had said.

"Shall I answer you? Do you expect an answer?" he said steadily. "Then the answer is that you are safer here only for a little while—only for the moment."

She started back with a little cry, retreating to her cabin door.

"I did not mean to frighten you," said Wallen quickly. "I mean that there is another danger quite apart from any on board. You know what Captain Laynton and the others are after, and you have been told by Gunga here that, though you may not choose to believe it, they are inviting their own destruction, and unless—"

A terrific smash upon the door cut short his words, and, whirling around, he jumped to Gunga's side. The shock of some heavy object, used obviously as a battering-ram, had loosened their makeshift prop, the door had yielded by perhaps an inch, and Gunga now was straining with might and main to force it back into place.

Wallen flung his weight against the door—not an instant too soon. It came again, the smash upon the door, and with it a scream of pain above the shouts and cries. Came then another scream—then again the scurrying of feet in retreat—then silence. Gunga had fired this time—but not at the floor.

"Sahib," said Gunga calmly, "we were in too great haste. See"—he jammed the dismantled cabin door more securely into position, wedging it against the iron base of the chair with a piece of wood that he wrenched from the chair's back—"it will not slip again."

Wallen nodded, testing the barricade. It was firm now, and would hold as long as anything of the saloon door itself remained.

He looked around. Helen MacKay had gone into her cabin—and the door was shut.

The time dragged by after that. There was no further attempt to force the door. It grew dusk; then dark. Wallen switched on a single light in the saloon.

And then abruptly, in a shout, came Captain Laynton's voice, apparently from the top of the companionway:

"You, below there!"

Wallen smiled grimly. He had been waiting a long while for that.

"Well?" he replied indifferently.

"Look here now!" Captain Laynton's voice became modulated and unctuously smooth. "You ain't doing yourself any good by playing the fool

this way. You come out of there, give us the information we want, and we'll forget about this—for all that two of my chaps have got bullets through their shoulders."

"What's the ship's position?" inquired Wallen coolly.

There was a quick oath from Captain Laynton.

"I guess you know blamed well!" he growled.

"We've Arru abeam, haven't we?" persisted Wallen quietly.

"Yes."

"Well," said Wallen slowly, "I'll tell you what you want to know—on one condition."

"A-ha! So you do know, eh?" snapped Captain Laynton. "I thought we'd get it out of you before we were through. You're beginning to show some signs of sense, my lad. What's the condition?"

"It's simple enough," Wallen answered shortly. "You'll stand in close to Arru opposite MacKnight's station—and let Miss MacKay and Gunga here go ashore."

"I, sahib—*no!*" Gunga had slipped quickly to Wallen's side, and was clutching at Wallen's sleeve. "I will not go, sahib. If the sahib gives his life for the Miss Sahib, shall the shame come upon me that I let the sahib die alone?"

"Quiet, Gunga!" Wallen commanded softly. "I cannot hear what the captain says." Then raising his voice: "What did you say, captain?"

"I said what you mean is that you'd kind of count on going along with them after loading us up to the eyes with some fake dope," Captain Laynton flung back sarcastically. "Well, you can forget it! You'll never get away from this ship like that."

"I don't expect to get away," said Wallen simply. "They are to go. When they are safe, I'll tell you everything you want to know. If what I tell you proves to be a lie—I am still aboard."

"Well, that's fair," admitted Captain Laynton. "I'll take you up on that, and—"

His words were lost in a sudden furious altercation in which Wallen could distinguish Mott's voice. Then came a bellow from the captain:

"You close your face! What's the girl compared to the other?"

Almost a smile was on Wallen's lips—a smile that was curiously like a prayer. It was his last card, and he had played it; and it was the master trump. Gunga in low, passionate words was still pleading with him.

Captain Laynton shouted down the companionway again:

"I'll take you up on that. We'll stand in now, and I'll send them ashore in a boat."

"No," amended Wallen coldly; "you'll send a boat ashore and ask MacKnight to come out here in a proa. There's a slight difference. I said I wanted to see them safe, not rowed around the ship and put aboard again on the other side."

"Well, have it your own way," laughed Captain Laynton unpleasantly. "I'm agreeable, and that goes. We'll—"

It seemed to come from the port quarter—a muffled boom that rolled and reverberated over the water. And then another, and still another—and then a wild shout from the deck.

