

Son of a Hero

James Oliver Curwood

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EDITOR'S PREFACE

Here are the best of many thrilling stories written by the late James Oliver Curwood concerning the ships that once plied America's fresh-water oceans—and the dauntless men who sailed them. These tales of the Inland Seas are reliable word-pictures of vessels and sailors now remembered only by the survivors of a generation that will soon have passed entirely away. Mr. Curwood, though better known as a writer of Canadian wilderness novels, was once regarded as an authority in such matters. Early in the present century he contributed to "American Waterways" from the Knickerbocker Press, its volume on The Great Lakes.

These narratives are substantially as the great story-teller related them. I have but arranged them into a book, each chapter of which is really a separate Curwood yarn.

Naturally, a few changes were necessary—but only a few—and not much has been added. I am confident that James Oliver Curwood's readers will find the magic spell of these stories as great as that of his colourful narrations of the men and women who live in the northern wildernesses—"God's Country," as he called it.

DOROTHEA A. BRYANT

CHAPTER I. SON OF A HERO

Into one of those cavernous pits often found at the bottom of Lake Superior—"the shining big sea water" to a poet, perhaps, but a sullen, fear-inspiring ocean to belated mariners—all that remained of the Bannockburn had sunk for ever. She pounded herself to pieces within six hours after striking upon an unknown reef near one of the desolate islands that lie close to the horizon about Whitefish Point. From those pits far beneath waves that are shivering cold even in midsummer no ship ever breaks to rise again; and there—like things of ice—human bodies lie intact until the judgment-day.

It was late in November, 1885, during a frightening hurricane that swept suddenly out from over the uninhabited Canadian wildernesses to spread ruin and death along white-duned shores that skirt the bleak, forbidding forests of northern Michigan.

A week later, a little woman with gold-brown hair and big sleepless eyes slipped once more into the marine office in Detroit, as the door opened to give exit to a messenger. She had come many times before. There was pathetic hopelessness in the glance she gave the clerk; the agony of the hours that had passed since the Great Storm had stripped her cheeks of colour and furrowed them with lines of suffering. She had come so often that now her lips were parted in what might have been the beginning of an apologetic smile had not the misery in her heart destroyed it. The clerk turned his head and his heart throbbed a little faster as the office stenographer lifted toward the inquirer her eyes that were filled with the intense sympathy of woman for woman. He went back and leaned over a ledger, leaving the little woman standing silently outside the barred window. One of his duties was to give the news of tragedy, to tell of storm and shipwreck, of men lost and vessels saved—to bring happiness and to break hearts; but he could not bring himself to do it now. He heard the stenographer rise from her chair, and knew that she was going to the window.

"Have—you heard of the Bannockburn?"

The woman's voice barely rose above a whisper. For an instant there was intense longing in her eyes; then, as the office girl hesitated, struggling with the truth, hope shot into them with almost the gleam of madness.

"No, dear, we haven't," said the girl softly. "I mean—nothing definite. She was sighted off Grand Island just as the storm began, but—she hasn't been seen at the Soo."

"Oh!—My God!"

The clerk, poring over the ledger, heard the stenographer swish past him into the next room. He knew why. He turned and looked at the little woman, who stood with her face bowed in her hands just outside his window. This was not a strange sight, for it had happened many times during the past few days; usually the tragic news had not been received so quietly.

Those were the days just after the Great Storm that comes once each year. It comes in the days of late navigation, November or December, when men and ships of the Inland Seas face a thousand perils in their mad dashes from port to port through ice and snow. Never has it been known to fail. And the one just past had raged with unprecedented fury for seventy-two hours. From end to end of the lakes it had swept until not one of the five escaped the destruction it wrought. Now the stories of the tragedies were coming in over the wires, to be disseminated among owners and the friends and relatives of the men whom they hired.

Since early morning the clerk in the marine office had been busy answering questions. There was a lull when the little woman came. But now, as she stood sobbing quietly, an aged man, bent and hobbling, and with snow-white hair touching his shoulders, stumbled up and inquired in a cracked, trembling voice for news of his son's ship. She was safe in port, and he hobbled away, mumbling with hysterical gladness. A young woman, just behind him, with a little boy's hand clasped tightly in her own, whispered for the fiftieth time for word of a wooden ship upon which her husband had sailed. One after another they came, and silently the little woman stood aside from them, unseeing and unhearing, until a woman brushed past her sobbing aloud.

Instinctively she put out a hand, and the two white tear-wet faces met. Both were young; sympathy glowed in their eyes. She whose husband had gone with the Bannockburn spoke first.

"Is it bad, dear?"

"No—no—no!" sobbed the other. "Thank God, they've heard! He's safe— safe! See this."

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She held something out for the other to read. It was a telegram. But the little woman's blurred eyes could not see. She reached out and flung her arms blindly around the other's neck, and kissed her. Then she went forth into the storm.

The city was smothered in the damp grey chill of a windy, sleet-filled night, and in the face of it the Bannockburn Widow—for by reason of a custom of the lakes such poor unfortunates are sometimes known by the names of their husband's ill-fated ships—passed up from the river, and mingled with the hurrying, home-bound throngs that were pouring forth from the shops. She seemed neither to see nor to hear; with blinded eyes turned to the slippery pavement she ran into other pedestrians, until the breath was half jostled out of her; a loiterer, ensconced in the shelter of a doorway, caught the prettiness of her face, and brushed up to her side with a raised umbrella. But he was unnoticed. Without once looking ahead, the woman continued through the sleet. Only by her homing instinct was she led in the right direction, across the car-cluttered square, from under the feet of carelessly driven horses, and up the narrow, alley-like street that passed her home. So far as thoughts of herself were concerned, her mind was a blank. One thing alone seemed to fill it—a vision of a coast of rock, with the sea roaring against it, and a black forest behind, and in the midst of the hissing spume a ship being beaten to pieces. She had seen that coast of rock. Only that summer she had passed it on the vacation trip which her husband had given her. He had pointed out the pictures upon them, which had given them the name, Pictured Rocks; and she had shuddered when he told her stories of ships that had gone ashore there.

"Some day I may go up against 'em myself, Nell," he had laughed. And she had laughed with him. As the memory of it came to her, she moaned aloud.

In front of a little cottage she paused. A small lamp burned dimly in one of the windows, and the Bannockburn Widow strained her eyes to peer through into the room. After a few moments of silent watchfulness she slipped like a shadow up the board walk to the narrow steps, and tapped gently upon the door. It was cautiously opened, and an elderly woman's face peered out at her. For an instant the eyes of the two met, and the one who had opened the door stood back speechless while the other entered.

"Are they asleep?"

The elder woman nodded. She tried to speak, but her lips seemed frozen. While the other was taking off her drenched garments she drew a shawl about her head, paused at the door a moment, stammered good night, and hurried to her own home.

The sailor's young wife fell upon her knees beside a ragged, upholstered chair, and buried her face in her arms. Her gold-brown hair had become loosened, and fell in a damp, shining mass down her back. For a long time she might have been in a swoon; but the fires of her suffering were burning madly in her brain. All they produced were pictures, pictures, pictures; bursting seas meeting cavernous rocks with the tumult of thunder, a ship battling in a maelstrom of reef and spume, the black forest bending in shrieking blasts and always somewhere in this terrible scene a human face! And this face became larger and nearer and more real to her, until its lips seemed to move in speech; and out of the ghastly grey mists of her mental fantasm a hand reached and beckoned, beckoned until she flung herself back with a shriek.

A child's half-sleeping cry answered, and the woman sprang to her feet, and stood, almost without breathing, clutching the edge of the chair and listening. The cry did not come again. On tiptoe the woman went until she could peer into a darkened room, where two little forms lay huddled in the middle of a bed.

As silently she stole back again. A pencil and a tablet lay upon the table. Upon the tablet she wrote:

"Ben is wrecked on the Pictured Rocks. I've gone to help him. Please care for the children until I come back."

Then she put on her water-soaked coat and hat, and went again out into the storm of the night, led on by the pictures in her brain.

They were becoming more and more distinct now. With each passing moment she saw them clearer; and she knew that her duty was defined and indubitable. It seemed a long time afterward that she came down into the crashing tumult of shunting engines and the glare of a score of fiery eyes that lighted up the sooty drizzle of the station yards. The pictures left her brain for a time as she picked her way among them. The dazzling headlights seemed like orbs of fire. Bewildered, she stumbled over tracks and ties, until at last a trainman seized her by an arm and piloted her to safety. Then the pictures came back, and she forgot that she had been lost and in danger. She asked questions, but none of those who answered them saw aught but the misery of some passing misfortune in her face. Strangers looked at her pityingly, the ticket agent curiously, and when she passed the gateman her

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white face was bowed and hidden.

So she went into the train. The yards, with their inferno of blazing eyes and clanging bells, slipped behind unnoticed, the glow of the city melted away, and to the little widow the hours and miles swept past in meaningless procession.

Toward dawn she fell into what might have been sleep had it not been for the pictures. Her head rested upon her arm, and for a long time she lay crumpled up in her seat, starting now and then like one in a nightmare when her mental visions became too exciting. When she straightened herself and looked out into the world again the sun was shooting fleeting rays through the grimy window. Deep black forests had taken the place of city and farmland; here and there a woodman's shanty came into view; and through the open car door came the redolent perfume of the pine wilderness.

This had been home to her once. It had been life to her, a life which she would not have bartered for the choice of a million others—until there came the man who afterward turned sailor. The odour of the pine was an old friend. It reached down into her soul and wrenched her free from the brain-pictures which were maddening her, and she struggled to her feet and went to the car door, and stood there listening and seeing and smelling, while a flush gathered in her cheeks and her eyes glowed with the warm beauty that made people love them. Somewhere in this big wilderness she had been a girl; somewhere in it the little farm of the old folks was buried; somewhere—somewhere—in it—she had met the man. The old thoughts returned to her. The pictures came, one, and two, and three, until in their number and hurry they crowded and crushed one another, and drove the Bannockburn Widow back to her seat with a white drawn face on which was stamped all the misery and hopelessness in life.

It was noon when the train ran into the little wilderness station near the white capped run of Superior. As the woman came out, she saw the black sweep of the lake over the tops of a thousand wind-wrought dunes beyond the shanty that was called a station, and on its uttermost edge, where the grey gloom of the sky seemed to reach down into the sombreness of the lake, her eyes caught the faint smoke of a southbound freighter.

The sight of it fascinated her. As she stepped down from the car, she failed to notice the curious glances of men and boys whose daily diversion was meeting the train. In her head the pictures seemed to burst into flame, a heating, maddening fire that filled her with a desire to shriek aloud to the ship which was a thing almost out of her vision. But those who watched her saw nothing of the trouble in her brain. She went slowly down among the dunes, and then to the edge of the lake; and along that she trailed, bent and searching, until the purple shadows of the beach-pines wrapped her from the following of human eyes. None knew whence she came; none could guess whither she was going. An old lumberman said that a squatter back in the woods was expecting his wife from the south. But few believed that this was the woman. And in the end the most curious of them all, a small boy, dived off into the woods to discover things for himself. It was late when he came back. The lake was shrouded in cold foggy gloom; the rising night-winds were whistling in the pines; away off in their depths sounded the lone, hungry cry of a wolf; and the woman, the boy said, was miles away—with her face still turned to the peopleless barrens of the Indian cliffs.

Once she had looked back and seen the boy, but she had not thought of calling him. After a time she knew that she stumbled because she could not see, and that an opaque curtain had shut her in until the lake and the forest might have been another world. But the night held no terrors for her; so she kept on. The lone wolf howled up in the edge of the forest; a flight of belated wild fowl whistled over her head; a quavering, thrilling cry came nearer and nearer from the blackness of the land, the night-wind came colder and stronger; the bursting of the lake among tumbled rocks became more and more tumultuous, but the little Bannockburn Widow was unmindful of them all. The Indian cliffs were ahead. Each step brought her nearer to them, and each moment she could see her husband's ship more distinctly. Now it had ceased its struggles in the seas; its shattered remnants lay among the rocks. Among them she saw human things, some dripping and creeping, some drowned and still; and when she thought that she heard their voices, crying faintly for help, she stopped and listened.

"Ben!" she called. "Ben! Oh, Ben!"

She fancied she heard a reply, and called again. The wolf slunk farther behind; two little fiery dots that were levelled at her from the edge of the forest disappeared; the night, too, grew suddenly quiet, and only the noise of the lake drowned the voices of those human things staggering up from the wreck in the woman's brain. It suddenly occurred to her that she must hurry or they would get away from her. So she ran. When she stopped

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running she fell. For hours after that the pictures were gone, the sounds of the night passed unheard, the lone wolf howled and sniffed almost at her feet, and the lake lashed itself in futile fury against the face of the Pictured Rocks.

When she awoke, the sun was shining upon her. She did not sense the passing of time. The night had gone without reckoning, and she began the search where she had left off, only now there were no human things creeping and dying in her visions. If a hunter had seen her, he would have known that she was weak and footsore. But she was not conscious of hunger or fatigue. Rather than this, a strange content was growing in her; she had reached the Pictured Rocks. The lake was rolling and thundering against them, and she knew that very soon she would find her husband. Hour after hour she went on. She thought that she had travelled far, but the rocks she had left in the morning were in sight at noon. Now she seemed much nearer to them. She came to a break in the great stone cliffs, and down there in the white sand at their base she thought that she saw men. There was one lying white and naked in the sun, with the water creeping up about him at every roll of the lake. She knew now that her search was at an end.

"Ben! Ben! Ben!—"

She called aloud in her joy as she half crept, half fell, down through the fissure in the cliff. With outstretched arms she stumbled to the edge of the beach. The white thing had been drawn back by a receding wave, and was just out of her reach. It was an oar.

"Ben!" she pleaded. "Ben, my darling!"

She waded out to her knees, and met the oar as it came in again. With a scream she snatched it and fell with it upon the sand. After a little she held it out and looked at it, her eyes dazzling in the joy of triumph. Silently she clutched the thing to her breast and slowly made her way up the ragged breach in the rocks. It was a tiresome climb, but she held to her precious burden. When she had reached the summit she staggered back toward the gloom of the forest, mumbling incoherently. But through it ran one strain.

"Ben—Ben—Ben—Ben—"

That day a coatless, uncovered sailor looked longingly out from the island that lay just beyond sight of Whitefish Point. It was a desolate and uninhabited area of drifting sand and ragged pines, surrounded on all sides by the ugly grey run of the sea. No other object in the dreary scene betrayed a sign of life. Nearly doubled under the weight of a bundle clasped in his arms, his feet wrapped in trailing rags, he stumbled slowly along. His eyes were deep—sunk, his face starved to the thinness of a death—mask, and he mumbled incoherently to the bundle he held. Slowly the figure turned and trailed back among the low, pine—covered sand—dunes, and as it disappeared, like a tottering old man, another living thing came up from the edge of the water. It was not unlike the first in the gauntness of starvation, but this man was naked to the waist and his feet were bare and bloodstained. He was older, but more powerful, and as he gazed up to where a shirt fluttered at the top of a dead pine he showed his teeth in a snarl and cursed. Then he, too, took up the trail into the dunes.

Deep in them and sheltered somewhat from the cold wind of the sea, the first man gently laid his bundle down in a shelter made of pine boughs. As he pulled back the coat he had wrapped about it he smiled, a ghastly enough smile had it not been for the love—light that shone in his sunken eyes. The man's movements exposed the face of a sleeping boy who could not have been more than five years old. He put the coat back again and turned to the figure approaching through the dunes. "His—s—st!" he warned, holding up a hand that shook like one of the pine—cones above him.

"T' hell with yer hissin'!" growled the other. "Cap'n, I want th' grub—an' I'm damned if I ain't goin' t' have it."

"There isn't any more grub," said the smaller man. "I gave it all to the little one."

He picked up a few dry sticks from the sand and piled them on a fire that was burning near the pine—bough shelter. In his companion's eyes smouldered a dangerous madness. A few yards from the shelter he fell upon his hands and knees and like a hungry animal crawled toward the sleeping child. The starving captain staggered to intercept him and grovelled upon all fours in his path.

"I said there isn't any more!"

Like two human creatures in an animal pantomime the men glared, while their emaciated faces almost touched. There was a deadly challenge in the little man's red eyes. He supported himself on his knees and one arm, while the other arm was raised, like a cat's, ready to scratch at the yellow, hair—hung visage of the man he defied.

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After a moment the sailor settled back on his haunches with a crackling laugh and glanced furtively at a stick just out of reach. Streaks of blood had dried on his naked chest and arms, and over one of these he licked his tongue, smacking his lips in an ecstatic grimace. There was something terribly suggestive in the leering look of the man as he nodded toward the pine-bough shelter. He came a foot nearer on his hands and knees, but the captain crouched weakly, his teeth gleaming like half-drawn ivory knives ready to bury themselves in human flesh. The other paused again.

"Are y' honest, Cap'n?"

"Honest as God!" replied the smaller man, and as the other turned away again, the captain went back to sit down in front of the pine-bough shelter. For a few minutes the half-stripped sailor lay in the sand, burying his arms and shivering. Then he crawled up and huddled close to the fire. The other suffered in grim silence, staring out fixedly against the wilderness of lifeless sand-dunes, and slowly his reason slipped beyond his control and the drifted heaps seemed to take a thousand fantastic shapes and fill the air until they walled him in. After a time they settled again and were peopled with a score of romping children, among whom was a rosy boy with a tiny ship trailing at the end of a string. Behind them all was a woman, who smiled over their heads and down at him. The man crooned and beckoned to the woman and the child until something pulled at his arm, and the sailor crept between him and his vision.

"My Gawd, Cap'n, wake up!"

The captain dragged himself back to consciousness with a start. His first instinct was to crouch back in an attitude of preparedness; his second to glance hastily in the shelter where the coat-wrapped bundle still lay as he had placed it. In a vague sort of way he felt that he had something to fear, and he turned his cavernous eyes in a sullen, suspicious look at his companion.

"I've got a plan," said the sailor. With a trembling forefinger he drew a circle in the sand. "We'll both start here—at the end of th' island. You go one way, me th' other. Mebby we'll find a clam."

He pulled himself to his feet and stood swaying like a drunken man. With an effort the captain stood up. He piled a few more sticks on the fire and then the two men staggered off through the dunes. The little man's weakness was overpowering. In a moment of delirium he fell upon the sand and hunted for tracks. "They were here—they were here—" he moaned monotonously. "God—God—they were here—they were here——" He dug his way up the side of the dune that crumbled away under him as he kicked and clutched in it with his hands and feet. Again and again he rolled back exhausted, his eyes and mouth filled with sand. Fighting his way weakly, inch by inch, he crawled at last to the top of the dune, and with an unheard cry flung his arms above his head and turned his gaunt face up to the cold, grey vastness of the sky. Then he pitched forward and like a dead thing rolled down the other side of the dune. With a powerful effort he concentrated what was left of his mind and, at times stumbling along on his feet, at others creeping upon his hands and knees, toiled through the drifting sand until he came to the edge of the lake along which the searching sailor was crawling like a snail. In the west, day was going out in a sickly yellow gleam. The starving man turned his face toward it and trailed close down to the water's edge watching hungrily for something that would give him life. He forgot to measure time as he worked. One minute—ten—an hour passed. He failed to notice that he had made less than a hundred fathoms. On bleeding hands and knees he still crept along, resting now and then, sometimes even in the freezing wash of the sea. The glow burned out of the sky, and now up through the gloom of the twisting sand-dunes came the sailor.

"Nothing—nothing——" he groaned wearily. "Oh, God, nothing—nothing— nothing——"

The little man stood up beside him and together the two gazed out upon the grey waste of water that was dissolving itself in the gathering darkness of night. After a moment the captain's chin fell upon his chest, and his eyes searched the sand at his feet. Suddenly he gave a cry and fell upon his face, sobbing, laughing and raving in his madness until the other drew back in horror. For a few moments he lay very quiet, and during those moments the captain fought to re-establish his reason, while with both hands he clutched a tiny mussel to his breast. When he came to his knees he held the precious shell out for the sailor to see. The eyes of the latter burned with a maniacal fire. He approached like a thing half human and fell upon his companion, tearing and scratching with the viciousness of a cat. "Gi' me it—gi' me it!" he cried.