Gunga rushed across the saloon and into one of the staterooms; and Wallen, glancing quickly about him, noticed that Helen MacKay's door now stood ajar. How long had it been like that, he wondered? Had she been listening? Had she overheard what—

Came the dull, distant boom again; then a crash, a ripping, tearing, rending of wood and steel, and the *Monleigh* heeled to the shock.

Then Gunga called:

"Sahib, it is too late! From the porthole I see the flash of the guns. He will have come from behind one of the islands. It is Ram Gulab Singh!"

CHAPTER IX
THE MAN WITH ONE FINGER

WALLEN walked quietly across the saloon and entered his own cabin. A strange, unnatural calm seemed to have fallen upon him with Gunga's words. *Too late!* Had he waited too long before attempting to get her away from the *Monleigh*? Was her life, for which he would gladly have given his own, to go out because he had failed? He shook his head. He could not in justice reproach himself. There had been only one chance, and he had taken it—MacKnight's. Even if he had defied Captain Laynton and his sordid crew hours earlier, the result would have been the same—it would have brought neither the land nor MacKnight's the sooner. It was only that Ram Gulab Singh had come first.

He took his reserve supply of ammunition from its hiding-place and stowed half of it away in his pocket; and then, returning to the saloon, he gave the rest of the cartridges to Gunga, and motioned the other to remove the barricade.

Helen MacKay came suddenly out from her stateroom.

"What are you going to do?" she asked quickly.

Wallen turned around. She was standing before him, a straight and resolute little figure—but her eyes were on the floor, and there was a tinge of color in her face where, when last he had seen it, it had been cold and white.

The electric bulb in the saloon dimmed down and went out. The boom of a heavy gun came across the water again, and for a tense instant, before answering her question, Wallen waited, expectant of the shock if the shell should find its mark. It missed. Above there was silence from the deck; but from forward sounded excited shouts and cries. There was a quiver through the ship, an increased vibration from the engines as they speeded up.

"I'm going up on deck," he told her quietly. "They'll be too busy to notice me, and, besides, it's dark. Gunga will stay here and replace the barricade after I go out. We've got to know what's going on, Miss MacKay. The ship has been struck once, though not vitally, I think; but down here is no place in which to be caught if we are badly hit. I will be back presently."

Without giving her a chance to reply he stepped out into the alleyway as Gunga opened the door. It was black, empty, deserted here, as he had expected. He made his way up the companionway to the little lounging-

room, and through the port doorway to the deck. He could see nothing at first. It was very dark—not a light showed on the *Monleigh*. In that respect Captain Laynton, profiting no doubt by his experiences in the discreditable and varied trades he had boasted was the *Monleigh's* business, had been prompt to meet emergencies.

And then gradually, discernible only to a sailor's eye, like a dark blotch on the water, Wallen made out another steamer almost abeam. An instant later, as though in grim endorsement of his vision, from the blotch there leaped a great, red flame; came then the heavy, resonant roar of the gun's report, and overhead a shell whistled ominously by. And, aided by the flash now, Wallen placed the distance between the two vessels at less than a mile—though as to the size of the other he could form no estimate. But did that matter? She was well armed at all events; and it was Ram Gulab Singh—the man who had brought his mother to her death, his father to his death, and now in all probability it would be his turn!

He found himself still with that strange, unnatural calm upon him. It was not that he minimized the danger—he and every one on board were facing practically certain death. He was thoroughly alive to that fact; it was only a matter of so many minutes, few or many. He shook his head a little. Helen MacKay, of course, should never fall into Ram Gulab Singh's hands—alive.

He stared forward—listening. He could hear Captain Laynton on the bridge calling down the engine-room tube, frantically imploring the engineer for more speed—and then Captain Laynton's voice was drowned out by other voices on the bridge, Larsen's and Mott's, as the two officers bawled orders to the crew over the weathercloth. They were all up there, then—the three of them—Captain Laynton, and Larsen, and Mott.

Wallen, hugging the shadows of the deck-houses, moved forward to a position under the bridge. Larsen was now talking excitedly overhead:

"She's coming up hand over hand! If Wallen's story is straight, after all, and I guess there ain't much doubt of it now, we haven't a hope if that blighter out there gets aboard us, providing he don't sink us first!"