The two rolled over and over in sickening combat. The great hands of the starving sailor caught at the other's throat and held there until the face went black and the captain opened his mouth like a strangling fish. By chance he freed himself, and using the clam for a weapon dug its sharp edge deep into the sailor's naked chest. Inside the

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captain's shirt was treasured a pistol. In their smothering embrace he reached for it, and his arm was pinioned. An instant later the sailor's hand came in contact with a small stone and with it he rained blow after blow upon the little man's head. Under them the captain sank like a dead man and lay crushed beneath the body of his enemy. He was conscious of a flow of warm blood pouring over his face and he knew that he must be terribly wounded. His hand touched the revolver butt and with a supreme effort he twisted the muzzle upward and exhausted all of his dying strength in a pull upon the trigger. There followed a smothered explosion, and the sailor lurched back and pressed his hands to his stomach. A moment more and he toppled over upon the sand, kicking and sobbing in the agonies of death, while the victor lay very quiet, with blood soaking his hair and beard and forming a pool under his face.

Darkness had fallen thick and cold over the sea when the captain raised his head. He seemed to be awakened from his death-sleep by the crying of a child. Groaning, he struggled to rise, and failing in this he dragged himself foot by foot toward the dead pine from which floated the signal of distress. That pine had been in his mind for a day and a night. He had figured that his last duty would be the sending up of a pillar of flame that might call a ship to his little son whom he would leave when he died. They had burned a tree each night. This would be the last. On his stomach he wormed his way toward it, and again and again he attempted to raise his voice in response to the wails of the child coming from among the dunes. After a little it seemed to the wounded man that the sounds were nearer. Frantically he strove to reach the pine. The light of it would bring to him the only living thing he had saved from his ship, and he prayed and sobbed in his weakness as he came nearer and nearer to it. He was bleeding profusely again and knew that he had only a few minutes more before him. His last progress was made by inches. At the base of the pine he had only strength enough left to strike a match and light the pile of cones. Then he rolled upon his face again as the flames began licking their way up the resinous tree.

Somewhere in the man there rose and battled the last call to life. It struggled with his desire to die, and conquered by bringing him back into the agony of existence. He heard the crackling of flames over his head much as he might have listened to the murmuring of the sea on a peaceful night of a happier day. He possessed no fear, no pain, and his one desire was that he might rest in peace. But the spirit of life dragged him out of the valley of contentment and opened his ears again to the crying of the child. His consciousness found him in a blaze of light. The pine was a roaring torch reaching up a hundred feet in the air. Its heat had burned his face and scorched his hair, but this gave him no additional pain. He was almost sightless, but life gave him power to see the child. More like a wounded animal than a man he dragged himself toward his son. In terror the boy saw the strange thing approaching in the fiery glare, and his screams of fear brought reason back into the captain's brain. He stopped, and gasped out a cry that sent warm blood trickling down his face. A final tremendous effort brought him to his feet, an unhearing, unseeing creature struggling with the death-grip, and praying for a few moments more. He staggered on and on until he knew that he had been recognized and that the terror-stricken child was running into his arms. Then he collapsed. In one hand the man still clutched the precious clam. He opened it now with his teeth and gave it to the child. He tried to speak, but the life of his tongue seemed gone.

The captain turned his face once more to the sea. The lights of a ship were coming up out of the naked vastness of Superior. He lay down quietly and passed into a deep trance, and when the men came they found him with the little breathing thing at his side, cold in the slumber from which no man awakes.

Two graves were soon made, but there were none to identify either the occupants or the little child. Eventually the rescuers learned from the boy that his name was "Jim," but where he lived or who he might be remained unknown. So when Captain Falkner left the little waif at an orphanage on the Erie shore the boy was registered as James Falkner—lacking a better name—and his relatives believed him to have perished with his father on the Bannockburn.

CHAPTER II. THE AMATEUR PIRATES

A decade is not a long time—when it has passed.

The sun was sinking like a blood-red ball in a field of fire—as the sun should set on the eve of a sanguinary struggle at sea. So thought Jim Falkner, captain of the *Lady Gwendolyn* and her pirate-crew. The pirate-ship rested heavily in an almost motionless waste of water, but there was breeze enough partly to fill her sail and to flaunt, at the peak of the single mast, the half of a table-cloth, on which was painted bold and clear the skull and cross-bones which proclaimed her calling. Edging up across Lake Erie an eighth of a mile away was a small full-rigged schooner, looming picturesquely against the western sky under a dirt-grey cloud of canvas. The pirate-crew had watched her slow approach, and for a quarter of an hour Captain Jim had stood on the sloop's cabin roof; a twisted glass which distorted shapes amazingly screwed to his right eye. About his shock of uncombed hair he had tightly bound a red bandanna, and from under this his thin freckle-strewn face shone flushed and dirty. In the belt about his middle he carried a carving-knife, and in the leg of one of his boots, which were big enough for two pirates of his size, were concealed a pistol, a box of cartridges, a case-knife, and other things which were prized. The others of the *Lady Gwendolyn*, four in number, were the raggedest, dirtiest urchins that had ever sailed a ship, and for three minutes one of these had kept his eyes levelled along a piece of gas-pipe which had been fitted over the bow of the pirate-ship. At last the gunner turned about and called out in shrill disgust:

"Ain't yer ever goin' t' tell me t' shoot?"

"Fi-yer-r-r-r-r!" yelled the captain.

With a spasmodic jerk the gunner lighted a match and touched the flame to a short fuse in the end of the improvised cannon. Then the crew of the *Lady Gwendolyn* ducked. A moment later there came a deafening explosion, and half a pound of pebbles sang on their way to the schooner.

"Load 'er up!" shrieked the pirate captain, coming from cover and swinging his arms joyously. "Load 'er up!"

Two or three men ran to the rail of the passing schooner, and the pirates heard a warning voice. The gas-pipe roared in response. Never in his life had James Falkner been more in his element than at this moment. But suddenly in the middle of a yell which seemed as though it would split his throat, he choked himself off with a gasp of astonishment. There had come an unexpected tremble in the great white wings of the schooner, and while the pirate-crew stared in silent stupefaction the canvas crumbled down like melting banks of snow, and from the vessel's side a boat shot out, filled with four of the biggest, most determined-looking men that the *Lady Gwendolyn's* crew had ever seen.

"Holy Gee!" ejaculated the gunner. He looked up at the captain, but his face was blank. A few minutes later the four seamen towed the *Lady Gwendolyn* astern of the schooner, where they tied her as a prize, and one after another the captured pirates scrambled, in all of their warlike toggery, over the side of the ship. All of this had happened almost too quickly for comprehension. Nipped in the bud was the bloody and picturesque career which the pirate-captain had mapped out for himself. He was stunned, ashamed, and as he toppled over the schooner's rail, hoisted with good-natured force by a seaman behind, he saw that he was being laughed at by half a dozen men and women gathered on the after-deck. As he scrambled to his feet and the other pirates came pouring over, a girl ran out from the little group and levelled a box-like thing.

"Oh, keep quiet, keep quiet—please do!" she cried. "There! One, two, three—the light is so poor—four, five, six—" and so she counted up to a dozen, and the pirate commander, knowing that his picture was being taken, straightened proudly with his right hand on his hip, threw out his chest, and stood without a quiver. When the girl had done, she looked straight into his eyes, and laughed.

"Thank you!" she said.

Even in this moment of sore defeat Jim Falkner's fertile mind reverted to his favourite pirate-hero, who had met the beautiful heroine in just this way, and he straightway fell in love with Miss Virginia Cloud, who, in company with her parents and a young man whom the boy had not yet seen, was making a cruise of the lakes in one of her brother's ships. The pirate-captain and his crew were given quarters under an awning back of the cook's house, and there they discussed their misfortune until the cook took them into his kitchen and filled them

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with a supper such as they had not seen in many days. The cook was a negro, and after the meal was over he came in, grinning broadly, and carrying a basket heaped with oranges.

"Miss Virgin'y sent you these, an' sed she'd lak t' see you," he announced, nodding to Jim.

The youthful pirate's heart thumped wildly inside his jacket. He distributed the oranges, thrust his own in one of his pockets, and rose from the table. He felt that something momentous was about to happen.

"Youse fellers go back an' lay low," he whispered as the cook turned to his work. "Don't say nothin', but be ready!"

As he went on deck he paused for a moment in the growing shadow of the caboose, fished out a cigarette from deep down in his boot-leg, lighted it, and then walked forward, where he found the girl watching the rippling sea under the bow of the slowly moving schooner. As she heard him thumping up in his heavy boots she turned, and once more she laughed merrily.

"My goodness, how fierce you look!" she cried. She held out one of her pretty white hands, and shaking as if with the ague, Jim thrust one of his own dirty ones into it. He saw now that the girl was very pretty. But there was something about her eyes which troubled him. They were red, as though she had been crying, and he saw a tear half-way down her cheek.

"What's the matter?" he asked guilelessly. Something strange inside him seemed urging him to drop his cigarette, which he did. The girl saw the act, and almost hugged him up beside her.

"Nothing," she replied, yet Jim knew that there was a tremble in her voice. "I just wanted to talk with you. Will you tell me your name?"

"I ain't got none."

"What! No name?" The girl tilted up his freckled face and gazed squarely down into it.

"Nothin' but Jim," he answered. He could not help looking into the girl's eyes, and he noticed that a sudden change came into them. At times he had dreamed that away back in the misty past he had known such eyes as those, filled with that same gentle softness.

"No name!" repeated the girl. "And haven't you a home or—or—" she did not finish.

"Guess I had one once, but I don't know where," informed Jim. "They had me in a orphan asyloom once, and there they called me James Falkner; but that ain't really my name." He grinned, as though this fact was unusually amusing; but the girl turned her face out toward the lake and slipped an arm around his shoulders. For several minutes there was silence. In Jim Falkner's little soul things were happening which he had never experienced before. For the time he forgot that he was a pirate. He could not remember ever having had a woman's arm around him like this, and unconsciously he snuggled closer to the girl.

"James," she said suddenly, "would you like to escape?"

The question almost took the boy's breath away; it brought him back to the realization of being a captured pirate. In a flood his old ambitions returned to him, but they were almost immediately replaced by the desire to remain with the girl. He wanted to tell her this, and was just beginning when she interrupted him.

"Would you like to escape, to-night, and take me with you?"

Filled with joy, the prisoner replied that he would. Then, with her head bent down very near to his, Miss Virginia described her plans. When she had done, the pirate-captain straightened, almost bursting with the great secret she had confided to him. At that moment a man came and stood within a few feet of them. He was a young man, and he held his hat in his hand. But the girl had turned. Her chin was high in the air, her lips were closed very tightly, and Jim wondered what was the matter. In a moment the young man turned and slowly walked away.

"Who's dat guy?"

"He? Oh, just a man," replied the girl. Under a sudden impulse she faced the young pirate and put both her arms around him. "I want you to promise me one thing, James. You won't go near him, will you?"

"You bet I won't, if you don't want me to!" said the boy.

Miss Virginia bent down and pressed her warm lips upon one of Jim Falkner's dirty cheeks and for an hour after that the pirate-captain could think of nothing much beyond this soft caress. He went back to his crew under the canvas awning, but not until the evening was well advanced did he tell them of the venturesome work in store for them that night. For a time the pirates amused themselves by playing cards in the light of a deck-lantern, Then they doubled up back in the shadows, and still later Captain Jim crept out cautiously and going to the girl's cabin knocked lightly on the door. A moment later it was partly opened, and the pirate-captain slipped in.

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"You're a little early, James." The girl had been writing and held a pen in her hand. The boy's enthusiasm was subdued by the whiteness of her face.

"Sit down," she said, with a little smile that made Jim fear she was losing courage. "I'll be ready in a minute." After a few moments she turned to him again. "Hadn't you better get your men in the boat?" she asked. "I'll be there by that time."

After Captain Jim had gone she slowly read over the pages she had written:

"Dear Mama: Please don't be frightened when you read this. To-night I am helping the boys to escape, and I am going with them. You know why, but I want you to tell Father and Captain Marks that I did it just for a little fun. You'll do this, won't you? Mr. Brown is our guest, and it would embarrass him if the others knew about the affair. It is almost unnecessary to say that he came to me again this afternoon. I was perfectly fair with him, but he was too stubborn for anything. In other words, he said point-blank that I would have to give up my idea of studying operatic music, that he did not want a wife whose interests were divided between home and the stage. At that I slipped off my engagement ring, and then—well, he took it and walked away. I never want to see him again, and I want you to please tell him so. The boys will put me ashore, and I will take a train for the Soo, where I will rejoin you. He, of course, will have sense enough to leave the boat at Detroit. Now please don't worry, Mama. In haste, Virginia.

P.S. Of course, you know I intended to do as Dick wished. But when he said I must I said I wouldn't, and now I never will!"

The girl sealed the letter, addressed it to her mother, and placed it on her dresser where it would be seen in the morning. Then she put on a hat and a light coat, and with a dressing-bag in her hand slipped quietly out of her cabin into the gloomy stern of the ship. By their united strength Jim Falkner and his pirates had worked the Lady Gwendolyn in until her stub of a bowsprit rubbed against the schooner's rudder, but even then the passage down seemed a perilous one to the girl. The pirate-chief was waiting for her with a length of rope in his hands.

"We'll git y' down in a jiffy!" he said encouragingly. "I'll tie this rope under yer arms and ease y' down that way. See?" He showed her how the trick was to be done, and was so eager in his work that he did not notice a dark form stealing toward him in the shadow of the bulwark. As Miss Virginia was lowered into the sloop this figure paused, as if undecided whether to approach nearer or to retreat.

"Ahoy, down there!" hissed Captain Jim, when he knew that his passenger was safely aboard. "Lay to 'n' be ready! I'll be back in a minit!"

Into his head had come a daring thought. Piratical blood was surging through his veins again, and now, as he turned and crept stealthily back, his eyes were open wide for plunder. James Falkner was not a thief. If a boy ashore had accused him of being such he would have fought, and fought hard. But he was a pirate, and to a pirate all things of value are legitimate plunder. Near the cook's cabin was a big coil of rope, and very cautiously Jim dragged this across the deck. Suddenly he heard a noise behind him, and, turning, he saw a figure between him and the stern. The spirit of a man came into the escaping prisoner. He saw that the situation demanded action, and reaching down into his boot-leg he pulled out his revolver, sneaked up as quietly as a cat, and shoved the weapon close up under the nose of the young man against whom the girl had warned him that evening.

"Hands up, mister!"

The man obeyed. In the darkness Jim could not see that he was laughing silently, despite the fact that the revolver was within a few inches of his face. "Don't shoot!" he begged. "Don't shoot! I'll go with you."

Captain Jim's heart throbbed with delight. Here was a prisoner, perhaps a valuable one, instead of a coil of rope. Visions of a ransom filled his brain. In a shrill voice that trembled with excitement he commanded the prisoner to walk into the stern and climb down into the sloop. He was even more delighted with the alacrity with which the man obeyed. It was so dark that the pirates below could not see who was coming down, and Jim did not inform them until he was among them himself. After he had cut the towline he whispered the story of his capture. Without a word the prisoner had seated himself. The girl was the bow, a dozen feet away, concealed in darkness and unconscious of what had occurred.

"Is that you, James?" she called in a low voice.

"Yes," replied the captain. "Don't anybody make a move until the schooner's out of hearin'," he added warningly, and for a few minutes there was a deep silence aboard the sloop. Slowly the schooner's lights grew more and more distant, and at last Captain Jim ordered the Lady Gwendolyn's sail hoisted, and a lantern brought

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from the little cabin. He was eager for the girl and his prisoner to see him as a captain in active command. While still enveloped in darkness he transferred his weapons from his bootleg to the belt about his waist. Then he stood up square and stiff on the cabin roof just above his prisoner's head, and as one of the pirates came up behind him with the light he placed a hand over his eyes and stared tragically out into the blackness of the night. In a moment the sloop was dimly illuminated. Then the pirate heard a sharp, sudden little scream, then a man's voice calling a name—just once. After that there was silence. Still the pirate—captain stared out over the lake. It delighted him to think that his attitude had startled the girl and the prisoner; he tilted himself perilously over the edge of the boat, one hand surreptitiously sought his revolver as if he detected approaching danger, then—

"Brute!"

Surely that name had not been applied to him! He regained his proper equilibrium with a jerk. The man had partly risen with his hands stretched out toward the bow. Up there sat the girl. The pirate—chieftain wondered what she was looking at. She seemed staring at least six feet above his head, her lips set tightly, her hands clenched in her lap. He looked up, but saw nothing of interest. Then he looked at the man again. It occurred to him now that the girl had warned him against this man. She feared him; possibly he had done some great wrong, or was planning to hurt her. Determinedly he drew a bead on the back of the prisoner's head.

"Set down 'r I'll blow yer head off!" he yelled.

The man turned, smiled up at Jim, and sat down. Still holding his cocked revolver menacingly, the commander of the pirate—ship approached the girl. She looked at him sternly with a peculiar gleam in her eyes that he had not seen before.

"Didn't I ask you not to tell him?"

"I didn't," replied the pirate—captain in a whisper. "'E was goin' to squeal on us, an' I bagged 'im! 'E's a prisoner!" He pronounced the last words with a tragic emphasis.

Despite herself, the girl smiled. But Jim was a barrier between herself and the man.

"I wish you could get rid of him in some way," she murmured. There was an appealing look in her eyes, and the boy's face became very sober. He walked back and whispered among his men. After a little they approached the prisoner and coolly proceeded to tie his hands and feet. The man looked at the girl and laughed, but this time she had turned her back toward him. Soon she heard a noise which grew suspiciously louder until out of curiosity she glanced over her shoulder. The five pirates had dragged their helplessly bound prisoner to the edge of the sloop, and he was already half—way over when she shrieked out the commander's name.

"What are you doing?" she cried.

"Gettin' rid of 'im!" shouted Captain Jim. "Now, men, one, two—"

"Stop!" she screamed. "James, you're a—you're a—" she stopped, and the pirate—chief knew that he was in disgrace.

"A clever joke!" growled the man, "a blamed clever joke!" Jim Falkner knew that there was some good reason why he should free his prisoner, and he did so. For a long time after that he kept very quiet. Two or three times the man spoke to the girl but she deigned no reply. At last she called to Jim, and the boy crept up to her, feeling that he had lost all favour in her eyes; but she reached out and put an arm around him, and the pirate—captain felt as though he would burst with joy.

"James, where are we going?" she asked.

"I dunno," he replied. "We're just sailin'. We might hit land any time."

"I know, but what land may we hit?"

Captain Jim became nervous. He clawed at the rotten rail of the sloop and wondered if he had better guess something at random.

"I—I ain't sure," he said truthfully. "Mebby we're goin' t'ward Canada, mebby we're goin' t'ward—what's that United States state off there?" He pointed, and the girl told him that it was Ohio.

"Well, mebby we'll hit that," he concluded hopefully.

For a long time after that Miss Virginia sat very still, her face turned out to the darkness of the lake ahead, and Jim tried hard to picture in his mind the things she might be thinking about. Her arm was still around him, and gave him some comfort.

"You—you're mad?" he dared to whisper at last.

"Just a little, James," she replied. "But not at you," she quickly added, with a reassuring pressure of her arm.

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Captain Jim felt that she was going to say something more to him soon, and he waited patiently, peering up into her face now and then.

"You wouldn't shoot, ever, would you, James?" she asked.

"No—oo—oo—oo," replied the pirate—chief doubtfully.

Miss Virginia gave a relieved sigh. "I'm so glad," she said. "I wouldn't have you hurt him, but—"

"But what?" urged the pirate—chief.

"When we reach land I want you to get him away from me. I don't want him to be near me or know where I go. Will you?"

Captain Jim said that he would, and during the next hour he invented a scheme so big that he could hardly hold it. Once, filled with a knowledge of his power, he came up close to his prisoner and grinned sardonically in his face. The night passed tediously after this—at least to the girl and the man. The girl especially was becoming more and more miserable. She begged the boy to find out from his prisoner what time it was, and inwardly prayed that something would happen soon to relieve the situation. A little before dawn her prayer was answered. Warning first came in a slight jar and a scraping under the Lady Gwendolyn as though she were passing over drifting brush. Then came a jolt which flung the girl to the bottom of the sloop, and above her cry of alarm there sounded a shrill yell of terror from one of the pirates as he was hurled head foremost into the lake. The man had half gathered the girl in his arms when the boy who had been flung overboard stuck his head over the edge of the boat.

"Land ho!" he yelled lustily.

"Where 'way?" cried Captain Jim.

"We're on it!" informed the partly submerged pirate. "I'm standin' on bottom now."

Jim saw the girl struggling with his prisoner, but before he could lend her assistance she had freed herself. The man said something which he could not understand, then turned and jumped into the lake. The pirate—captain could hear him splashing on his way to the shore.

"He's gone!" said he. There was a note of disappointment in his voice as he saw the end of the great achievement which he had planned.

"I'm glad, James," replied the girl. "Now, how am I going to get ashore?"

"Wade," advised the pirate promptly. "It ain't over yer head!"

To prove his assertion he dropped over the side, and found the water only up to his arm—pits. "You afraid?" he asked.

"Noo—o—o—o—o," said the girl hesitatingly, "but—"

"You needn't undress," comforted Captain Jim.

Miss Virginia laughed, and the man ashore, hearing her merriment, swore to himself as he strode up from the beach.

"I'll have to change my clothes afterward, James. If you'll be very careful, and will carry this bag without getting it wet, I'll follow you."

Captain Jim reached up for the bag and waded ashore with it. Immediately after him came the girl, and after her trailed all of the pirates but one, who remained behind to care for the Lady Gwendolyn. Then the pirate—chief and his men went a dozen rods up the beach and built a big fire out of driftwood. By the time it was burning well the girl rejoined them wearing a beautiful, clinging, creamy dress that made them all stare in open—mouthed admiration. She went straight up to the chief and gave him a hug.

"Dear Jim," she cried, "you're a—you're a brick! And every one of your men is a brick!" She knew that word expressed worlds to the chief. Then she went from pirate to pirate and kissed each of them, and thanked them so beautifully for all that they had done for her that they were ready to get down and eat sand for her if she requested it. After a while, one of the pirates went out into the dim dawn and returned not many minutes afterward with the information that they were wrecked "on an island no bigger'n Grand Circus Park," which meant that there were about half a dozen acres in it.

In the firelight the girl's face showed her alarm. "I know! It must be Middle Sister Island!" she exclaimed. "Oh, James!" there was a sob in her voice. "There isn't a soul on it, and nobody ever comes here! Oh, dear—dear—dear!" Captain Jim knew that she was really crying now, with her face buried in her arms, and he gulped hard two or three times and silently beckoned his men away. He knew what was the matter, too. She was afraid of the man. He told his men this, and he revealed other things to them. Then he signalled the other pirate

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from the Lady Gwendolyn, and all of them went out silently as shadows in a search for the escaped prisoner. In Captain Jim's great scheme force was not to play a large part, for he had reasoned that the man would be more than their equal, unless he shot him, and that he had promised the girl not to do. He would lie to him. He would tell him that the girl wished to talk with him, but that he and his men would allow him to go near the girl only as a prisoner, with his hands tied behind his back. After the man's arms were helpless Jim was sure that he would be an easy prey. Then he would inform him that the girl never wanted to see him again, and that he and his crew were therefore doing their duty.

The girl had raised her tear-stained face just in time to see Captain Falkner and his men disappear. She knew that they were not deserting her, so she sat beside the fire and cried and shivered and laughed by turns, until the day came in a ribbon of red over the lake. Then the pirates returned. One of them was limping grievously, and his dirty face had been cleansed in streaks by many tears. Shamefacedly Captain Jim showed one closed and swollen eye and an upper lip that bulged. But there was something in his manner which spoke of triumph.

"We had a scrap," he explained, his articulation a little thick because of the condition of his lip. He did not know that the girl misunderstood him. She looked from the limping, tear-stained pirate to Captain Jim's battered countenance, and mentally concluded that the two had engaged in combat.

"You shouldn't fight," she reproved, trying to keep a sober face. But the humour of the situation overcame her, and she smiled. Jim Falkner was delighted. He could see that she was already greatly relieved at being freed of the man.

"We done 'im good and plenty this time!" he further elucidated, edging up to her confidentially.

"We!" exclaimed the girl, looking pityingly at the other injured pirate, who was standing almost entirely upon one leg and grinning cheerfully. "We, did you say? How many of you attacked him?"

"The hull of us!" said the pirate-chief. He could not account for the girl's silence. He expected some words of approbation, and not receiving them soon turned his attention to the stranded sloop. Some weeks previously the pirates had resurrected the Lady Gwendolyn from a mud-bar where for several years she had been allowed to rot and warp. There was not a sound board in her, and in the collision with the shore she had crushed in a half of her bottom. Undismayed by the loss of their craft, the pirates whistled and shouted in the joy of their adventure as they brought their stores ashore and piled them near the dying fire. Captain Falkner's provisions began with a peck of potatoes and ended with an emaciated strip of bacon.

For a time the girl watched the pirates' operations with interest. Then she strolled slowly along the beach, looking sharply to guard against an encounter with the man, whom she still desired to evade. She wondered where he had gone. From a point which she soon gained she could see down both sides of the island, but he was not in sight. Her curiosity became acute. She continued her walk until she had entirely encompassed the island. Captain Jim had roasted a few potatoes and fried some bacon, and the choicest of the fare he had placed on a tin plate for the girl.

"We're goin' to build a raft," he informed her soon after. "When we get it built we'll go out there 'n' be picked up."

He pointed out over the lake where, two or three miles away, a trail of smoke marked the ships' highway. All that morning the pirates worked like beavers. By noon the raft was completed. With ropes and wire taken from the sloop, pieces of wreckage and driftwood had been fastened together, and in the centre of the crude craft had been erected a short mast bearing a part of the Lady Gwendolyn's sail. All of this the chief proudly pointed out to Miss Virginia.

"And do you expect me to ride on that?" she asked.

"Sure not!" replied the pirate-captain. "We're going out there 'n' stop a ship. Then we'll come back 'n' resky you." He spoke with confidence, and in watching their embarkation the girl forgot that she was being left alone with the man. Not until the pirates were well out did she think of this, and then she screamed to them and waved frantically for Captain Jim to return. The chief seemed to comprehend, for his voice came back in a faint but cheerful shout:

"He won't hurt y', Miss Virgin'y, we've settled for him!"

The girl wondered what he meant. She was not alarmed at first because she knew that the man was big enough to care for himself. But as the afternoon passed and the raft became only a speck out in the lake, a fear that something had really happened to her lover began to possess her. If the man had suddenly appeared and had held

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out his arms to her she would have gone into them promptly. Her pique had partly disappeared at breakfast that morning. It was entirely gone now. She longed for her adventure to come to an end, and with only the lonesomeness of the lake about her and that silent, mysterious bit of wilderness behind her, fear came quickly where before there had been anger and defiance. And soon after the sky darkened until it was almost as gloomy as at evening. An occasional lightning flash streaked the sky. Up out of the south came the distant rumbling of thunder. The girl wanted to cry aloud, but something seemed to command her not to break the heavy silence, that preceded the storm, so she only sobbed as she hurried around the island again. She thought of the pirates, and prayed that some ship would pick them up before the wind came. Then she looked up fearfully at the black growth of trees in the centre of the island, in which handfuls of wind flung out by the approaching tempest made mournful, thrilling sounds. Up there was her lover. Perhaps he was dead. She drew nearer until she stared wide-eyed into a thickness that was fast growing black.

"Dick!" she called softly. "Dick! Dick!" She parted a mass of bushes. One step, two, three, and she was enveloped in the gloom. Almost above her head the sky opened in a panel of fire, and there came after it a rumble of thunder that seemed to jar the earth under her feet. For a time there was so absolute that she could hear her heart.

"Dick! Dick! Where are you?"

She went in deeper. Foot by foot she penetrated, trembling, listening, until she could not tell from which direction she had come. She stumbled between rocks, she scratched her face and hands on thorn-covered vines, and then she came to an open spot. In the edge of that opening was the man. He was sitting with his back against a sapling, behind which his hands were tied. In front of him was a swaying bush, and suspended from the bush by means of a string was a chunk of bacon, at which the man was pecking like a bird. He was manoeuvring for a nibble when the girl saw him. She stood for an instant as silent as the rocks about her. Then she ran to him.

"Dick! I've found you! Thank God, I've found you!" And her arms were around him.

The next afternoon the girl and the man came close down to where the remnants of the Lady Gwendolyn lay scattered upon the beach. A quarter of a mile out a sail was bearing down upon the island. It was a trim little yacht, with canvas as white as snow; brass glittered along her gunwale, a long pennant fluttered at her peak, and suddenly, as she luffed under a gust of wind, a large square flag filled out below it. Boldly designed upon this was the skull and cross-bones.

"I told you we could depend upon Captain Jim," said the girl.

The pirate-chief was first ashore. He was very sober when he saw the man, but the girl met him with open arms.

"It's all right, James," she said, hugging him to her. "There's been an awful big mistake, dear, and when you take us ashore I'm going to marry him! And, Jim"—she hugged the astonished little fellow tighter—"you're going to be our boy now, for ever and for ever!"

"And we'll get you a bigger and better ship than any you ever had, James Falkner," the man added. "But, tell me, boy, where did you get that boat?"

The last spark of piracy in Captain Jim Falkner rose for a moment triumphant. He straightened with a bit of his old pride.

"We cut 'er out!" he said briefly.

CHAPTER III. THE FROZEN SHIP

On that unusually cold December morning it was warm and comfortable in the club-rooms down by the docks which the Master Mariners' Society maintained all the year around on the top floor of the Lake Carriers' Association building for the accommodation of ships' officers who resided near. From the large windows one could obtain an unobstructed view of the local harbour, the protecting breakwater and the tumult beyond; and on this particular morning there was that outside which greatly interested—the men who frequented those club-rooms. A hard-working tug had just nosed the big schooner Vidalia, long overdue, alongside her wharf, an object of entrancing beauty as the winter sunshine turned her ice-covered masts and rigging into sparkling gems of every known hue.

"That crew can thank whatever gods there may be to watch over the destinies of sailormen," said Captain John MacDonald quietly. "In all my forty-odd years on the lakes, I never knew of such an apparently miraculous escape," he remarked, turning about to face some dozen auditors, mostly "retired" captains, grouped near him.

"Jim! You boys better go out and watch that schooner to-day. You won't see another like it for many a year." He glanced over toward the edge of the western window where young Falkner, lately pirate-chief of the Lady Gwendolyn, and two or three of his friends were striving to see what was happening down on the Vidalia, without interfering with the prior rights of the club members who stood there.

"Reminds me of old Dan McHann's adventure in 1871," he continued, as his auditors lighted ill-smelling pipes and settled back into easy-chairs, while Jim Falkner and his pals sat down on the floor beside them, quite disregarding the old man's suggestion that they go down to the Vidalia's wharf. Captain MacDonald was a story-teller whose fame had spread far and wide along the Erie Coast, notwithstanding the fact that he sometimes sacrificed veracity in an effort to make his tales more interesting.

During the years that followed hard upon the short cruise of the Lady Gwendolyn, Jinx Falkner had been "our boy" to Dick Brown and his lovely wife, Virginia, in only a very limited sense, despite her assurance that he would ever be so regarded. Nevertheless they did take an interest in his welfare and arranged that the boy should make his home with Dick's parents while he earned his way through High School. In Dick's memory there remained a too realistic attempt by the irresponsible youngster to drop him over the side of the pirate-craft, bound hand and foot, and a too successful restraint while he was on the island where it was wrecked. These served to cool his own enthusiasm, and after all, the words of "Miss Virgin'y" were but hasty thoughts inspired by a romantic escapade that had fortunately just ended happily.

Jim Falkner was not a good student. Few of his associates, whether comrades or teachers, considered him anything but just plain dumb. His experiences in the schoolroom were of such a harrowing nature that his days there became a period of absolute drudgery and terror which he endured only because of his sponsors' obvious desire that he should do so. But early and late, in fair weather or foul, and regardless of the season, the lake drew him to its shore irresistibly. He soon came to know intimately every type of vessel that ploughed its surface, and on every ship that docked regularly in the harbour he was a welcome visitor. Sailors, more than any other class of men, quickly recognize a kindred spirit; and it was no trick at all to conclude that Jim Falkner was one of the lake breed.

His intelligent interest in the ships that paused a while inside the breakwater aroused a friendly regard for him from the men who sailed them. Little did they care for his lack of scholastic attainments; and among the older mariners who no longer walked the quarter-deck Jim Falkner quickly became and remained a prime favourite.

Masters they had been—men accustomed to command and to be obeyed! It irked them to discover in their declining years how few there are who take either boys or old men seriously, and led them at times to bewail the degenerate days upon which they had fallen. There was surcease, however, from an ever gnawing pain in the worshipful admiration of Jim Falkner. He never failed to listen with rapt attention to their oft-repeated narratives that stirred his young soul inexplicably. Those stories sent him forth grimly to endure the humdrum activities of home and school until that greatly desired day when he too could go away on one of the ships that slipped quietly over the horizon and as silently returned from unknown lands where strong heroic men might fairly expect to encounter startling experiences.

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"Aye! That was an adventure indeed," continued Captain MacDonald. "Danny never would tell his friends much about it, though; and it was only after he went down with his ship somewhere off the Thunder Bay shore that we got the particulars from his wife.

"The last ship down from Duluth floated like a great shadow in the Superior snow gloom. A million ice-devils bit and snapped at the vessel like angry dogs, and half-frozen swells swished against her in monotonous complaint because her sides were of steel. From his perch in the crow's-nest, Dan McHann could hear them, and for the twentieth time he delivered thanks into the chaos of the day that he was riding in metal instead of wood.

"Except for the sound of ceaseless strife between iron and sea, and the drifting up of voices that sounded half a league away, McHann might have imagined himself above the clouds. Falling snow shut out all vision deckward. Even the freighter's bow lights were obliterated. Above him and ahead, there was a shifting, tantalizing nothingness, into which he stared hard, a blurring sweep of snow and mist, out of which the storm wraiths formed themselves, like ghostly pictures smothered in sea foam.

"It was the man's first experience in a last trip down, and the phantoms had worked upon his nerves. He had seen ships come up out of the swirl ahead, only to dissolve before his eyes as he leaned to shriek down warning; grotesque monsters seemed created by every veer and lunge of the wind, until, at last, his vision was stung to uselessness by the intangibility of the world about him, and he bowed his head in his arms. There was relief in this. So he crumpled himself back in the nest, and cursed the greed of men who had sent him out upon this death race with vinter, for the toll from three hundred thousand bushels of grain. As he swore, he looked out again, in a fleeting, half-blind way, and, as he looked, there seemed to creep up out of the snow clouds the network of a ship, with dead-white masts and frozen shrouds. He rubbed his eyes with a mittened hand, and when he uncovered them again there fell from his lips a cry of warning that ended in a shriek.

"The blow came then. Above the rhythmic throb of the engines, and the cries of startled men below, there came a jar of mighty objects meeting, and above that the grinding, hissing rush of a thousand tons of ice. McHann reached out, but his arms were filled with air. Like a back-broken thing, he shot from the kick of the steel mast, and his wailing cry died away in the twisting whiteness of the storm. To those on the freighter who heard, it was the death call of the crow's-nest man. McHann, after that one cry, closed his mouth tight, and held a long breath; and, when he figured that he was near the end, he held out his arms to meet the ice-choked sea. In place of it he was crumpled up against something that set him rambling off into half-consciousness.

"Some time afterward, he seemed awakening from a dream. Things seemed to come and go before his eyes, and something that was growing brighter and stronger in him every moment made him feel that he was out of danger—that there were tangible objects about him, which he would reach up and investigate when the numbness went out of him. He knew that, straight above him, there towered the mast of a ship. It did not seem strange that there was no canvas about this mast, or that its spars and shrouds were thick with ice and snow. Rather, he argued in a negative way that, where there is a mast there must be a ship, and a ship is run by men. So he waited for some one to come and help him. After a little while, when his vision had grown stronger, he could see that he was under a foremast, for half-way up it was the look-out nest, and in the nest was a man. The man was leaning far out, and was beckoning to him, in a weird, aimless sort of way. McHann made a huge effort, and sat up.

"'Hello, Bill!' he called weakly.

"He grinned up at the object, and was very happy to know that he was saved. But the man aloft did not respond, though he beckoned, and his head bobbed; and, the more he beckoned and bobbed, the straighter sat Danny McHann; until, at last, he staggered to his feet, and, with his hands against the mast, stared straight up at the crow's-nest man. His senses were readjusting themselves rapidly. When he backed away through the drifted snow there was in his face the look of a man who had witnessed something bad, and a grim sort of horror was filling his soul, for he knew that man was as dead as a herring floater.

"It was only for a moment that the thing remained in his brain. He went back into the snow, and sat down, with his head between his knees. From his forehead blood dripped upon his feet. He made an effort to rise, and felt the warm flow of it over his face. Instinct, more than reason, impelled him aft. He did not know that at times he dragged himself on hands and knees through the snow, and that frequently his progressive movements were no more than convulsions, a sprawling of legs and arms and an unconscious struggle with hands and feet. When he reached the galley door, he pulled himself up to it, like a wounded animal. It was unlatched, and under his weight

burst inward.

"Danny drew in his head and shoulders, and lay upon the floor. There was warm stale air inside. His comprehension of the virtue of all things but warmth was gone. Even this warmth he seized upon, in a subconscious, worm-like way, and encouraged himself into it inch by inch, only realizing that after every effort he became more comfortable. It was a long time before he aroused himself to the meaning of things. It occurred to him for the first time that he had suffered a hurt, and that his hurt was keeping him down. So, when he strove to throw off the oppression that was binding him, it was with new caution. He lifted himself slowly, gripping at the fact that it was his head which hurt him most, and that, when he moved fast, as under the crow's-nest, he became dizzy almost to the point of nausea.

"The thought of the man in the crow's-nest set him back at the beginning of things, and when his head became clear enough he went to the door. For many minutes he stood there, listening to the creaking of ice-stiffened shrouds and staring into the ghostly gloom forward; and always his eyes circled from other things to the figure which hung against the foremast. To his disordered vision it was a shapeless, illusive blotch, suspended in the chaos of snow. After this, he searched until he knew that the silent watch and himself were the only human creatures, living or dead, who rode with the frozen ship.

"There came an overwhelming sense of drowsiness in him, so he dragged a cot into the galley and stretched himself upon it. For a long time he listened to the moaning of the gathering night-wind, the rustling run of the ice-choked sea against the wooden sides of the ship, and the crackling of frozen ropes and spars. He had to listen hard to hear these sounds. Even the ticking of his watch rose above them. This watch troubled him. Its ticking kept him awake. He pulled it from his pocket and placed it as far out on the floor as he could reach.

"When he fell back upon the cot there was a buzzing in his brain. The effort of reaching out sickened him. And it had done no good. He could hear the watch plainer than before.

"Tick! Tick! Tick!

"It seemed working in his head. The sound came louder and nearer, as though the watch was creeping across the floor to him. Soon it ceased to tick. It tapped! It was like a small hammer, beating on wood just under his ear. He dragged himself out upon the floor, and gave the watch a shove with his hand, that sent it to the opposite side of the room. When he came back, he held his breath to listen.

"Tap! Tap! Tap!

"It was still under Danny's head, so close that he thought he could feel the jar. He groped out in the darkness, as though expecting to touch some one. Then he felt under his pillow. The tapping stopped. Before it continued again he had fallen off into a stupor. The tapping under his head grew louder after that, but failed to arouse him."

Clouds had gathered over the tossing unrest beyond the breakwater, obscuring the sun, but the growing gloom in the club-rooms passed unnoticed while Captain MacDonald continued his narrative. Tim Falkner leaned forward like one entranced.

"Many hours later he opened his eyes. His face was turned to the wall. Instantly he knew that it was day, and that the cabin was filled with light. He was very comfortable, too, and the pain had gone from his head. The incidents of the evening before crowded into his memory—the ghost ships climbing, wraithlike, out of the snow gloom; then the real ship, with the thing swinging and beckoning in the crow's-nest; and, after that, his rush into what he had thought would mean eternity for him. Curious how he had landed on the deck of the abandoned schooner! There came a thought of the mysterious tapping, and he listened. The ticking of his watch came to him faintly. He held his breath—a strange thrilling sensation growing in him; another sound came to his ears, an almost inaudible sound, that seemed coming nearer and nearer to him. It was like the cautious, smothered working of human lungs—the breath of a creature struggling, like himself, to maintain silence. He turned his eyes, without moving his head, but nothing was within his vision. Still there came the soft fall of something, that might have been a bare root, and the breathlike sound near his ear ceased. With a powerful effort he nerved himself, and swung his head and shoulders around, his right arm doubled for striking.

"'Gawd!' he exclaimed. 'How you frightened me!'