"Light that Morse lamp!" ordered Captain Laynton abruptly.

"Yes, and give him our position!" It was Mott's voice in a sneer.

"He's got it fast enough now," growled Captain Laynton. "But we'll give him something else. You there, Larsen, light it, d'ye hear? And Morse him that if it's that swine that's masquerading as Wallen he wants, we'll turn him over, and—" His voice was lost in a deafening crash, as a shot, hurling two boats in ruin from its path, tore the wireless house to match-wood. Then

Captain Laynton's voice again—in a mad yell: "Quick! Tell him! Tell him! D'ye hear—tell him! He'll have us at the bottom in another five minutes!"

And now in the comparative silence Wallen could distinctly hear the clicking of the Morse-set somewhere above his head. He strained his eyes seaward, watching for an answering signal; and after a moment it came—but not in Morse. It was the belching fire of the gun again; and again the rend and crash of the projectile as it tore this time into the *Monleigh's* hull. There was no doubt about the range now, nor the tenor of Ram Gulab Singh's answer. It was based, as Gunga had said, on the principle that dead men tell no tales. Ram Gulab Singh's tactics, from Ram Gulab Singh's standpoint, were faultless—that a ship might disappear from the face of the earth and be never heard of again was one thing; but that any one aboard her should return to report that she had been attacked in these waters, suspiciously those of Ram Gulab Singh's, was quite another!

The gun-fire grew hotter—more remorseless. Wallen moved farther back beneath the bridge for what shelter he could find. Each moment now was recording some wild, unreal, bewildering kaleidoscopic change in the scene around him. Two more shells had played havoc on the boatdeck, strewing it from port to starboard with débris. He heard a voice on the bridge say something about taking to the boats, and another voice say that all of them had been blown to splinters.

He caught suddenly at a stanchion for support. A shell had exploded deep down in the very bowels of the ship this time, literally lifting the vessel from the water, it seemed. He heard the groaning and screeching of mangled machinery. He saw a cloud of steam volleying skyward from the engine-room hatch. Then he was conscious that there was no longer any vibration in the ship, and he knew that the *Monleigh* lay a helpless thing, without power of movement, her engines wrecked.

It was all chaos now. He saw Mott and Larsen appear suddenly on the boatdeck—then hurl themselves down the forward ladders to the foredeck below. He heard them shouting orders to the crew. He heard Captain Laynton, still on the bridge, alternately screaming into the engine-room tube and jerking the engine telegraph hysterically backward and forward. And he heard a weird, uncanny chorus of exultant shrieks coming now from across the water—and the sound was close.

Wallen swept his hands across his eyes. He could make out the other vessel now, gliding nearer—like a shadow save when the gun's flame burst through the blackness, angry red. And now aft behind him showed another flame. An ugly sight! The steam pouring in immense volumes from the engine-room hatch was streaked as it swirled upward with darts of yellow

and bright red. There was fire below. A Chinaman, one of the coal-passers, naked to the waist, blackened, burned, yelling in torment, demented, appeared suddenly upon the deck, and flung himself headlong overboard from the rail. And the bridge, useless now for navigation, was being wholly deserted—both Captain Laynton and another man, presumably the quartermaster who had been at the wheel, came rushing down; Captain Laynton dashing into his cabin, and the quartermaster making for the lower deck.

The *Monleigh* rolled with a sudden heavy lurch—and Wallen started on the run back along the deck. Was she sinking? He halted at the lounging-room door for a final glance. The steam, roaring from the engine-room hatch, was streaked now with deeper yellow, deeper red. And now there came the crackle of small-arms from the crew forward—the answer a demoniacal mob-scream from close aboard, and, it seemed, a thousand tiny flashes as the fire was returned. They were almost alongside now. They were preparing to board!

Laughter came to him uncontrollably. What was it Gunga had said? "A fight, sahib, that I would to Allah I might see again before I die!" Well, Gunga had not prayed to Allah in vain! Gunga would have his fight. They were going to board. It was light now, like the play of lightning with the volleying of the small-arms. How they lined the decks and rails out there—they were in their hundreds! Aye, Gunga would have his fight! He laughed again wildly—and then fear came! *What of her?*

Wallen's lips drew into set, rigid lines—and the next instant he was down the companionway and pounding at the saloon door.