"In the middle of the floor there stood a grotesque monster of a man. He was old—very old. Long grey hair fell about his shoulders. A beard almost white spread over his chest. He was a giant in breadth and height. He wore no coat, no hat, no shoes; his grimy shirt was open at the throat, the sleeves of it were torn into shreds. Enough to frighten a man at first glance, but benignity shone in the eyes as he looked down.

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"Good morning, my son!" the stranger greeted.

"Good morning!" replied McHann, as he brought himself to a sitting posture on the edge of the cot. The movement made him dizzy, and he knew that he had not fully recovered from his injury.

"I hope you are better," said the other. "You had a good sleep. I stopped work so as not to awaken you. I thought the pounding might annoy you. Have you seen my crew?" He smiled down at McHann, and there was something in the smile that made the young man shudder.

"Crew!"

"Yes, of course—my crew. Come! I'd like you to meet the boys!" he said as he walked to the door, and McHann followed him. Shoeless he trod ahead through the snow until he stood under the foremast. He pointed up to the dead man swinging in the nest.

"That's Joe, the best watch that ever run Superior!" His grey eyes were clear and expressionless, and no shadow of a smile lurked on his lips. McHann's face whitened.

"He was bad until I tied him up there—very bad! He said I wasn't captain, and wouldn't obey me. I knocked him down with a club. That's his punishment for not obeying me—no sleep, no food, work all the time!"

"The old man turned and made a new trail through the snow. Where the wheel should have been was a miniature mountain of ice, and close beside this he stopped, peering in, as though looking through a window. McHann knew what had happened. The ceaseless wash of the sea had gradually smothered the wheel in ice. The mass was higher than his head.

"Look!" cried the old man.

"McHann drew close. He stared hard into the crystal mass. He could see the outline of the big old-fashioned wheel, and beside the wheel was a shadow—a horrible, spectre-like shadow that his vision soon formed into the shape of a man. One arm of it reached out and gripped a spoke of the wheel; its head, hatless, was inclined forward, as though watchful eyes were peering into a danger lurking sea; from the waist down it was lost in the opaque whiteness of the mass.

"That's Tom!" whispered a terrible voice. "Ugh! But he was a hard one! 'Twas an awful task to master him. Once he nearly had me—but I gripped him by the throat and hung like a dog. Then I tied him there. He's a clever wheelman. Ain't you, Tom? Eh?" A hard, cackling laugh sounded so close that McHann shivered. He could feel the other's hot breath on his neck.

"Tom thought he was captain of the ship. I think he was a little wrong in his head. The queen thought he was captain, too. So did Joe. They were all wrong!"

"The queen!" echoed McHann.

"Yes, the queen!" The old man drew McHann about. "A strange glow had come into his eyes. The grip of his fingers was like that of a steel clamp.

"You know that I'm captain here, don't you?" he asked; and as McHann nodded, the grip on his arm loosened.

"Does the queen?" he dared softly.

"The old man's yellow teeth showed in a leering grin. "Yes. She does now. Would you like to meet the queen?"

"Without waiting for an answer he turned in the direction of the galley. Inside he motioned McHann to seat himself on a cot. For a few moments he stood looking down upon him. In his eyes there came slowly a dull, threatening fire; his bony fingers crooked themselves until his hands looked like talons, his breath came quickly, and his huge form seemed nerving itself for a spring.

"I'm the captain, you say?" he demanded again.

"Of course you're the captain!" cried McHann.

"He tried to laugh, but he knew that something akin to terror filled his face. He saw the talon-like fingers relax. The old man turned slowly away, and with one of his bare feet kicked aside a piece of rag carpet that lay near the galley stove. The movement exposed a trap. He raised this, and step by step, descended through the opening, evidently by means of a ladder. At last only his great head remained above the floor. For an instant he stared hard at McHann—then disappeared.

"The other was listening! Then there came the fall of bare feet, gradually dying away, and then—

"A thrill shot through McHann. He heard voices; the shrill frightened cry of a woman—and then a sound of scuffling. Again came the cry, muffled, choking—and there went out from McHann an answering yell that boomed through the hold of the ship like the report of a gun. He shot down through the trap, and another cry burst

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from his lips as he landed. For an instant he stood silent to get his bearings. Not a sound came from the dense blackness about him.

"Where are you?" he cried. "Where—"

"He did not finish. Instinctively he felt that something was very near him, and coming nearer—something living and breathing like himself, and with him as its objective. He half crouched, as if to meet an enemy, and soon he was sure that he heard a sound. It became more, and more distinct, and the sweat burst from his tense muscles. It was the ticking of a watch! Foot by foot the tell-tale sound approached him until he knew that he could almost reach out and touch the creature that was creeping upon him. Then it stopped. He could feel that the other was gathering himself for a spring. A second more and he had launched himself into action. One arm and a knotted fist shot out with terrific force, but the blow missed, and McHann stumbled and pitched to his knees with the weight of it.

"Before he could rise the other was upon him with a mad, half-human cry. His long fingers clutched the sailor's throat; his huge form crushed down upon him like a weight of iron. With a sidewise wrench McHann twisted himself until he could throw an arm around the old man's neck, tightening the grip until the other gave a choking gasp. The fingers at his throat closed in like pieces of steel. He relinquished his hold; in a frenzied fight for breath he tore with both hands at the clutch that was throttling him—in his dizzy brain there rang the cackling triumphant laugh of the madman. He fell forward upon his face; his arms sprawled out powerless, there came a splitting pain in his head, and a sound like the rushing, hissing roar of a cataract drowned his senses. Again, as if coming to him through a great void, he heard that gloating laugh.

"The first thing after this of which McHann became conscious was a face. It seemed to be very near to his own—a staring, wild-eyed face, sometimes so close that he imagined he could feel the breath of it, at others slipping away until it dissolved into air. Twice he saw its lips move, as if speaking to him, but his eyes closed, and his ears seemed powerless to grasp sound. At last it appeared to him with vivid distinctness, a thin terrified face of starved whiteness, with dark wide eyes burning into his own. With a powerful effort he dragged himself another step into consciousness. He realized then that the face was down from him; that somebody was crouching upon the floor at his knees, and that the face was that of a girl.

"You're—the queen?" he managed. It was the first thought that came to him. He could scarcely hear himself because of the dizzy sickness he was struggling to overcome. A weight rested upon his knees, and the face came nearer to him.

"I feared he had killed you! Oh, if I could only help you—get you water—"

"The words helped to drag Danny from his stupor. He attempted to straighten himself and found that something held him from behind. His thoughts returned to him quickly now. He was tied in a chair. His hands were bound. In an instant the situation flashed upon him. He looked about for the old man. Then his eyes rested upon the upturned face of the girl. He was struck with the beauty of it, the terror in it and the feverish lustre that shone in her eyes.

"He's down there!" she whispered, and turned on her knees so that she might point to the open trap. Then McHann saw that her hands were tied. "He's mad! He's sinking the ship! Oh, God—"

"She looked up at him wildly.

"McHann listened. From beneath him there came the peculiar tapping of the night before. The girl heard, and shuddered.

"Hear him pounding? He's digging a hole through the bottom! It's almost—through—" Suddenly she raised herself until her bound hands rested against McHann's breast. "Tell me," she breathed, "has he—killed them?"

"McHann knew what she meant. His own hands were tied behind him, but he leaned over until his face swept her tumbled hair.

"Who—killed who?" he asked.

"Tom—and the others. Tom is my brother. This is his ship. Johnson was the wheelman—and he went mad. One morning he came to me and said that he had killed them all during the night, and that the ship was his—that he would not kill me, but would take me to the bottom of the sea with him! Tell me—"

"From out of the trap there came the cackling laugh of the madman. With a frightened cry the girl dragged herself to the edge of the cot and drew herself upon it. Scarcely had she done so when Johnson's head appeared through the opening. His lips were drawn back over his yellow teeth; a terrible gleam filled the eyes that fell upon

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McHann. 'We'll soon be going,' he said. 'It's coming in fast. Listen!'

"Faintly there came to McHann's ears a sound which he knew was the intruding of the sea. The old man laughed gleefully. For a few moments he stood with his head and shoulders out of the trap; then he slowly descended. McHann strained on the thongs which bound him. In his effort the chair toppled over with him, and he fell face down upon the floor. He was surprised at his weakness. Vainly he struggled to bring himself to his knees, and at last rolled upon his side, facing the girl. "There's a knife!" he gasped, nodding toward the stove. 'Can you—get it?'

"Instantly the girl slipped from the cot and began crawling across the floor. She moved by inches. Her long hair dragged under her knees. At the stove she reached up and gripped the knife between her two hands.

"Quick!" whispered McHann. 'Quick—'

"Soon she reached the cord that bound his wrists. He could feel the knife sawing upon the cord. How light the pressure was! Each second seemed a minute—each minute an hour.

"Is it cutting?" he asked.

"A little!" came the girl's voice, replying in a terrified whisper. McHann could hear her breathing hard at his back. He strained at the thongs to tighten them, and never for an instant did his eyes leave the black opening of the trap. Each moment the sound of water pouring into the hold came to him more distinctly. A dozen times he fancied he heard the old man climbing up the ladder. Once the thrilling triumphant laugh came to him as if from amidships. He twisted his head about, and looked up at the girl.

"It's almost through!" she answered.

"There came a sudden snap, and Danny's hands were free. Quickly he cut the ropes about his waist and feet and freed the girl. Then he rose to his feet, gripping the knife, and staggered to the edge of the trap. Again came the terrible laugh from below. It was nearer than before.

"He's coming!"

"McHann swayed. He was conscious of an almost overmastering dizziness. The girl saw his weakness and caught him by the arm. 'Come with me—quick!' She pulled him toward the galley door. 'You're hurt. We must get to the boat——'

"McHann followed, resisting slightly. The girl's strength seemed greater than his own. 'Guess I am,' he acknowledged weakly. 'Didn't know he got me so hard.'

"Danny stumbled out into the snow, the girl darting ahead of him to the schooner's small boat, swinging in davits amidships. When he came to her she was tearing with her naked hands at the tarpaulin covering which protected it from the wash of the sea. Even as they pulled off the sheet, a yell of rage sounded from the cabin. In a last tremendous effort McHann caught the girl in his arms and lifted her into the boat. Then he swung the davit arms out over the sea. Behind him Johnson appeared in the galley door. Where the two ends of the falls were tied the sailor slashed blindly with his knife, and the boat pitched downward. A single glance behind—a vision of the great grey giant within a dozen feet of him—a cry of warning to the girl, and McHann flung himself over the side.

"Half an hour later McHann lifted himself on his elbow. With a piece of her dress the girl had been bathing the blood from his face.

"She's getting pretty low!" he said, as for the hundredth time they turned their eyes in the direction of the sinking schooner. She lay three-quarters of a mile away, with the sun lighting up her glistening shrouds.

"A little sob broke from the lips of the girl. McHann, sitting up, took one of her cold little hands and held it tightly in both of his own.

"Tom was the only one I had on earth. If he's gone—"

"Yes, he's gone, but I'm going to take you to one of the dearest mothers in the world," said McHann softly. 'She's waiting for me at Algonac, and perhaps—'

"He stopped. The end of the distant ship had come. For a time only her spars seemed riding above the sea, and these went down slowly, until the black of Superior rose and fell where they had been.

"Got off just in time, didn't we?" asked Danny cheerfully.

"From the girl's staring face McHann turned his eyes toward the Michigan shore and wondered how long it would take him to row that distance."

CHAPTER IV. CAPTAIN KIDD OF THE UNDERGROUND

There were at least seven Lake Erie ports that might have claimed Captain Kidd as a citizen, for the reason that this unusual individual was a frequenter of them all, though he owned property in none. In these seven towns there were seven thousand or more people who could have pointed out Captain Kidd on sight, but it is doubtful if there were more than seven who could truthfully have said that they were personally acquainted with the man and his ship, especially the ship, and not one of these could have sworn as to Captain Kidd's method of making a livelihood. Some thought that he carried sand. Others were of the opinion that his ship was a tramp. And a few, very few, winked in a peculiarly non-committal way when the subject was raised, as is the habit of old lakemen in doubt. But the people of busy lakeports are too deeply absorbed during the months of navigation to prod into another man's business unless there are dollars and cents at the bottom of it, and as a result the skipper of the Lauraline Spreckles, abbreviated the Laura Spreck by her master and owner, was allowed to seek his ways in undisturbed peace.

That disinclination to investigate on the part of people who found making a living to be a rather difficult undertaking at best explains why it was that Jim Falkner had become a coal passer on Captain Kidd's ship during the summer following his graduation from High School. After all, it wasn't the business of any one in particular to warn an orphan boy,—especially when no one knew for certain that any danger was to be anticipated.

Their habit of minding their own business exclusively was properly appreciated by Captain Kidd, who frequently gave thanks, therefore, to the Providence which guided his fortunes. On the other side of the lake, where in a bleak stretch of the Canadian shore terminated the famous underground railway which began in Peking, Hong-Kong and Shanghai, Captain Kidd was reputed to have done things which would have won him a life of considerable monotony, if Uncle Sam had known. This, too, was a fact properly digested by the cheerful adventurer. Meanwhile he continued to smuggle Chinamen and now and then a Chinese girl.

This afternoon Captain Kidd was in a more reflective mood than usual. Ostensibly he was taking up sand. The Laura Spreck lay three-quarters of a mile off a barren stretch of Ontario dunes and marshes, over which the day was fading away in fiery sunset. Back of him the grey rib-line of Point Pelee trembled like a thread of desert sand in the haze that was shifting seaward from the marshes of Pigeon Bay. This rib-line, which reminded him of the slim white forefinger of a lady's hand, was indissolubly associated with the fortunes of Captain Kidd. Among its barren drifts he had added to his sins; in its loneliness he had piled up the hoard of gold which no man knew but himself. To him it was the visible end of the underground. That mysterious chain of human mechanisms might begin almost anywhere outside the country of which he was a subject, but it ended there. From that point the yellow-skinned contraband came to him, and as he half dreamed now in watching its thin outline, he thought of the secrets that it held for him. From it he had taken Hop Lee, a cousin of Mock Duck, who had paid five thousand dollars to the head agent for his relative's importation. Hop Lee had taken up with his famous cousin's life in San Francisco, and presently had become one of the most proficient murderers in his tong. Then there was honest "Joe" Tung, who now owned three laundries in Buffalo, and who annually sent him a present of fifty dollars because of prosperity and gratitude; and there were two score or more others of whom he had lost all account. Now and then there had been a girl, but he could only wonder where these had gone, and each time one of them came to him through the underground his rough heart ached with sympathy.

It was a girl he was waiting for now. For weeks Captain Kidd had been working up an interest in her. There were certain reasons why he had come to anticipate the time when he would see Ah Ho, as she was named to him in his instructions. In the first place, he was interested in her story. Ah Ho, a letter from the agent at Hong-Kong had told him, was one of Canton parents. Her father was an official of some dignity in a small town, and Ah Ho, he stated at some length, was very beautiful, for which reason the underground charged a big price for her importation. A dozen years before, when her father needed money in order to achieve a certain ambition, the girl had been disposed of to a wealthy and aged Chicago Chinaman named Tai Sing, and after giving her an opportunity to grow up, Tai Sing was now claiming her. A copy of the cable-message from Hong-Kong stated that she had sailed on the Star of the Orient, and still later advice assured Captain Kidd that she had arrived safely in Vancouver. After that she had been passed like a precious parcel along the underground. The head agent in

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Montreal had reported that Ah Ho was in the city. The latest despatch read, "Embarked in regular channel, Friday, six p.m." This was Friday. It was five-thirty p.m. If all had gone well, a signal of Ah Ho's presence would be shown among the sand-dunes within the next thirty minutes. Arousing himself from his restless contemplation of the shore, Captain Kidd swung down among his men. His strong thin face was now lit up with eager anticipation. He bared his large teeth in a cheerful smile as he nodded to Stetson, the greybeard engineer. Stetson grinned joyfully, and hurried off to his engines. Jim Falkner followed him with the genuine enthusiasm of all adventurers under twenty. There were two men left; old Grimmsey, the wheelman, whose boast was that he could walk his ship in and out of corners of Lake Erie blindfolded, and Watts, the mate.

"We'll have to pull in pretty close to see the signal, Watts," announced the captain. "I think it'll come from the edge of the marshes."

He went with Grimmsey into the wheel-house, and the electric bell down in the engine-room tinkled his orders to Stetson. Over the bow of the Laura Spreck he watched Pelee's rib-line of sand as it broadened out under his advance. The sun had now reached the water-rim. In its last glow the shore burned for a few minutes more brilliantly than before, and the wind-swept tops of the sand-dunes reflected the light as though each were capped with a million infinitesimal mirrors.

In this interval, when half of the bay was losing itself in the gloom of the evening, a carriage toiled slowly up over the backbone of the point and for a moment stood motionless on its crest, silhouetted in black against the glow of the western sky. Captain Kidd leaned out eagerly. He strained his eyes for a signal, and fingered word down to Stetson to stop the engines. As he looked, three men sprang from the carriage, and he caught the glint of rifle barrels in their hands. They threw themselves upon their faces, and sent a fusillade of shots over the sand-ridge. In another instant the carriage was tearing down to the beach, and while the captain of the smuggler still leaned over the edge of the wheel-house and stared, his face tense, his breath coming quickly, the three men rose against the sky-line and raced after the horses.

Captain Kidd turned for the space in which one might flip an eyelash. That lightning glance assured him that toward the open lake the way was clear. When he turned again to the tragedy ashore the carriage had come down to the edge of the water. It had plunged in to the hubs, and as the frightened horses reared in the surf a boat shot out toward the fugitives from the reeds of the marsh. Then again the sky-line was broken, this time by a horseman. Two of the three riflemen were waiting for him on bended knee, and even before the reports of their rifles sounded in Captain Kidd's ears the pursuer lurched from his saddle and fell upon the sand, where he lay motionless blot. Two female figures jumped from the carriage into the water, and waded out to meet the approaching boat. Close after them came the armed fugitives, and barely had they scrambled over the side of the craft when half a dozen horsemen tore over the sand-ridge.

Captain Kidd heaved a deep sigh as he faced Grimmsey. The hardness had gone out of his face. "A close shave," he breathed. "A damned close shave, Grim!"

Five minutes later the boat ran alongside, and Captain Kidd recognized the chief matron of the underground in her bow. He had met this woman many times, and when he carried female passengers she always accompanied him. She called up to him now from the gloom gathering under the starboard bow.

"You'll have to take us all, Captain Kidd," she cried.

"Certainly, Miss Moore," replied the captain. "Come aboard, all of you. I'll land you gentlemen a few miles down the shore. Of course you understand that under ordinary circumstances I never allow a man on my deck—unless he's a passenger."

"A Chinaman he means," explained the matron with emphasis. As she came over the side of the ship she whispered low:

"They discovered our movements in Montreal, Captain. We didn't know it until the last moment, and then we thought we could beat them out. It will be surprising if we don't have a revenue cutter at our heels before long."

Somebody lifted up Ah Ho, and Captain Kidd leaned over to take her in his arms. He felt her warm breath against his rough cheek as he hoisted her over the rail. He stared hard as he released her on deck, but a thin veil and the gloom of evening baffled his attempt to see her face. He was conscious that she had been like a feather in his arms, and that something had thrilled him for a moment as he held her. He had thought much about Ah Ho. As she slipped away beside the matron he did not doubt but that she was beautiful, but the Hong-Kong agent was a half-breed, and spelled beauty in a different language from his. Anyway, he wanted to see Ah Ho.

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"Watts, see 'em to the private room," he said to the mate, who stood near.

The matron laughed back shrilly from the gathering shadows amidships. "He needn't mind," she called; "I know the way."

The men from the boat had scrambled aboard. One of them introduced himself as the new Montreal sub-agent, and then presented his comrades.

Captain Kidd pointed to the rifles which they carried. "You may have to use them before morning," he suggested.

After a little he instructed Watts as to the course to be pursued by the Laura Spreck, and retired to his cabin. The matron had preceded him and sat at his table coolly sorting a number of papers. As he entered she looked up and nodded smilingly. Over the captain's shoulder she caught a glimpse of the sub-agent's boyish face peering in inquiringly, and called out for him to enter.

"I want you to talk with Wilson, Captain," she begged. "Wilson and I are great chums, and I've promised that some day we'd tell him things about the lakes. He's almost a Chinaman. He's lived in Hong-Kong ever since he was so high." She measured to her knee.

With his big white teeth shining in the glow of the cabin-lamp Captain Kidd held out a frank hand. "I'm going there some day, Mr. Wilson," he said. "I've always had a hankering to see both ends of the workings."

The woman shot the sub-agent a lightning glance from behind the captain's back. "Captain Kidd knows more about the underground on this side than any other man," she said sweetly. "There was McVeigh—but he's dead." Her eyes scintillated at the sub-agent. Suddenly she gave a hysterical little laugh, and when the captain turned in her direction her face was buried in her arms. "Ugh-h-h-h! That back there has shattered my nerves!" she moaned. When she looked up her face was flushed instead of pale. "We had to kill a man—perhaps two," she said. "You must talk to me, Captain, or I'll go into hysterics. Tell me something, anything. Wilson wants to hear, too."

"Hear what?" grinned the captain.

"About the underground, of course!" blurted the sub-agent.

Captain Kidd leaned toward him. The smile left his face. His eyes shone harshly. "I never talk about that," he said. There was a warning in his voice. He would have said more, but his ears caught the cry of a man outside, a cry which he recognized, and the meaning of which he read in the sub-agent's flinching eyes and pale cheeks. He wheeled upon the woman and met her smiling at him over a pistol barrel.

"What do you mean—" he began.

"It means," the woman interrupted him, "—it means that I've grown tired of it all, Captain Kidd; that I've turned State's evidence to save myself; that—"

Captain Kidd turned his head slowly. The sub-agent had him covered from behind.

"It means," continued the woman, "that the fight on shore was a ruse; that the men out there are secret-service agents; that you're going to be extradited; and that your crew—"

"And Ah Ho?" he interrupted. He faced the woman, gripping the edges of the table fiercely. "What about Ah Ho?"

"Oh, she's all right," laughed the matron nervously. "She'll make splendid evidence, Captain. She thinks we're all her friends, poor thing, and that—"

The woman stopped. Captain Kidd had stretched out his arms to her, his face filled with the agony of his helplessness.

"Nell!" he cried, his voice pleading. "Nell, I didn't expect it of you! Oh, God, how I've loved you, Nell, and how I've wanted to tell you—a dozen times—a hundred times—but I've waited—" In his despair he seemed to stagger as he approached her. The woman rose. She dropped her pistol upon the table, and her breath came in hurried gasps. "Nell! Nell! Don't say you've turned traitor to me!" he pleaded. "Kill me, Nell, kill me—kill me—but don't—say—that!" He came nearer, until his hands touched the woman. Then, in an instant, he was in his arms. It was as if a vice of steel were rushing the life from her body. Over her shoulder Captain Kidd's face shone triumphantly at the secret-service man. The woman was a shield. For a moment he groped under his coat with one free hand. Then there came a flash of steel, a sharp report, and the white-faced man in front crumpled up with the venom of lead in his vitals.

"Love you!" hissed the captain in the woman's unhearing ears. "Love you, you she-fiend! I knew you would

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do this some day. I guessed it was coming!" His fingers gripped her throat for a moment; then he flung her insensible form to the floor, as a heavy knock sounded from without. Captain Kidd moved like a cat, silently, swiftly. In his day—dreams he had wondered if something like this would not happen, and long ago he had prepared for it. Before the knock was repeated he had snatched up a rug, disclosing a trap-door. In a moment the black exit lay open before him. He could hear men straining at the door, and there was an unpleasant smile in his eyes and something dazzlingly dangerous in the gleam of his strong teeth, as he paused for an instant, half crouched for the retreat. Unhesitatingly he aimed at the middle panel of the door and fired twice. After that he slipped quickly through the hole into the passageway, and locked the trap-door behind him.

"Now, Chinkey," he spoke softly, "it's for you."

He made his way through the passage, his right shoulder brushing against the inner timbers of the ship's hull, his left against the bulkhead. He was now walking with the vessel's deck just above his head, and by the steps he had taken he knew when he had reached the secret chamber containing Ah Ho. After a little he found a bolt. This he drew back noiselessly. Imperceptibly at first he pushed in a door. A gleam of light caught his eye. There was absolute silence. A twentieth of an inch, a tenth, a half, then an inch, the aperture grew. He saw one wall of the room, the door, finally Ah Ho. The girl was crouching in a listening attitude, her face turned toward the hold of the ship. Captain Kidd knew that she had heard the shots. "Chinkey," he called in a low voice. "Chinkey!" At the sound of his voice the girl's white face turned straight toward him. She uttered no sound, but terror was rooted in her big dark eyes. Those eyes puzzled Captain Kidd. He could not see her face distinctly, but the eyes fascinated him. He could not remember having seen a Chinese girl with eyes like Ah Ho's.

"Don't you be afraid, Chinkey," he said soothingly, thrusting his head and shoulders out into the room. "They think they've got us, but they ain't!" He pulled himself through, and sprang to the door. As he shot the bolt which secured it from the inside he heard a distant crash. "That's the cabin-door, Chinkey," he cried. "We'll fool 'em yet, Chinkey, an' th' won't be nobody left to tell how we did it!"

As he carried her under the swinging lamp, Ah Ho's veil fell aside, and Captain Kidd caught a glimpse of her face. "The deuce, Chinkey! You are pretty, s'elp me; you are!" he exclaimed. He thrust her through the trap and followed after. "It's darker'n seven devils, ain't it?" he asked. "Where's your hand, Chinkey?" He squeezed past her and groped under the cape of the long coat which the agents of the underground furnished her, until her little trembling fingers lay gripped in his big palm; then he gently pulled the girl after him.

Back of him he heard voices echoing in the passageway. "They've found the trap!" he whispered. "God, what a chance to even up!" For a moment his blood burned with a desire to turn and, in the narrow passage, wreck vengeance upon those who had overcome him by treachery. He levelled his revolver over Ah Ho's head, and held it there, with Ah Ho trembling close up against him, until he saw a streak of light at the other end.

"They're coming, Chinkey," he breathed. "Now we've got to hustle!"

He continued down the passage until his outstretched hand touched a wall. Beyond this he could hear the throbbing of the ship's engines. For a moment he listened to it, and for the sound of voices behind. "They think I'm layin' for 'em in the passage," he whispered joyfully. "They don't dare follow us, Chinkey!" He dropped Ah Ho's hand, and ran his fingers over the wall until they found a lock. Slowly he drew the bolt. Then with a sudden thrust of his shoulder he burst open the door, and his tense face stared out over his pistol barrel into the glare of the engine-room. Hopefully his eyes sought for Stetson and Billy. Both were gone, and in Stetson's place he saw one of the men who had come with the matron. There was promise of deadly accuracy in Captain Kidd's aim, and the revenue man threw up his arms without delay. The smuggler grinned approvingly as he came out, with Ah Ho close behind.

"Guess you'd better git out," he invited. "That's the best way." He nodded toward the passage. There was a dangerous glitter in the eyes behind the gun, and the officer obeyed. "Tell your friends I'm down here waitin' for 'em," said Captain Kidd as he slammed the door. In an instant he had whirled upon Ah Ho. "Quick—this way I" he cried. He caught her almost roughly, and half dragged her to a partly open door aft of the engines, through which he thrust her ahead of him. The girl stumbled and fell over a pile, of litter, but her companion seemed not to have noticed the mishap. Ah Ho could hear him tugging at a heavy object, and soon she saw him roll something big and round out through the door. He came back like a shadow, and a second and a third object were rolled after the first. Then there came the crashing of an axe, the rattle of shattered glass, and a moment later utter darkness, as Captain Kidd sprang back and closed the door.

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"It's done, Chinkey!" he cried, groping for her.

Ah Ho stretched up her hands, and Captain Kidd gathered her close in his arms. "They've got all that's coming to 'em, now, Chinkey!" he continued excitedly. "Smell it, girl! D'ye smell it?" He sniffed the air, already impregnated with a biting, unpleasant odour. "They're carb'ys of acid, Chinkey! God, I figured this was comin' some day!" He left her standing, and with the butt of his revolver hammered upon metal in the side of the hull. Soon had driven back a number of hooks and now swung open a port as large as one of the traps through which they had escaped.

"See the stars out there, Chinkey?" he whispered, making room for Ah Ho at his side. "Well, you'n me'll soon be as free—"

At the head of the engine-room he could hear the excited shouts of men. But they came no nearer. Even Ah Ho knew why. Through the cracks of the cubby-room door the acid fumes were pouring stronger each moment. The girl coughed, and clutched Captain Kidd's arm. The light from outside shone upon her upturned face, and there the man read something of what was passing in her soul. He realized for the first time that this was all a great mystery to her, and that she could only guess at the significance of the shots ashore, the hurried flight to the vessel, and his actions now. But she trusted him. He could see that in her eyes. Her mouth was round and red, like a rose, Captain Kidd thought, even in that moment, and he saw it tremble as he looked down into her face.

"Chinkey, d'ye know I'm beginning to have a deuced chummy feeling for you," he said. "You're a game little girl, if you are a Chink; and I swear I'll feel a bit rummy when I deliver you to that yellow-skinned old cuss who's buying you over there!" He stuck his head out of the port and looked up. The aft boat was swinging low in her davits. By hoisting himself partly through the opening Captain Kidd reached an iron ring under the rail of the ship and drew himself cautiously out until his free hand gripped the falls. For a few moments he listened, almost ceasing to breathe. Amidships he heard the crash of an axe and voices that came to him indistinctly. But the stern of the smuggler seemed deserted. Unlooping the falls, he held the ropes taut while he retreated through the port. Then, with arms and shoulders out, he lowered the boat until it swung within a foot of the water.

"Chinkey!" he whispered.

He slipped the ropes under the swing of the port-door, and lifted Ah Ho through. As her feet touched the boat he released his hold and climbed out himself. He half hung in the porthole, listening for the explosion which he knew would come soon, until the fumes of the acid drove him down. Crouching beside Ah Ho, he loosed the falls, and the small boat plunged into the tumultuous trail of the ship, which dragged out behind like a molten river tossing in the face of the moon. A shout of triumph half rose in the throat of Captain Kidd, but when his lips parted it came only in a throttled, inarticulate cry. He leaned out until the crests of the waves swept their spray into his eyes. His lean, white face was alight with a passion as hard as the glint of the pistol barrel which reached out toward the Laura Spreck. The ship was dissolving into a shadow, and before it disappeared Captain Kidd longed to let those upon it know that he had beaten them. He thought of the woman who had betrayed him, and the desire became overwhelming. For a moment he hesitated, and in that moment he fancied he heard a rumbling from here the lights were slipping away into the gloom of the night. When he was sure of it, he sprang up tall and gaunt between Ah Ho and the moon, and tossed his long arms over his head with a far-reaching cry of joy. Then he sat down, and Ah Ho crept to him and remained unnoticed for a time in a trembling heap. When the man turned from his lost ship she was staring straight up at him.

"Didn't you hear it, Chinkey?" he asked. He leaned over and tilted the girl's face up by placing his forefinger under her chin, much as if she had been a child. "Didn't you hear it, Chinkey? That was the acid getting next to the boiler fires! You'll soon see it. Look!" He stretched out an arm, and Ah Ho drew herself up beside his knee to get the direction. "Mebby you've never seen anything like what's going to happen," he spoke reassuringly, "but don't get scared. They'll get off all right, because there's two rafts and another boat on board." An understanding came to her that something was going to happen somewhere out in the gloom and shut out the vastness of the lake, and she watched for it with the tragic eagerness of the man.

"It's coming—soon!" whispered the man. His words were tremulous with excitement. "It's coming, Chinkey."

A mile away a tiny red streak seemed to split the blackness. Ah Ho felt him twitch as though he had been stung. She turned her face to him instinctively, and when she looked back the red streak had grown into a lurid glare with twisting flashes of flame shooting skyward. And as those flames grew higher and higher and the glare spread until half the lake seemed lit up by it, she snuggled close to Captain Kidd in her wonderment and terror,

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and the captain, opening both arms, held her so close that when all was over and only a dull glow lasted in the distance Ah Ho was almost breathless from the embrace.

"She's gone, Chinkey," he said. For many minutes he remained silent, until even the glow was out of the sky; then he set Ah Ho down in the bottom of the boat and leaned over until his face was very near to her own. "I'm going, too, Chinkey," he continued. "I've got to. Everybody'll know who Captain Kidd is now, 'n' there's fifty years o' bars waiting for me if I go back there I" He swept an arm toward the American shore. "I'll miss the old ship like the devil, but I don't know but I'll miss you more, Chinkey."

Suddenly he reached out and took Ah Ho's face in both of his hands. "Listen, Chinkey!" he cried. "In the sand over there on the point I've buried all I ever made—and it's a plenty. The sand was safer'n banks, mind you, seeing as I was Cap'n Kidd, and I'm going for it—now I And when I get it I'm going to take you to a place away off there—so far up that it's cold most all the year round, and then—and then, Chinkey—"

He drew the girl's face so close to his own that his lips touched it, "And then I'm going to teach you American, 'n' you're going to teach me Chink, and between us I'm going to find out darned soon how bad you hate that yellow-hided cuss who bought you. An' I reckon, Chinkey, that I've got enough to pay your family's debt."

With a cheery heigh-ho Captain Kidd unlocked the boat's oars, turned his broad back upon Ah Ho, and struck out for the sand-dunes of Point Pelee.

CHAPTER V. THE LAST MOMENT

Jim Falkner did get away from the burning Lauraline Spreckles, just as Captain Kidd predicted. With the remaining members of the crew, he climbed upon one of the rafts. Meanwhile the immigration inspectors escaped in the boat that had been left when Ah Ho was spirited away and apparently lost in the rapidly falling darkness.

No really worth-while purpose would have been served by taking the crew into custody after Captain Kidd himself had escaped; so the inspectors contented themselves with a sharp warning and set off in search of the one whom they had striven so hard to capture for many months. Next morning a passing steamer picked up the sailors and landed them in Sandusky. Another incident in the drama of life on the Inland Seas where truth is indeed stranger than fiction.

Masters of the ships that pass and repass on the fresh-water oceans of America are much more concerned about the physical development of the individuals constituting the crews than they are about their several reputations. They can know but little about any man they select. He is not likely to be with the vessel for more than one season—perhaps for only a single trip—and time presses. There are only a few months in which to earn dividends for the owners safe ashore.

Jim Falkner, therefore, found it very easy—with his youth, his straightforward appearance and splendid physique—to become a member of the crew of the sloop Ventura, sailing on the morrow for Green Bay. Fortune smiled all the way across the treacherous expanse of Erie as they moved slowly up the river, passed Detroit, and crept across the smooth expanse of Lake St. Clair, while winding through the flats and in fact, until the heavily laden craft had left astern the lightship which guards the channel through the swiftly shifting bars at the extreme southern end of Lake Huron.

But just as Sarnia faded away in the distance fair weather suddenly ended and a cold wind from out of Georgian Bay quickly replaced the warm breezes which had theretofore accompanied the Ventura. Before midnight a storm of hurricane character was requiring of Captain Tom Connoly the exercise of all the seamanship he had learned in twenty years, man and boy, of sailing on the Inland Seas.

By noon on the fourth day the plunging schooner had progressed far northward over the tumultuous waters of Lake Huron, but it had become evident, even to young Jim Falkner, that this was to be the last voyage of the Ventura. Flick, the second officer, sent him in to urge upon Captain Connoly the need for his immediate presence on deck.

Returning, his head and shoulders just out of the cabin, Falkner was in time to see Svenson burst like a maniac from the group of men fighting like shadows in the mist at the forward pump. He caught faintly the savage yell of defiance as Flick ran out from among the shadows and intercepted the giant Swede with a blow from a knotted fist that sent him reeling into the drowning wash of the sea. He shouted and struggled toward the fighting mate as the little grey man followed up Svenson's huge bulk, like a terrier; but other figures staggered out of the blinding spume, naked-armed, bare-chested, with Svenson's panic gleaming in their eyes. Flick saw the fear-crazed sailor as he came rushing back across the deck, the other sailors clearly bent on aiding the Swede, but he planted his back against the port davit, where the tops of the seas swept over him in smothering rushes, prepared to resist the mutiny as long as possible.

"They've left the pumps!" he shouted to Captain Connoly as he came up. "I'm damned—" But at that moment a ton of water breaking over the rail sent the mate reeling out among the men. He picked himself up and staggered to Connoly, his thin, grey-bearded face questioning him eagerly.

"She's a little better, boys I" shouted the captain. "But we can't take her out into that I" He pointed out into the greyness of the sea, broken only by the foaming tops that rode rail high with the ship.

"My God, men, no boat would live—"

The voice of a seaman replied almost in a shriek, "We're full! We're full to a foot of the hatches, I tell y' I She's got to go now or never."

There was sullen assent in a dozen water-blistered eyes. From early morning until noon these men had clung to a sinking ship because each cherished in him the memory of some kindly and thoughtful action by a woman. Because of her they had fought until their hands bled and their breath came in gasps. They had watched the

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schooner settle inch by inch and foot by foot, struggling stubbornly for the precious minutes which would give life to her, until arms hung limp and effortless and men fell exhausted upon the deck, when others took their turns at the pumps. And above them all Svenson had worked and urged and cursed those whose nerve began to fail them until, when the last minute seemed riding on each white-crested rush of the sea, something broke within him, and he turned in his despair to the boats. It was Svenson now who rushed to the falls. In an instant Connolly was among the panic-stricken men.

"You can't live in that sea!" he shouted. "Fight it out another hour, men—one more hour!" The black cook had drawn a knife to cut the davit ropes, but the captain dragged him back by the throat.

"You will stay!" he shrieked with an oath. From behind him he heard Svenson's loud call for help, and as he stumbled to the deck with the cook he saw that the Swede had slipped his end of the falls and was straining at the ropes to keep the boat from being rammed by the heads of the seas. Even as he freed himself of the negro a huge sweep of water shot up like a geyser from the schooner's side, hurling the bow of the small boat up the deck and hitting Svenson a blow that sent him half amidships. The tackle had slipped from its block, leaving the ropes and davit useless, and commanded by the voice of the crazed Swede, the demoralized crew rushed across to the starboard boat. Captain Connolly had missed Flick, and now the little old mate came running from the cabin with a revolver in his hand. The captain went between him and the men.

"Let 'em go, Flick!" he cried. "They're leaving the other boat. Let 'em go. They're mad!"

Slowly Flick backed to the port side, his pistol cocked, watching the men to starboard like a cat. For a few moments he stood there, his weather-whitened eyes never for an instant off the thrilling scene before him; then he turned to the abandoned boat, and as he leaned over to begin the readjustment of the tackle a cry as filled with madness as that of Svenson's fell from his lips. He whirled about with his revolver on a dead level, but was a moment too late. As the report of the shot sounded faintly above the thunder of the sea the starboard boat, filled with half-mad men, slipped down into the grey mist, and when Flick reached the empty falls he could only blaze away at a pitching shadow that was losing itself in the gloom. Captain Connolly caught him by the arm, and, like one dazed by a sudden blow, Flick slowly faced him.

"Tom, she's—stove in!"

There was a terror in his eyes that Connolly could not fail to understand. He knew that the little man was thinking of what was down in the cabin. Speechless, the two returned to the port davits and stood over the ruined boat. From it the captain turned his eyes to the grey desolation that shut in the sinking ship. The schooner rode more easily now. She had settled until the resistance she gave to the sea was as solid as that of a mass of steel, and the ramming of her sides only sent jarring throes through her timbers, as though a thousand-ton weight touched her gently each time she was struck. A few minutes more, a sudden sweep of water over the rail, and Connolly knew that she would go down, quietly and without sensation, but with merciful quickness. He turned toward the cabin, and at the threshold of the door that led to where the woman lay he paused for an instant and fought for the strength that he knew he would need. Then he opened it and entered. At the end of the room a woman was lying upon a cot, her strangely white face turned expectantly toward the door. As Connolly came through she smiled, and her beautiful eyes brightened with a glad light.

"It has seemed so long, Tom," she said, her voice rising barely above a whisper. "The storm frightens me. But it's quieter now, isn't it?"

"Yes, dear!"

The man took off his dripping hat and coat and sat down beside her. The woman, as he did so, drew down the coverlet a few inches so that he might see the little pink face lying against her bosom. He leaned over, more to hide his own whiteness than to caress, and stroked the baby's cheek with a big forefinger. The woman took his other hand and pressed it happily. She spoke no word, but when the man raised himself to look into her face he saw the great dawn of the new life shining adoringly in her eyes. The gentle happiness there seemed to creep up and embrace him, like a thousand clinging arms, and with his heart almost breaking in its agony he pressed his lips close down against her own and for many minutes lay quietly listening to the bursting crashes of the sea and counting the time when the last moment for them all would come. After a time the woman said:

"Tom!"