"Open, Gunga, quick!" he shouted; and, as the door swung back: "Miss MacKay—both of you—this way!"

As they ran out to meet him, there came a violent shock—and with the shock a still louder outburst of yells. He caught quickly at Helen MacKay's arm to steady her. He did not need to see; he knew what it meant—Ram Gulab Singh was alongside!

Half carrying her, half guiding her, Wallen, with Gunga behind him, gained the deck and rushed forward to the bridge. It was a last stand; that was all—ultimately the same as though they had remained below, except that here they could die fighting and not as rats in a trap. He and Gunga could hold the bridge ladders until the *Monleigh* went down, or until at least every other part of the ship was in the hands of Ram Gulab Singh; and the chart-room would serve as a protection for her until . . . until . . . His brain went sick again with fear at thought of her—and it did not seem to be his voice that was shouting so reassuringly over the horrible babel around him:

"Up you go, Miss MacKay! That's it! Splendid! Now into the chart-room!" He swung her almost forcibly inside—and whirled around to Gunga. "Gunga, take the starboard ladder—I'll take the port."

Around him was an inferno. Screams, shrieks, yells and cries, the shrill hiss of escaping steam, the sharp crackle of a flame leaping upward through the engine-room hatch, and the crash and rattle of small-arm fire filled the air. And watching from his vantage point on the bridge, he could see the great looming shape of a vessel that lay against the *Monleigh's* bow now, and from which, to join the scores already there, white-clothed figures, like a horde of ghouls, kept pouring onto the *Monleigh's* flush foredeck; and, as a fire-flame shot heavenward, illuminating the scene to daylight brightness, the naked steel of the kris flickered in its downward sweep, and dark grimacing features showed, and out of the features in a horribly incredible way the eyes glittered. And here and there upon the deck sprawled forms lay motionless where they had fallen.

Peering over the weathercloth, Wallen could see that those who were left of the *Monleigh's* crew had already been driven back on the ladders leading to the boatdeck. Ram Gulab Singh was making short work of it—as he must. For, with the *Monleigh* afire, even if the fire were still amidships, it was a precarious thing for that other vessel to lay there alongside.

Wallen's hand clenched on the stock of his automatic. That was Laynton and two of the crew fighting like demons there on the starboard ladder; and there, on the lower port ladder were Mott and Larsen and two others—no, there were only Larsen and two of the crew—Mott had pitched downward into the sweep of a kris, seeming most curiously to meet the glint of it in mid-air.

Six left!

What was the matter below there now? What did it mean, that infuriated, triumphant yell of the Malays, louder than any that had gone before? They were swarming up both the lower ladders now! Yes, he understood—too well! Captain Laynton was down, and Larsen on the other ladder had suddenly given way—Larsen was hidden under the bridge now, and—

Gunga's voice rang out:

"Sahib, they come!"

In a flash Wallen swung about and dropped down full length on the bridge at the head of the port ladder, shouting to Gunga to do the same. He could understand now the sudden retreat from the lower ladders. The Malays had got aft somehow, and were now sweeping along the boatdeck, screaming as they came, to take the *Monleigh's* men in the rear.

And now the fight raged at the foot of his own ladder. Larsen and one man gained it—and Larsen toppled in a heap. The seaman, battling like a madman, gained the first step of the ladder, the second, another—and then a form, leaping from the ruck below, pulled the man backward—and crashed upon his face beside his victim as Wallen's automatic streamed fire down the ladderway. The last of the *Monleigh's* men was gone!

And then they came against him, howling, screaming, mad with the bloodlust that was upon them, sweeping upward one after another—and one after another they went down before his fire. The ladder steps grew cluttered. He could hear Gunga singing in a strange, croonlike way as he fought. A queer way to fight! Another rush! He fired, fired once more—and then the hammer clicked as he pulled the trigger. The magazine was empty!

He snatched at his pocket for cartridges as a tall, muscular figure, with distorted face, swept through the mass below and sprang up the ladder. There was no time to load—the man was almost at the top with his followers swarming up behind him. And then suddenly, as Wallen leaped to his feet and with clubbed pistol lunged forward, the white beam of a searchlight from seaward played over the bridge—but he had no amazement and no thought to give to this strange happening, for in the white light Wallen looked into the eyes of Ram Gulab Singh—and it was Ram Gulab Singh because the hand that clutched at the ladder's hand-rail was fingerless save for the forefinger.