"Yes, dear."

"Are you—very glad?"

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The man pressed her face to him with a passionate tenderness. He did not answer in words, but the woman was satisfied. Then he gently drew himself away, the young wife's eyes following him inquiringly.

"You're not going back—now?" she asked. "I thought—"

"Yes,—Flick is in charge," he said quickly. "But I must see—that everything's all right—" Between his words he hesitated, listening to a sound under his feet that thrilled him. It was like the bumping of floating cargo against the deck. The water was rising faster than he supposed, but he showed no sign of the fear that was in him.

"You will be back soon?"

"Right away, Jen!"

He came back to kiss her, the sickening throbbing at his heart, almost suffocating him as he looked down into the woman's confident eyes, luminous with a touch of the old fever. He was glad that she did not know. It would make the end easier for him—and for her, if the end had to come. And he knew there was only one chance in ten thousand against it. As he passed out of the cabin he saw the lifebelts strung along the ceiling. For an instant it flashed into his mind that he might use them. As quickly the thought passed from him. They would only prolong their misery a little longer, and the woman—he shuddered as he pictured what those few minutes of life battling in the sea would mean for her. The end would come easier in the cabin. In the last minute she would understand, and would love him more for it. So he passed out, closing the door carefully behind him, and scanned the deck for Flick.

In the mist which enshrouded the abandoned pump, belched up in clouds over the bow, he saw the mate, with only Jim Falkner to help him, fighting feebly where Svenson and the crew had been half an hour before. It struck Captain Connoly that there was a touch of the Swede's madness in the mate now, for only madness would keep him there, with his arms steadily rising and falling as if the rhythm of the pump count was still sounding in his ears. The captain had come out to shake hands with Flick and pass a last word with him, because Flick had stood by him and the woman. But something held him from interrupting. It occurred to the captain that his mate had lost count of material things, and that the madness was a blessing. He might have had a chance in a hundred or two by packing himself with lifebelts, but that chance was scarcely worth fighting for. Captain Connoly would scarcely have taken it himself had he been left alone.

For a few moments Captain Connoly listened for the sound under his feet. But he heard and felt only the jarring of the ship which came of the seas pounding. Then he thrust an arm through the hole that had been made for a pump. He did not expect to touch water. The fact that he did brought him to his feet as though something had bitten him. Flick had seen him, and stood huddled just out of the sheets of spray that shot over the bow, watching as if the sight of the man rising from his knees was curious and interesting. Connoly beckoned to him, but Flick's only response was to dive back into the mist, like an animal hunting cover; and then again the captain saw him, shadow-like, bending and rising with the motion of the pump, and heard faintly his shout to Falkner for more speed and renewed efforts.

A great shudder ran through the schooner; if she had possessed a tight hold Connoly would have thought that she had struck a rock. The leeward drift that had won these last hours of existence for her against the rushes of the sea seemed suddenly stopped, as if she had steadied herself for the final engulfment. Captain Connoly turned and ran for the cabin. He heard Flick's cry behind him and caught a glimpse of the little man as he staggered out of the mist forward, but it was too late to stop, even to give a last word to Flick. Over his shoulder he saw the starboard rail hidden in a mass of seething water, and as he reached the door it swished about him ankle-deep and followed him in a torrent into the cabin. Again he heard that cry of Flick, but he shut the door, as he had planned, and bolted it to give himself a few last moments of life with the woman.

When he turned to her with the tragedy that had overtaken them written in his face, his outstretched arms dropped slowly to his side. Only her name fell from his lips. The words that he had meant to say were left unspoken. She was asleep. Her face was toward him, and in the dim light glow he saw deepening in her cheeks the flush of returning fever. One white hand had fallen over the side of the cot, and on it gleamed their wedding-ring. Connoly fell upon his knees. The water trickled about his fingers as he crept to her. At the bedside he stretched an arm over her, so gently that she did not awaken. Then he turned his face to the door, grim with the terror of this last moment, but filled with the splendid sanity of his resolve. The sea would not get the best of him. He would have the woman, at the last—and so firmly that the hell a thousand seas could not separate them. But it would not be until the last—the very last. Then she would awaken only to know he was there, and would die

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before the misery and the terror of it all came to her. The man fancied that he had heard the beating of water against the panels; his staring eyes saw it pouring faster under the door—he heard it straining against the cabin walls. The floor seemed lifting him up. Bow first, the schooner was diving to her doom. His arm grew heavier over the woman. His other slipped under her head. Then came another shock, longer than the one that had preceded it, and after that there was absolute quiet, save for the trickling of water under the door and the tremendous beating of his own heart.

Still she slept.

There came a knock from outside, again and again, and then a sudden pressure that burst off the bolt, and Flick stood there, babbling words that seemed to have no meaning. He went as suddenly as he came; and Captain Connolly could hear his sobbing voice dying away on deck. He drew his arms from the woman and followed. At the door he paused, then slipped out.

The woman's fever-stricken face moved a little, her eyelids trembled, and after a moment she opened them. "Tom!" she called weakly.

A gust of wind slammed the door. "Tom, where are you?" She drew herself up on an elbow, frightened, and saw the water running black and ugly on the floor. "Tom—Tom—Tom—"

A man sprang through the door. It was Captain Connolly. He wrapped her close to his wet breast and the laugh that fell from his lips was filled with an insane joy. Over his shoulder, standing in the doorway, she saw Flick.

"Had quite a time of it, but it's all over now, sweetheart!" whispered Captain Connolly. "Where do you think the old tub is? Couldn't guess, eh? Well, she's settled as soundly as the Rock of Ages somewhere on the Thunder Bay shore! Tried to fight her off, but we couldn't do it. Now all we've got to do is to eat and sleep until somebody comes to pull us off, eh, Flick?"

But the mate had gone. Out on deck, with his face turned to the indistinct outline of the shore, and the gleams of sunlight bursting through the ragged clouds, Jim Falkner saw him bow his grey head to whisper softly what little he could remember of the Lord's Prayer.

CHAPTER VI. THE LAW OF THE LAKES

McEwen had fought like ten men. The crew stood back, cowed and bleeding, and McEwen rested on his capstan-bar. He had done murder; and now he knew that he was at the climax of his misfortunes. But he had meted out vengeance in full measure, and though the stings of regret were coming with a cooler realization of what men would call his crime, his whole being still throbbed with the primal instinct that had called upon him to become the messenger of a good but unreasoning justice. The dead man at his feet had been a sinning thing, a coveter of that which every man holds precious unto himself. McEwen was glad that he had killed him. For an instant the little woman behind him had been glad, too.

Now there was quiet where there had been the strife of battle. Seven men had struggled with McEwen, and six of them, their hearts filled with sympathy, rested for the command of the seventh who lay only partly conscious upon the deck. This seventh was the captain. McEwen had struck him hard, and the face of the woman was filled with hatred as she looked upon the great bulk of the master in his defeat. She came up to the man who was her husband and took one of his naked arms between her hands, the light of love shining in her eyes. McEwen's wife was almost beautiful. Now, when the world had come to look its blackest to the man whose life had been indissolubly mixed with misfortune, it was she who had innocently edged him on to final ruin. The knowledge was slowly coming to him as he waited for the next attack.

His eyes gleamed with the fire of an animal longing, and he took one step forward toward the prostrate captain to measure over again the justice which was due to two, but which had emptied itself unsparingly upon the head of one. But the woman was before him. She turned her back upon the crew and twined one of her arms around the man's neck. With her other hand she drew his head down until it rested upon her shoulder. When men came up behind him the desire of vengeance had gone out of McEwen. Not a sound fell from his lips as the ship's irons were snapped over his wrists. Soothed into submission by the touch of the one for whom he had given his life, he walked quietly with his captors to the little cabin that had been his wife's, and there, with the door barred behind them, the two were left alone.

It was a long time before either the woman or the man spoke. McEwen seated himself, and his companion kneeled silently and held his manacled hands close to her. As darkness slowly hid her husband's face she crept up to him until her cold wet cheek rested against his own. "Don't cry," he whispered. "You weren't to blame—you couldn't be!"

"I struck him!" cried the woman. "Oh, I struck him hard, Ben!" She laid her head upon the man's knees and sobbed. "Oh, Ben—Ben—I'd give my life if I hadn't told you!"

"No—no—it was right," replied McEwen. "I am to blame, little girl—only me. I knew Hendricks—I knew the captain—I was a fool for bringing you on a trip with him. I could stand his eyeing you, an' smiling, but when Hendricks came upon you for'rd, like a sneak, and—"

"I hit—I hit him!" sobbingly interrupted the woman. She slipped up between his arms and McEwen pressed her to him until the irons on his wrist hurt her back.

"Yes, you hit him. I know you hit him hard," said the man. "But I hit 'im harder, I hit 'im considerably harder. And I'm glad!"

"Ben—Ben," pleaded the woman.

"Yes, I'm glad," repeated the man, doggedly. "But I'm sorry for you, Anne. There was a time when I thought the worst had happened. When little Tom died and I lost my ship—my berth—and had to turn common seaman to keep you from starving. I've always been unlucky, and now—"

McEwen caught himself, and his wife did not question. Hours afterward the woman knocked on the barred door and the man on watch let her out. It was nearly midnight, but a light was burning brightly in the captain's cabin. McEwen's wife took a few steps towards it, then hesitated and turned into the shadow of the galley. Only a few faint gleams of the stem lights streaked the gloom of the after-deck, and into this she walked silently and leaned over the rail of the ship. For a long time she glared out into the blackness of the sea. Now and then over this highway of the lakes there glimmered faintly the lights of other ships, and far astern she saw a glowing, ever-changing eye that guarded a point of the Michigan wilderness, winking at her, it seemed, like a ball of we

behind lids constantly closing.

Behind that light the woman knew there lay the stillness of the peace of a land unclaimed by human strife, and into her heart there came a longing to reach over into it and to take with her the ironed man she had left back in the little cabin. As she thought of the restfulness there, amid the forests that breathed of good will to all living things, the great red eye winked and winked at her, and each time, as the hurrying ship left it farther behind, it seemed to call to her more eagerly, yet with growing hopelessness. At last it sank behind a forest headland, but even then a last reflection flashed up into the sky, and when that was gone the woman buried her head in her arms and sobbed and listened to the gurgling music of the running water in the ship's wake. After a little she slipped out among the shadows of the deck and approached a stalwart figure that was leaning over the wheel of the schooner. "Mr. Falkner, may I talk with you—just a minute, please?" she asked.

The young man turned and lifted his lantern as McEwen's wife came up into the light. In the struggle that day the woman had seen him protect her husband, as if by accident, from a vicious blow by the captain, and she had confidence in him.

"Thank you," she said. "I thank you for—for not hurting him."

The wheelman lowered his lantern from the white beautiful face of the woman and turned the wick down so that it left them almost in darkness.

"I saw what you did," she added. "You don't blame him, then?"

"No," muttered the sailor, glancing quickly in the direction of the captain's lighted cabin, into which a new master had just moved. Jenks was a fit successor for the dead man. "I'd have done it myself in Ben's place." And for a few minutes the two stood silent, looking out into the blackness that hung over the Sea. ahead.

"You think—there's no hope?" faltered McEwen's wife.

He had expected this, and answered equivocally: "We're bound for Buffalo. If it was Detroit, or Algonac—" Then he stopped, hoping that the other would understand.

"What difference does it make where we're bound for?" she persisted, laying a hand upon his arm.

Falkner drove the schooner a point out of her course, to busy himself, then brought her slowly back, and thought hard as he worked. "Well, it means this," he finally said, cornered. "If a ship was just leaving Duluth and I was to kill a man or commit piracy, I'd be punished by the state for which bound, even if the port was a thousand miles away. It's the law of the lakes."

"I understand," moaned the woman. "In New York—they—kill—"

"And in Michigan they don't," said Falkner.

Anne McEwen's hand dropped from his arm. For a few moments she stood with bowed head, and Jim, with a thick feeling in his own throat, thought that she was crying. But when the woman spoke again her voice was so firm that it startled him.

"You've been kind, Mr. Falkner. I'll always think of it," she said, and walked in the direction of the captain's cabin, this time boldly.

God help me," she whispered to herself. "Oh, I'll do it, Ben; I'll do it I'll do it!" For a moment she paused beside the captain's door, as if still lacking a little of the courage she would need in the trial before her. Then she knocked, her little fist beating firmly against the oak panel, and Falkner heard the thick voice of the new master as he called for her to enter. For an hour after that the wheelman watched and listened closely, determined to rush to the woman's assistance should she call for it. But he heard no sounds; and only once did he see a figure through the lighted window, and that so indistinctly that he could not tell whether it was the captain or the prisoner's wife. At the end of the hour the cabin door was opened and Mrs. McEwen reappeared. Her face flushed with excitement, and in her eyes there was a dazzling fire which the captain did not understand as he looked into them.

"Then you don't understand what I mean, Captain?" she whispered, pausing and looking up at the man in the lighted doorway. "I wish you could—oh, I wish you could!" She clenched her hands, and a look of pathetic helplessness filled her face. Jim Falkner saw it and grinned. He could not hear what she was saying, but his faith in the honour of McEwen's wife was strong, and he knew that she was fighting—fighting hard. "Oh, I wish you could!" the woman whispered again, so tremulously that she seemed on the point of crying. "Don't you see? Ben has always made life miserable for me, and—I—I—want you to get rid of him, but you mustn't kill him! Can't you see what I mean now?" she cried desperately. "I want you to give him a chance, that's all—a chance to kill himself!"

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Before the captain could detain her she turned and ran quickly across the deck of the schooner toward the little cabin. When the watch admitted her into McEwen's prison he smiled in a way that was not pleasant, and the woman felt like striking him. She knew that this man had seen her come from the captain's cabin, and that the next day stories of her visit would be common among the crew. Her face burned with mingled excitement, triumph, and shame, and she pressed it for a moment against her husband's rough cheek. But now she could talk hopefully.

She described to the condemned man the things they would do when he was free. She told him of the light on the edge of the Michigan wilderness, how it had seemed to call to her, and how he and she might bury themselves in the great pine forest, and live there peacefully, as others had done and were doing. She described the happy visions she had seen in her dreams when he was away at sea, visions of a hundred Arcadias waiting for them in the vast, unsettled northland, where summer was sweet with the fragrance of flowers and the song of birds, and the still, white winter was always filled with the peace of the wild. Until the first light of dawn came in at the little cabin window she added fuel to the spark of hope that was beginning to burn in the man's breast.

This morning McEwen's wife made her toilet with more than usual care. She was a little pale and there were shadows under her eyes, but when she came on deck her hair glowed red-gold in the early sun and her eyes shone with unnatural brightness. She guessed that her visit to the new captain was already known among the men. The sailors stared at her boldly, and the seaman who had taken the place of the promoted mate approached her and smilingly asked if she were ready for breakfast.

"I am going to take breakfast in the other cabin," she replied. "Will you tell Captain Jenks that I am ready?"

Her tone of authority confused him. If Captain Jenks was already subject to the wiles of this woman, it behoved the sailor to act with propriety; and he dropped a warning to the sailors as he carried Mrs. McEwen's message to the skipper. The developments of the day showed that his judgment was right, for Anne McEwen not only breakfasted in the captain's cabin, but she took complete possession of its occupant, and when the two came out upon the deck she clung to the man's arm with an astonishing air of ownership. During the whole of the morning the two were continually together, with the exception of brief intervals which the woman spent in the prisoner's cabin. At noon the two dined together. A little later Mrs. McEwen reappeared alone. Her face was flushed with excitement, her eyes sparkled with triumph. She tried vainly to hide her emotion as she hurried to her husband. Jim Falkner saw her and knew that she had achieved something which meant much to her and to the shackled man in the little cabin. She sought to flash the news to him with her eyes as she passed, but he failed to comprehend in detail; so he fell to guessing.

That afternoon Captain Jenks called Falkner into his cabin and seemed unusually pleased about something "You're at the wheel from twelve until two to-night, ain't you, Jim?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," replied the young man.

"Well, you needn't report until one o'clock. And look here, Falkner—" The giant captain stood up and placed both hands upon the seaman's broad shoulders. "There ain't no use of gossiping about a little change like this, is there? Take a reef in your jaw, Jim—and hold it! Understand?" The young man returned silently to his duty with a feeling in him that something stupendous depended upon his silence— something that in some way had to do with the welfare of the woman who was plotting. Once he even asked himself if it were possible that Anne McEwen had turned traitor to her husband, but he immediately growled out a curse at himself for having allowed such a thought to enter his head.

McEwen's wife remained with her husband all of the afternoon. Captain Jenks showed no anxiety to see her, and even evaded as much as possible that part of the ship where the prisoner's cabin was situated. Toward evening the woman came on deck again and went into the stern of the schooner. Until the ship's light began to glow in the gathering darkness she amused herself by throwing crumbs of iron ore into the bottom of a skiff that was dragging behind the vessel. At first she missed frequently. Ten—twenty—thirty times, and her judgment became more accurate. Then she closed her eyes, and with tragic earnestness tossed the bits of ore blindly. She counted, missing once out of three, once out of five, and at last only once out of ten times. She was still practising when the captain came up and stood beside her at the rail.

"What are you doing?" he asked. He leaned over and looked down into the bottom of the boat. The woman laughed as she called his attention to the little pieces of ore. "I've tossed seventy pieces out of a hundred in there," she cried. "I'll wager you couldn't do it, Captain!" She gave her companion a handful of ore and watched him with apparent earnestness as he measured the distance. When he missed twice out of ten throws she clapped her hands

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and laughed. In a moment she became sober as the cook approached to inquire where she would have her supper.

"With my husband, please," she said, "and send supper for half a dozen. I'm ravenously hungry. Captain, tell him to bring us double allowance, will you?" She appealed to the skipper, who reiterated the order.

"I was hoping that you would take supper with me," he said, as the cook turned away.

"You know it is the last time," she replied, drawing back slightly as he came nearer to her.

"Are you sure it is the last?" questioned the captain. "Are you sure that—"

"I'm absolutely certain," interrupted Mrs. McEwen, with a shudder. "Ben knows that he has got to die. But he fears the kind of death—and the disgrace—to me." Unconsciously the woman's voice became almost tender. But she hardened it in a moment. "Ugh—h—h! He talks of it in such a cold-blooded way—and I agree with him in everything. He thinks that it will save me trouble if he kills himself before we arrive at Buffalo. So when you give him his liberty for a few minutes to stretch his legs, s he calls it, he is going to take advantage of the opportunity and jump overboard. This afternoon he said that he was glad you weren't going to take his irons off, for he'd drown quicker with them on. Oh, yes—he'll do it!"

The man came closer, and in the semi-gloom he stretched out an arm. The woman drew suddenly back, but naturally, as if she did not see it. "I'm going back to—to the cabin now," she said. "You won't see me again until to-morrow. I'll pretend that I am asleep when you unlock the door, and he won't awaken me. Good night." She slipped out of the captain's reach and was gone before he could move to detain her.

A few minutes after she had rejoined her husband the cook was admitted with their supper. Mrs. McEwen ate lightly, and several times during the course of the meal she cautioned her husband to be more sparing with the food. After they had finished she took what remained of bread and meat and wrapped it in a piece of cloth. The half-dozen potatoes the cook had brought she put in a paper bag. Every scrap of food, even to bread-crumbs, she collected and hid away. When the cook returned for the dishes an hour later he made no attempt to conceal his astonishment. The prisoner grinned at him good-naturedly. Mrs. McEwen smiled at him. "I know you think we're—we're pigs," she laughed.

"But we were so hungry, and your supper was awfully good."

After that the hours passed slowly. Once the woman drew a small file from inside her dress and showed it to McEwen, and the two laughed happily. Again and again the prisoner drew his fingers over its rough edge, and each time he smiled more confidently.

"I wish I might try it just a little on the under side, Ben," begged his wife, but the man shook his head and nodded suspiciously toward the door.

After ten o'clock the woman at times thought the hands of McEwen's watch had stopped. She laid the timepiece in the light of the cabin lamp and until eleven kept her eyes almost constantly upon it. Then she extinguished the light, and in the thick darkness crept up close to her husband. The man bent to whisper to her, but she stopped him by placing a hand over his mouth. One by one she counted off the seconds to herself. A hundred—two hundred—three hundred, and up to five times three hundred she measured the time. Then she quietly slipped out from between McEwen's arms and tiptoed to her bunk. Again she counted, until she knew that the hour was almost gone. She strained her ears now to catch the sounds of the ship. Once she thought she heard footsteps. For a few minutes after that there was absolute silence, and then there came the fumbling of a hand at the cabin door. Trembling with excitement, the woman half raised herself until she was sure that the man had come and gone. "Ben," she whispered.

McEwen came to her. For a few moments the woman lay with her head upon his breast and her arms around him. Then she pushed him gently away, and the shackled man walked to the door and opened it. McEwen could discern no sign of life on deck with the exception of a shadow at the wheel, which he knew was the captain. So he walked out boldly and passed into the bow where he could conceal himself from the eyes of the man aft. Scarcely had he disappeared when Mrs. McEwen followed him and crept cautiously out into the deep shadow of the cabin. There she crouched, eagerly watching the figure at the wheel. The knowledge that the captain had thus far kept himself to her plot almost overwhelmed her.

She could see that he was alone and that part of the ship's lights were extinguished. Amidships the vessel was buried in deep gloom. The darkness hung like a wall between her and the dimly lighted stern, where stood the man; and the woman knew that through this the captain was watching the exposed part of the forward deck. Foot by foot she crawled aft, until from the protection of a hatch in the outer edge of the blackness of the midship deck

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she could look upon the wheelman and almost hear him breathe. Once or twice she dared to move that she might look back into the schooner's bow. The first time she saw her husband leaning over the rail of the ship; the second, he had disappeared. When she turned to the captain again he had left the wheel and was coming quietly up into the gloom.

With her face pressed upon the deck, and her throbbing heart almost bursting with mingled fear and hope, McEwen's wife heard him pass within a few feet of her. Face to face with the crucial moment she rose to her feet and darted across the illuminated space that lay between her and the darkness of the stern, her bare feet falling noiselessly upon the deck. For the fraction of a minute she stood poised over the after rail. Once—twice—three times she tossed objects into the blackness of the sea, and each time, as she heard them drop into the bottom of the boat dragging behind, she thanked Providence for the impulse that had urged her to practise with the crumbs of ore. Then she caught the tow-line, and with a prayer upon her lips climbed over the edge of the ship.

An inch at a time she lowered herself until she felt the wash of the sea about her feet. The rope cut into her tender hands, but as the water came higher she gripped the line still more determinedly. Gradually the water came to her knees, and she groped with one hand for the boat. She could just touch it, and sank to her waist before she could reach over into it. With a supreme effort she raised herself out of the sea, pulling on the taut line with one arm and lifting on the gunwale with the other, until, dripping and exhausted, she fell headlong into the skiff. For a brief interval she rested. Then, drawing a knife from her bosom, she crouched in the bottom of the skiff, and waited, with her eyes on the rail of the ship towering above her.

From the bow of the schooner McEwen, peering into the after-deck, had seen Captain Jenks leave the wheel and his wife run into the stern. Now he walked slowly back along the starboard rail, while from the ship's centre of gloom the captain eyed him like a wolf. Several times McEwen half climbed the vessel's side, and each time slipped back, as if lacking the nerve to launch himself into the sea. Gradually he approached the stern. The master of the ship followed stealthily, cursing under his breath at the other's cowardice and with the desire growing in him come up behind McEwen and end it all himself. For several minutes the shackled man stood leaning over the aft rail. The captain watched him closely and saw him motioning with his iron hands. He crept nearer, as McEwen raised himself, and like animal prepared to rush upon him if he faltered this time. But there was something terribly deliberate about McEwen's actions now. He climbed upon the rail, and for a full half-minute stood poised there. Suddenly he leaped out into the blackness that hung over the sea, and the man on deck could hear the plunge of his body in the wash behind. Without a shudder at the tragedy he witnessed the master of the ship returned to the wheel, lighted his pipe, and waited for Jim Falkner.

Out in the darkness the schooner's skiff was drifting. In it was McEwen's wife, pulling frantically at a rope which was dragging something up out of the sea. Soon a man appeared at the edge of the craft, like a fish at the end of a line, and two helpless hands, with iron cuffs about their wrists, were held up to the woman. Shortly after this there were two people in the little skiff, and the joyful sobs of a woman mingled with the tender love-talk of a man in the Peaceful quiet of the night.

CHAPTER VII. THE PIRATICAL LOVER OF TOW NUMBER TWO

Once more winter had spread its mantle over the Erie coast and the club-rooms of the Master Mariners' Society were well patronized. It was Thursday afternoon, nearly five o'clock. The seemingly endless games had been discontinued for a time while the club members and their guests gathered about the big fireplace where a huge pile of hardwood logs had become but a great heap of glowing coals. Savoury odours crept in from the kitchen at the end of a long hall, where their regular weekly banquet was being prepared, to mingle with the slowly drifting clouds that rose from a score of blackened pipes.

Captain John MacDonald, famed narrator of adventures on the Inland Seas—teller of tales which were fiction only so far as he deemed it necessary to make them really interesting—had scarcely got well started when Jim Falkner slipped quietly in to join the group, where he was always welcome.

"For a third time since Joshua Phipps had poised himself on the dizzily swinging cable-block," the captain was saying, "a streak of fire flashed through the inky blackness of the sky, and showed the wheelman of Tow Number One the growing sea beneath him. For three lightning flashes Joshua Phipps had stood there, half naked, undecided, with something between a prayer and a curse upon his lips, and fear in his heart. Thrice he had nerved himself to spring into the seething water, and thrice his nerve had failed him.

"A fourth lightning flash lit up the huge steel freighter ahead, puffing steadily down Lake Huron with a million feet of lumber dragging on behind. The man on the cable-block looked over his shoulder at it and as the light burned out of the sky he turned his eyes again to where the red and green lights of Tow Number Two twinkled, a hundred fathoms back of Tow Number One. They seemed to taunt him with his cowardice, to urge him back over the bit of sea to a little deck cabin half buried under the cedar piles.

"In that cabin was the only being Joshua Phipps had ever loved in his life, and now he pictured her there, his sweetheart still, red-eyed as he had left her that morning. Then he was mate of the ship, with a captain's berth somewhere in the future and a vision always before him of a certain little white-walled cottage down by the lake, with honeysuckle 'n' jasmine a creepin' over it, and with an orchard just at its back. That was the cottage and the orchard that Joshua Phipps would take his little sailor wife to, and they would give up the hard life of the Inland Seas together. Of these plans the mate had been talking, the day before, for the twentieth time, with Nell's head very close to his shoulder, when the captain, who was supposed to be taking a nap, had come over the top of the lumber and seen them. The next morning—that morning—the big freighter ahead had wasted a ton of coal by pausing for a few minutes in mid-lake. Then Joshua Phipps had been sent to the tow ahead, the tow that was to be carried on to Buffalo, while the other was to be dropped at Algonac, three hundred miles behind. That same day the captain of Tow Number Two sprained a leg, but the deposed mate was not recalled. These were the events that put the pirate into the heart of Joshua Phipps.

"Once more he leaned out, wanting still the last charge of nerve to launch himself down into the blackness of the sea. The rope that passed from his body to a hoop on the tow-line—the rope that meant life or death in the swift journey over the cable—he gripped in both hands. And still before him, those little bobbing red and green eyes at the head of Tow Number Two seemed to beckon more vehemently now as the first edge of wind came with the approaching storm.

"In the distance two sonorous echoes cried that a ship was coming up, and the whistle on the big freighter ahead answered the greeting with two screaming blasts. It was the night-language of ships passing on the unsalted seas, and the deposed mate stared again at the little eyes on Tow Number Two and half mumbled, half thought, the bargeman's 'lines of safety':

"Green t' green
An' red t' red,
Blow two w'istles
An' go ahead!"

"Joshua Phipps emphasized the last three words—'An' go ahead!' That meant him. The voice of the ship shrieked at him; the bobbing, blinking eyes of Tow Number Two invited him through the dash of spray; and something in himself said 'Go!'

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"Another lightning flash revealed the cable-block empty, and down into the chop of the sea that was coming with the first breath of the storm shot a human form, doubled like a jack-knife, and swallowed in an instant where the cable end of Tow Number One dipped in a swirl of water on its way to Tow Number Two."

A breathless silence filled the room as Captain MacDonald paused to tamp his pipe and enjoy the thrill which always came to him from the unfeigned interest shown on the faces of his little audience.

"When one plunges into the sea with a rope about his waist, and the other end of that rope is fastened to a steel hoop on a tow-line, it takes only the small part of a minute to drag through a hundred fathoms of water. For one long breath Joshua was whipped about like a great spider; then the upward slant of the cable running to the nose of Tow Number Two caught him, and he slipped up it on his hoop until, half drowned but breathing free again, he reached out and hugged close to where the tow-line cut into the cable-block of his old ship.

"For a few moments he hung there, like a great half-drowned water-rat. Somewhere behind the lumber he heard the shout of a man and then the stumble of heavy feet near him. Huge and grotesque in the dim glow of a deck-lantern, the deposed mate's head and shoulders rose above the ship's bulwark. An arm reached over, and at the end of that arm something that glittered menacingly as it pointed at a shadow swinging with the movement of the barge.

"Ho, Bill—Bill—ee—ee!" called the mate; but the shadow seemed to slip back into the blackness of the lumber piles while Phipps still pointed to where it had disappeared.

"Billy, is that you?" he cried again. "Don't be afraid, man! This is Josh—Josh Phipps, an' I need help!" He pulled himself over the bulwark as he spoke and followed where he thought the shadow had gone.

"I tell 'e you needn't be afraid, Billy! I fell overboard and caught on the cable by luck. Can't you give a man a little help?" He had put his pistol hand behind him and reached out to grope with the other. Close up against the ragged edges of the lumber piled high on the deck of Tow Number Two he found a man crouching.

"Billy, I ain't a ghost, I tell you! What you afraid of?" The mate hauled at the invisible form, and a round fat face, white with fear, came out into the lantern light.

"If it's you, Josh, an' I needn't be afraid, what the devil's that y' been pointing at me!"

"From behind him the mate poked the muzzle of a revolver close up into the other's face. Then he shoved it into one of his wet pockets and drew the shivering cook of Tow Number Two back into the dense shadow of the lumber. 'Only this, Billy, but I ain't going to use it on you, —not if y' play me fair!' The mate shouted the last words as a fresh gust of wind screamed over the lumber. 'Billy, can y' say the Lord's Prayer?'

"I think I kin, Josh!"

"An' do you remember the marriage service?"

"I kin think it out, Josh."

"See here, Billy—you wasn't lyin' when you said you was a preacher once?" The mate caught the cook's wrists in his hands and bound them with a piece of the rope from about his waist.

"No—no—I was a preacher, s'elp me God, I was!"

"I ain't going to gag you, Billy!" he shouted, for the wind came in a sudden roar as he spoke. 'But if you don't think out the service by the time I get back, or if you open your yap, I'll shoot—'

"Phipps' voice was drowned in a thunderous clatter of lumber above, and he finished his warning with a cold touch of the revolver. Then he swung out into the smothering sheets of spray that were drowning the bow-lights and clambered up the edge of the cedar piles to the top. Amidships the blackness was like that in the sky above. He crawled through it on all fours until the cabin lamps and the lanterns under the wheel showed him the stern of Tow Number Two running black with the drench of the sea. He leaped down, almost shouting with the new joy that burned in his heart. Against a blast that beat back his breath he struggled to the stream of light that shot across the slippery tow from the captain's cabin. A few steps more and his naked shoulders pressed against a door, his hand groped for a latch, and, dripping and exhausted, he came into the presence of the captain of Tow Number Two.

"Good evenin', Cap'n Wiggs—"

Joshua Phipps meant to round off his words with an oath. He had planned to curse the captain before doing other things; but through the water-mist in his eyes he saw a form kneeling beside the skipper's berth and a face, white and terrified, stared up at him.

"Nell!" he cried, 'Nell—'

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"A thundering blow of the sea against the ship's side sent him reeling. As he caught at the wall the girl sprang from the bunk, but the powerful fingers of Captain Wiggs imprisoned her arm and she sank back to her knees again, while Joshua Phipps, his eyes burning with the fever that had come to him in Tow Number One, advanced slowly upon the skipper of Tow Number Two. His hands were clenched, the muscles in his bare arms stood out like cords, and the wounded captain drew back in his berth and caught a sheath-knife from his pillow. The threatening eyes of the deposed mate seemed not to notice that the other was armed. He caught the berth-railing with a grip that made it creak. Then he leaned over and tried to smile—but it was an ugly grin, even for the homely face of Joshua Phipps.

"I said good evenin', Cap'n Wiggs!" he declared, while the captain swallowed as if a lump in his throat had suddenly become loosened.

"What the devil you doing here" cried the captain, pulling himself to a sitting posture, pain and rage distorting his face.

"Joshua Phipps came a step nearer, and reverentially placed one of his big bony hands upon the dark head of the girl at his feet. His hand trembled as it touched the silken tresses, but the eyes that looked into those of Captain Wiggs were unfaltering.

"I've come back for Nell, Cap'n!"

"Another hand, warm and loving, came up to the bronzed one on the head of the captain's daughter. The girl was silent still, between father and lover, but the touch gave Phipps all the strength he required.

"I've come back for Nell, Cap'n," said the young man in a softer voice. "This is goin' t' be our weddin' night, and you're going to bless us—here in this cabin!"

"The lash of the wind and sea and the shrill whistling of the gale in the lumber seemed to concentrate, not to drown, the captain's voice.

"This is mutiny, Josh Phipps—damned mutiny!" he almost shrieked. "Ho, Nell, girl, call the men aft."

"It's worse'n mutiny—it's piracy, Cap'n Wiggs!" cried the mate. He whipped the revolver from his pocket and flourished it above his head. "The ship's mine! There isn't a man out there to take care of the lumber in this blow. The wheel's tied, an' not a soul aboard to help you but me 'n' Nell. You're going t' marry us, or I swear we'll all go down together!"

"As if to emphasize his words, there came a jar that set the ship shuddering under their feet. Through his thick tan the captain's face went a shade whiter, and with a terrible cry Nell staggered to her feet and threw her arms over Joshua's naked shoulders.

"Oh, my God! Joshua, do you know what you're doing?"

"The mate's arms tightened about the girl's slight form. "Are you afraid to die with me, Nelly?" he asked quietly, while the gale outside came again in a screaming blast. The captain lost his voice in it, and waited, while Joshua pressed his lips down upon the head of the girl he held. Again there came a shock that seemed to split the ship.

The captain gave a shout. He made an attempt to rise from his berth, but fell back with a cry of pain. "Nell! Nell!" he moaned weakly, and in an instant the girl was at his side, her arms about his neck.

"I won't leave you, dad!" she sobbed.

"The look in Captain Wiggs' eyes would have sent a chill to the heart of any other than the half-mad lover of this girl. "Josh Phipps," he shouted, "we was bound for a Michigan port, where piracy is life imprisonment; but now I'll hang to th' tow ahead for N' York, where it's death! D'y hear, damn you, it's death—death!"

"Listen!" interrupted the mate. "Hear that sea, Cap'n Wiggs? It's poundin' away your lumber, because there's no man a-guiding the ship. But it's going to be worse in a minit, Cap'n! I'll give you one more chance—it's Nell or th' cable!"

"It's death t' you!" shouted the captain. Between the two—the girl knelt, her eyes big and dark with agony.

"One more chance—Nell or th' cable!" cried Joshua Phipps a second time, but again Captain Wiggs replied: "I tell you it's death! We'll keep to th' tow."

"In a moment Joshua Phipps was at the cabin door and had disappeared into the blackness of the night. With his going came a thunder of storm and sea through the open door that drowned the cry of the girl behind him. With almost a shriek of pain Captain Wiggs drew himself to a sitting posture on the edge of his bunk. In that instant his face looked ashy grey in the ghostly glow of the binnacle lamp over his head, and he gave one hoarse

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shout for the return of Joshua Phipps.

"Great God, Nell, he's gone to cut the tow! Ho, Bill—ee!—Jack!— Henderson!"

Probably every one in the room had heard this remarkable tale before— with the exception of Jim Falkner—but all were listening as intently as the young sailor, to whom it appeared an astounding recital of heroism and golden romance.

"The captain's daughter bowed her head against the rush of wind, and fought her way to the door. Her brain seemed to burn with a single thought. If Joshua Phipps was mad she was the person he needed most at that moment. Out into the blackness of the slippery after-deck she stumbled, a prayer in her heart and her lover's name coming in a smothered cry from her lips. The stern was roaring like a cataract, and in the drench of the sea she fell upon her hands and knees and crept across the pitching deck to the face of the lumber. Foot by foot she clambered up the great pile, the wind tearing at her hair and clothes and threatening to hurl her over into the black smother under the sides of the tow. At intervals her voice would rise, piteously weak, in a long wind-strangled cry of 'Joshua—Joshua—Joshua!' Once she fancied she heard an answering shout, and listened; but only the shrieking of the wind through the spars and the lashing of the sea filled her ears. She had almost reached the top of the lumber when an ominous rumble rose above the storm, and she released her hold and fell to the deck as half of the great pile above her slipped off into the water—With her breath almost gone, she clung to the Jagged ends of the cedar, then drew herself up again, until she looked out over the break of Tow Number Two, and saw, like pitching, clouded stars, the two little dancing lights ahead on Tow Number One. As she looked, the girl fancied those lights were dissolving into the blackness ahead, and her heart seemed to stop beating with the knowledge that her lover had cut the tow. Then they appeared again, to disappear as quickly as before; and as she strained her eyes in their direction a human shape came crawling over the lumber, followed by a shadow just behind.

"Joshua!" cried the girl.

"Her cry was smothered in the strong arms of the mate. With the drenched form clasped to him, Joshua Phipps lowered himself over the broken cedar pile, and with a shout to the shadow behind, staggered with his sweetheart through the open door of the captain's cabin.

"Cap'n, 'ere's Nell! It's a rough night for her outside, sir!" he said. Through the door there came another dripping figure, round, fat, and with a face like chalk. Phipps pointed his revolver at it.

"Come in, Billy, an' take a seat by the cap'n. Cap'n Wiggs, this is the preacher I've brought to marry Nell 'n' me!"

"For a moment the captain's voice failed him. He still sat on the edge of his bunk, his face twitching with pain at every jar of the ship. His girl knelt beside him again, the water from her hair and clothes wetting him to the skin. But he seemed not to notice this.

"Josh, have you cut the cable?" he asked. There had come a great change in his voice, and the hand that rested on Nell's head trembled a bit.

"Ask Billy, Cap'n Wiggs!" replied the mate.

"Billy—is th' cable gone?"

"There came the ominous click of the hammer on Joshua Phipps' revolver. Billy started. 'Tell th' honest truth, Billy!"

"S'elp me God—"

"The revolver fell careless on a line with Billy's head. 'Th' cable's gone, Cap'n Wiggs, th' lumber's washin' overboard, an'—an'—"

"Tell it all, Billy!" said the mate. "'An' we'll be on the rock o' Thunder Bay inside of an hour, Cap'n Wiggs, s'elp me God, we will!"

"And there's nary a hand aboard to help us, Cap'n," added the mate. 'Listen to the sea beatin' death to 'er ribs! We're awash—driftin' like a cask—'

"The revolver rested in the hollow of Joshua's arm on a dead level with Billy's eyes. It suggested death to Billy. 'Cap'n, f'r the sake o' God give Josh Phipps his wish or we're all dead men—an'—an'—' Fear choked back the cook's words, but with trembling hand he pointed at the captain's girl.

"It's for Nell, Cap'n," said the mate. Almost unconsciously he knelt beside the girl and put his arms about her. His revolver lay on the floor a foot behind him, and a devilish, frightened gleam came into Billy's eyes as he sneaked toward it. 'It's all for Nell, Cap'n,' repeated the mate, almost pleadingly.

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"Billy's hand stole down. His fat fingers twined themselves about the cold metal of the gun, and his white face went whiter as he thought of what he would do the next instant. The captain watched him over Joshua's shoulder.

"Put it down, Billy!" he said. "Put it down and take a seat, as Josh told you!" Then he leaned over until his powerful hands could have clutched the mate's throat. From outside there came the grinding wash of another avalanche of cedar pitching over the side, and the captain grimaced. "And what if I promise, Josh?" he asked.

"It ain't a promise I want, Cap'n, it's a wife," said the mate. His head was bowed until he could see only the feet of the other; but one of Nell's arms was about his neck, and he knew that he was safe.

"An' if I give y' that?"

"Joshua straightened himself. 'If you give me that I'll—I'll run th' ship to port an' work for you 'n' Nell till th' crack o' doom!"