"Ram Gulab Singh!" he cried, and struck with all his might—and missed—and the whir of the other's kris sang in his ear as he flung himself sideways to avoid the blow.

"You have your father's face, you rat!" the man shrieked, and swung the blade to strike again.

And for the second time Wallen leaped sideways, but this time he did not wholly avoid the blow. He felt something wet and hot stream down his cheek, he felt his head swim dizzily—and as he staggered backward and felt himself falling, he heard Ram Gulab Singh's scream of triumph, and caught the flash of the other's whirling kris descending once more upon him. And then, in the fraction of a second that followed, even as he fell, the brain, stimulated a thousandfold, absorbing details, registered them upon his consciousness. The blade, within an inch of his head, seemed to fly off into the air as though torn from the other's grasp; a revolver roared behind him, and Ram Gulab Singh flung up his hands; and *her* voice was calling his name again and again—and then he knew no more.

When he opened his eyes, he was in Gunga's arms, and Helen MacKay was binding something about his head; and there was a strange silence about

him—strange because the roar of the flames was silence where it seemed there should be shouts and cries and demoniacal screams and the clash of arms and the shrieks of dying men.

He looked dazedly around him.

Sailors in naval uniform were running about the decks, and a young officer now was peering into his face. Wallen tried to place the other, and failed at first, because his head was reeling and giddy; and then he remembered that it was Lieutenant Damon, of the gunboat *York*, who had crossed with him once in the *Tokamahu*.

"A narrow squeak, old top; but that Indian chap of yours tells me it's no more serious than a rather nasty scalp wound," Damon was saying, with a grip on Wallen's hand. "Great boy, that Gunga of yours! He ran over from his end of the bridge, and shot down Ram Gulab Singh just in the nick of time. Ram Gulab Singh's dead, of course; and the old *York's* chasing what's left of those devils out there now—hear the guns? We got the whole story from Miss MacKay two days ago. The commander sent me off with a couple of boat crews in the hope that we'd find some of you alive; and he sent me because I'd know you, Wallen, my boy—if you were really Wallen."

"I—I don't understand," said Wallen weakly.

"No—I dare say not!" Damon laughed cheerily. "And there isn't much time now to explain; we've got to take to the boats. But, in a word, Miss MacKay here wirelessed your servant's story to Singapore and asked for help for herself, giving a nautical position that she said she had succeeded in getting from the second officer. You had a day's start of us, but you must have been averaging over eleven knots or we'd have come up sooner. They didn't know what to make of that story of Drink-House Sam's murder as your servant told it; but they rounded up the Chinese and Malays that he accused, and two of them confessed, implicating the others. That clears you, old man. Here—steady! Don't you try to get up! I'll get a couple of my men to carry you to the boat." He turned away, hurrying along the deck.

Wallen's hand, raised to sweep across his eyes, touched the hand that, not so deftly now because it trembled a little, was still adjusting his bandages.

"You—you sent the story—my story," he said eagerly. "Then—you believed me all the time!"

She shook her head.

"I—I wanted to believe—oh, I *wanted* to," she said wistfully. "Only—I —"

And then her head bent lower, very close to his; and her cheek brushed his—and it was wet with tears.

"Helen!" he whispered.

"Come on!" called Damon, returning. "We'll have to tumble into the boat. The commander said I was to take you ashore and wait for the *York* to get back; but there's a fellow out there—a Scotchman—who's come out from shore in a big proa that I passed as we came aboard, and that'll be better than a three-mile pull. He can't come alongside, of course—too risky a maneuver with the headway the fire's made aft—but he's waiting for us. In the word I had with him when I told him to stand by, he seemed to know you, Wallen."

And then, as though to corroborate Damon's words, across the water came a hail in a strong, big voice:

"Aboard there! Wallen! 'Tis MacKnight o' Arru, Wallen! Mon, is it well wi' ye?"

And Wallen lifted his head at the cry. He was faint and dizzy, and very weak; but the flames were lighting up those tear-dimmed eyes of hers—and the eyes were smiling into his.

"Yes," he cried, and his voice rang glad and buoyant out into the darkness, out to MacKnight of Arru. "All's well, MacKnight! All's well!"

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *Shanghai Jim*, by Frank L. Packard.]