"Billy—hev y' a Bible?"

"The captain shouted the words in a voice of thunder. With a cry that rose piercing above the tumult of the storm, the sailor's sweetheart threw her arms about her father's neck, and Joshua Phipps rose to his feet, dazed, and stretched both of his great, brawny arms out toward the two.

"Hev y' a Bible?"

"It was the captain's old voice again, the voice that had strung itself to the song of gales for forty years, and, with it thundering through the cabin, a great joy filled the heart of Joshua Phipps, and he, too, turned and roared at the little fat man who stood shivering at the door, the revolver shaking in his hand.

"Your Bible, Billy!"

"As the cook slipped out into the roaring night two great hands met in a crushing clasp, and two tender, loving arms were raised to go around the necks of father and lover.

"Josh, 'adn't you better put off th' weddin' until the hands have straightened the ship?" asked the captain, after that first silent moment.

"The ship's all right, Cap'n Wiggs!" said the mate. "Billy was the one as told you the tow as cut; I didn't!"

"An' the tow—?"

"Ain't cut at all, sir!"

"But th' wheel—th' men—?"

"Henderson's at the wheel, sir, an' Jack's for'rd, neither of 'em knowing what's been happening! "

"For a full minute the captain was speechless. Then he let out an oath which seemed to come from the bottom of his soul. "Josh, you're— you're devilish clever!" he said.

"Again two great hands met in a crushing clasp, and this time two warm lips kissed first the mate and then the captain, while a wildly beating little heart prayed that Billy would hurry—with the Bible."

CHAPTER VIII. THE FISH PIRATES

Every one liked "Miss Virginia," the beautiful wife of Dick Brown, and most every one—as a matter of course—liked those whom it was evident she liked. Among those fortunate individuals was James Falkner, and to a greater degree than even he realized she had been the guiding force in the shaping of his life.

Still she exerted her influence upon the young man's career from a distance. To him she was almost of another world than that in which he lived—as, in fact, she actually was, some one worthy of worship, but not ever to be a comrade. There could be little in common between the rich cultured lady who graced the palatial home of Richard Brown, Esq., Barrister at Law, Solicitor in Chancery and Proctor in Admiralty, General Counsel for the great corporation whose myriad ships ploughed the Inland Seas from early spring until winter storms drove them to their harbours, and the orphan boy, obviously of the lake breed, sole survivor of the Bannockburn and lately master of the pirate-craft Lady Gwendolyn, even though he walked erect—his shoulders squared and his eyes piercing and fearless—knew more facts concerning more subjects, spoke more correctly, and was more active and energetic than any of his fellows.

The truth is that Jim Falkner adored his lovely sponsor, to whom even the passing years had been kind, but was strangely and unaccountably shy in her presence; and she was as ignorant of what was passing in the young man's mind as she had been the Lady Gwendolyn was captured and its master returned to school and the ways of civilized, law-abiding folks.

Dick was as much interested in the shaping of Jim Falkner's career as his wife. With the passing of the years, his memories of the eventful cruise of the amateur pirates faded and the obliterating mantle of Time obscured the unpleasant incidents of that trip. So, by the time the boy had graduated from High School, Richard Brown had become his sincere champion—yet one who fully realized that the only career worth while for a young man is the career which he carves out for himself, following his own inclinations, with but a modicum of advice and control from the elders who have his welfare at heart.

Due to the influence of Dick Brown, Jim Falkner was permitted to carve out his own fortune during the summer which followed his completion of his High School course; but Miss Virginia quite failed to understand the value to him of his experiences on the Pauline Spreckles, the Ventura, and on that thrice-cursed schooner where the Law of the Lakes missed its victim by reason of the fact that a courageous and true-hearted woman cared less for her reputation than for the safety of her husband. Because Dick's wife did not and could not so understand, Jim Falkner spent the next four years of his life at the University where Dick and Virginia had once been classmates. Few people—least of all Richard Brown—found it in their hearts to oppose Miss Virginia long, once her determination had become known.

Jim Falkner was but an indifferent student on the great campus, though it must be admitted that he did sincerely try. Each summer the lure of the Inland Seas had its way with him, however, adding to the young man's rich store of worth-while experiences; and eventually, with much of solemn ceremony, James Falkner, A.B.—who would rather have been Jim Falkner, able-bodied seaman—joined the reportorial staff of the best daily in the best city on the Great Lakes. At least, the young man chose so to regard the ten-dollar-a-week job which Dick's influence had enabled him to obtain.

The managing editor was studying a map when Falkner came in the third afternoon. He looked up, nodded, and asked sharply: "Have you seen this Jim?"

The young man picked up the afternoon edition of a rather sensational rival and noted the big headlines running across the first three columns. The preceding night an American fishing-tug had been fired upon by a Canadian revenue cutter, and the story had been "played-up" in graphic detail.

"What do you think of it?" asked the editor, who had been told of his new cub's interest in the lakes and their people.

Jim Falkner shrugged his shoulders. He had already learned that this was a golden way of expressing himself until he had fathomed the managing editor's mind. "Interesting," he said. "Mighty interesting!"

"I'll wager a hat that it will end in something more than a little excitement, Falkner!" exclaimed the managing editor. "Our lake correspondents say that the fishermen along the Erie shore are desperate. They're not catching

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fish on our side, and a great many of the tug captains have turned pirates and are running their nets over the international boundary. Our Dunkirk man says the town is hot with threats against the Canadians; while in Erie they're ready to fight, and I've got a tip that a number of captains are fitted out with guns—and there's a strong sentiment that if they're fired upon they'll use 'em. The Canadian revenue cutters are confiscating nets by the wholesale; they've captured three tugs, which have been taken as prizes into Canadian ports; and two boats have been fired upon when they refused to haul to. That's the situation in a nutshell, Jim. If the Dunkirk and Erie men don't back down there's going to be a fish–pirate war; anyway, there's stacks of fun brewing, and I want you to hustle over there and take the thing in hand. Everything is up to you. Get the best special stuff you can. Our regular correspondents will attend to the routine. Here—wait a minute—I'll give you an order for transportation and funds."

Jim Falkner was instantly on his feet, ready to go. "I can make the three–twenty train," he said, glancing at his watch. "That will get me into Erie to–night."

It was already three o'clock, and the managing editor nodded in appreciation of the young man's readiness. "Then we won't waste time in getting transportation. Here's an order on the cashier. If you want more money wire for it. Get in with the pirates, if you can, and take a trip with one of them. That's what we want. Good luck to you!"

Fifteen minutes later Jim Falkner was aboard his train. He had purchased a magazine at the depot news–stand, but did not read. Lounging back comfortably in his seat, he closed his eyes and began formulating a plan of action. At the outset he realized that he would have difficulty in successfully filling his assignment. This was not the first time that the dark clouds of a fishermen's war had gathered over Erie. And it was not the first time that a newspaper man had gone down among the pirates.

He remembered that MacIlvie had almost succeeded. MacIlvie's story was a bit of cherished history in the Herald office. He had smuggled himself aboard a Dunkirk fish–pirate's boat, and had reached the poaching grounds before he was discovered. After that he was marooned upon a sand–bar which was not much larger than the tug which put him there. He had almost starved. Falkner chuckled as he recalled the Scotchman's adventure. Then there was Briggs, the best marine man that ever struck the Herald beat. Briggs came back with one arm in a sling, and so badly used–up that he was unrecognizable for a month.

Falkner himself had been among the pirates two years before, in a desultory, friendly sort of way, while writing up the fish industry during a summer vacation. He knew them for men of strong courage, toughened by storm and inured to wreck and hardship, and with a thousand fancied wrongs to right—men who talked with fox–like caution in the companionship of strangers, and who thought it no sin to seek their livelihood across a line they could neither feel nor see, and would not understand.

The young reporter admired their courage. He liked the men. He wanted to join them, and be friends, and write them up as heroes instead of outlaws. He knew that this would please the managing editor. Everybody liked the fish pirates, except the Canadians. MacIlvie and Briggs had liked them—a mental picture of MacIlvie upon his sand–bar, and Briggs in his hospital cot, flashed upon Falkner, and the humour of it tickled him.

"If that's the reward of friendship in Erie, what the deuce will they do with me?" he thought.

Unconsciously he spoke the words quite audibly. The next instant he was looking into a pair of dark, tear–filled eyes turned upon him from the seat ahead. He saw a troubled face and a mouth trembling as if upon the point of speech. Then the face was turned away.

Falkner straightened himself. He had noticed the girl when he came in, and had looked at her hair because it had struck him as being exquisitely pretty. After that he had not thought of her again. But now he watched her closely, hoping that she would give him an opportunity to speak to her. But the opportunity did not come, and gradually his thoughts slipped back into their old channel.

By the time his train reached Toledo he had devised a scheme by which he hoped to make good among the pirates. He would get employment in one of the fish–houses, make the acquaintance of poachers, and watch for a chance to join one of their crews. It would take time, but he believed the managing editor would stand for it.

As the train pulled into the Toledo yards the girl of him rose from her seat, and Falkner was enabled to get another view of her face. Something in it—a look of tense anxiety, almost fear—urged him to speak. "I beg your pardon," he said. "I change here—may I help you with your grip?"

A bit of colour mounted into the girl's pale cheeks.

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"I—I—hardly know," she faltered. The young man saw unutterable wretchedness in her eyes. "You are—going to Erie?" she asked. "I overheard you—"

"Yes, I'm going to Erie," Jim Falkner interrupted. He wanted the girl to understand that he knew she was in trouble, and there was gentle friendliness in his voice. "Won't you please tell me how I can help you?"

"You can carry my grip."

She looked up into his face, and there came a little tremble round her mouth, and her eyes were soft in the lamp-glow, as though she wanted to cry. It was a pretty face, and the young man felt his heart pounding with sympathy.

"I want to do more than that!" he said. Suddenly he reached out and caught one of her hands. "See here, little girl, something's troubling you! Won't you tell me what it is?"

The girl was crying in earnest now. The passengers had filed out of the car, but Falkner continued to hold the hand he had taken.

"Tell me!" he pleaded.

"I—I—want you to take me to a pawn-shop," sobbed the girl from behind her handkerchief.

"A pawn-shop!" cried Falkner. "What the devil—Oh, I beg your pardon."

"Yes, a pawn-shop!" repeated the girl, with-drawing her hand and meeting his eyes squarely. "I want to go to a pawn-shop right away. I've lost my purse, and I haven't a ticket to Erie, and I'm—"

"Hungry, I'll bet a dollar!" cried the young man. "We're bound this instant for a place where they set up square meals, and do it in a hurry. We've got just thirty-five minutes. Come on!"

He caught up their grips and hurried down the aisle. There was not much beauty about Jim Falkner, but there was something unusually attractive in the boyish frankness of his face, and, as he looked back over his shoulder, his strong white teeth shining at her, the girl laughed.

"I'm a beggar!" she cried.

"The prettiest I ever met!" he flung back; and their eyes met laughingly as he reached up to help her down the car steps.

"A pawn-shop—you!" He laughed aloud.

Relief from her anxiety and the excitement of her rescue had flushed the girl's cheeks with colour. Suddenly the young man halted under a depot light.

"My name is Falkner," he announced, fishing a card from his pocket. "J. Augustus Falkner, of Detroit. It's a rummy name, but I've got to keep it. I don't put on that 'J.' for style, but to make the thing passable. Altogether it's James Augustus Falkner."

"And mine is Burton," replied the girl, smiling up into his jolly face. "Josephine Burton, of Erie."

"Jo—for short?" said Falkner.

"Ye-e-e-e-s, if you want to. You're a newspaper man?"

"Bound for Erie, to get up a few special stories about the fish pirates," he answered. He led her into the depot cafe and gave their orders. "Do you know any fish pirates?" he asked, after he had done so.

He noticed that she was looking at him with unusual interest.

"What are you going to say about them?" she questioned. "You're not going to—say anything—bad?" She spoke with intense seriousness, and Falkner detected a note of alarm in her voice.

"I want to make friends with them," he assured her. "I want to turn pirate myself. And I will—if they'll let me." Then he told her about MacIlvie and Briggs. Afterward, when they were seated in their train he described to her his plan for getting among the poachers.

"And you think that will succeed?" she asked, with a suggestive curving of her lips. "Well, it won't!"

Falkner stared at her in astonishment. "How do you know!" he retorted.

"I'd be ashamed of them if it did," continued the girl, her eyes shining with enthusiasm. "Those men whom you call pirates are old hands. They've known one another for years, and would no more think of stringing a gang over the line with a new hand aboard—" She caught herself in confusion.

"You're a pirate!" whispered Falkner. His eyes burned with admiration. "You're a pirate, Miss Jo—and so am I!"

It was late when they reached Erie. A single cab was waiting at the depot, and James Augustus Falkner, A.B., led Miss Burton to it. "I am coming to see you soon," he said. "To-morrow, or the day after—may I?"

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"The day after," she invited. "I shall sleep to-morrow."

The young man opened the cab door for her. After she had entered she stretched out a hand to him and said: "I will get you acquainted with a pirate, Mr. Falkner. To-morrow afternoon call at 520 Water Street and ask for Captain Town. He will help you. Good night—and a million thanks!"

It was midnight by the time Jim Falkner had registered for a room at a hotel. But for some time after that he did not go to bed. He lighted his pipe and went over the afternoon's adventure. Who was this Captain Town? For some reason which he did not attempt to analyse the question bothered him, and he imagined half a dozen things which might account for Miss Burton's apparent influence with him. He was quite positive that he must be a pirate, however; and a picturesque one at that, if his name stood for anything at all. Altogether, he counted himself immensely fortunate in having met the girl and in having been thus placed in line, as he was convinced, with a Lake Erie poacher.

The following morning, when the young man went down to breakfast, he stopped to chat for a few moments with the clerk, and asked him if he knew Captain Town. The clerk had never heard of him.

Until noon Falkner hung about the fish-houses. There he discovered that Captain Town was master and owner of the only "compounder" in the port.

What's a 'compounder'?" asked the young reporter.

"A compounder," said his informant, who was a dock loungee, "is a tug wot you can only 'ear the riffles of—if y' listen 'ard!"

At a little before two o'clock Jim Falkner walked slowly along Water Street. Before Number 520 he stopped in astonishment. It was a big stone front.

"Great Scott!" he gasped; but he walked up to it and rang the door-bell.

"Rooms here, I suppose," he mentally concluded.

A moment later the door was opened by a little white-haired old lady, who stared at him with ardent curiosity. "Does Captain Town live here?" asked Falkner.

"You bet he does, my boy!" came a jovial voice from back in the hall. "Step in, will you? I suppose you're the fellow Burton's girl sent over?"

One of the oddest individuals he had ever seen confronted the young man. He was unusually tall, and unusually thin, and his long lean face shone like red tanned leather. But there was something immediately likeable about him. His smile was friendly, and his grip so convincing that his visitor's hand ached for some time after he had shaken it.

"Been expecting you for some time, Falkner," he said familiarly. "Come this way, will you?"

He led him into a little room shut off from the hall, in which two men were busily engaged in smoking pipes. They were broad-built, weather-toughened men, wearing heavy seamen's jackets, and as Captain Town came in they shuffled to their feet and stood with their pipes in their hands. Falkner had previously learned that this was a custom of old lakemen when they wished to show unusual regard for a stranger.

"This is the fellow Burton's girl sent over," announced the captain. "Mr. Falkner, shake hands with the boys, will you? This is Teddy—Teddy Roosevelt, we call him, though his name is Jones; and this is Sandy—Sandy MacGunn. Both of 'em old-timers and rattling good men, as Burton's girl may have told you."

Falkner shook hands.

"We're going out to-night," continued Captain Town, relighting his pipe. "We've got our gang stretched two miles over the line, and there's a straight tip come that the Vigilant is going to drag there to-morrow. If she does we lose our nets—unless we get 'em out before morning. Burton's girl says you want to go, so—" He puffed hard on his pipe. "So—I guess we'll have to take you!"

For an hour Jim Falkner talked and smoked with the men. It did not take him long to see that for some reason the two fishermen, MacGunn and Jones, treated him with especial deference. Even the captain was puzzlingly attentive. At the door, as he was leaving, the master of the compounder gave him a letter.

"Burton's girl asked me to give this to you," he explained. "It's the money, I guess."

Suddenly he placed his two great hands upon the young man's shoulders and looked him squarely in the eyes. "See here, mate," he spoke in a low voice, "you did the square thing by Burton's girl. She thinks you're a brick. But if you lied to her—if you came down here to—" he stopped. Jim Falkner thought of Briggs and the Scotchman, and understood.

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"I swear that I won't betray her confidence," he replied. His voice vibrated with truth. "I'd turn back now if I thought there was a chance of it!" he finished.

"You'd be willing to die first if you knew Burton's girl as well as I do!" declared the captain. "You would, s'elp me God, you would, Falkner!" He took his hands from his visitor's shoulders and opened the door. "I don't suppose Burton's girl told you anything about herself?" he asked. "Not a word!" cried the young man; and his eyes shone with eager interest.

"Well, mebby I'll tell you something to-night," laughed the fish pirate. "Remember, we leave at ten sharp. You're sure you can find us?"

"Perfectly!" said Jim Falkner.

He walked away as if in a dream. Twice he looked back at the handsome stone house, and more than once during the next half-hour he asked himself if it were possible that a fish pirate lived there; an outlaw, a man who staked a fortune and imperiled himself on the strength of his own cunning, and who was willing to accept the risks of the poorest fisherman for the chance of a successful haul from over the line. He had expected to meet pirates, but not of this kind. He had not associated stone fronts and pretty girls with his pictures of the poachers. He realized that, perhaps unwittingly, he was now turning traitor to his assignment.

He knew that he had already gathered material which would have created a sensation in the Herald office; but he had given his word not to divulge its secrets, and he had deliberately pledged himself not to use those details which his managing editor would demand. All this—he acknowledged it with a peculiar thrill of satisfaction—because he had become strangely interested in a girl!

Jim Falkner whistled as he thought, and walked without seeking any particular direction. If he had made a fool of himself he was not in a mood to confess it. He still might follow out his original scheme, ingratiate himself into the confidence of some other pirate not associated with the girl, and write his sensation in the manner he had planned. He wondered how far Captain Town's friendship for the girl went. Perhaps they were relatives. He tried to make himself believe it.

Not until he had reached his hotel did he think to open the letter which had been given to him by the fish pirate. He was elated to find that it contained a note from Miss Burton, as well as the money which he had expended for her ticket the previous evening.

"Dear Mr. Falkner," he read. "In this I am returning what you kindly lent me last night. I hope you liked Captain Town. Please do not forget your promise to come and see me to-morrow afternoon. JOSEPHINE BURTON."

It was not much, but it filled the young man with pleasure. Since his interview with Captain Town he had feared that perhaps Miss Burton did not care to continue their acquaintance, and that the captain himself might not regard further attentions on his part in a friendly light.

He read the note again, and, instead of destroying it afterward, as was his custom with unimportant epistles, he placed it in his pocket. Miss Burton had become a young woman of mystery to him. He realized that she possessed unusual influence with the fish pirates,—or, at least, with Captain Town,—and each hour added to the eagerness with which he anticipated that night's adventure, in which he was confident he would learn more about her.

An hour before the appointed time he was at the slip in which the fish-pirate tug was secured. With the approach of evening a high wind had sprung up out of the north-east—although the night was clear—and from the disturbance in the bay he knew that heavy seas were running outside. The compounder lay black and silent. Not a spark of light could he discern aboard her, and he began to fear that the gale had driven Captain Town and his men from their determination to leave port. He was confident that they would at least send him word, however, so he seated himself in the shelter of a fish-box and waited.

A few minutes before ten two men hurried down from the blackness of the fish-houses and jumped aboard the tug. Falkner called to them, and found that one was MacGunn. The other was the tug's engineer, whom he had not met before.

"Going out, MacGunn?" he asked as he followed them aboard.

"Sure! Didn't the cap'n say so—at ten?"

MacGunn flung open the engine-room door and a rush of hot air poured into the young man's face. He lighted a couple of lanterns, and saw the puzzled look in his companion's face. "Had steam up for half an hour," he

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grinned. Then he added, with a suggestive shrug and another grin: "Hard coal!"

He flung an oil-coat over one of the lanterns and carried it into the pilot-house, where Falkner and he sat down in silence. A few minutes later they were joined by Captain Town and Teddy.

When the captain spoke it was in a voice but little louder than a whisper, and Falkner accepted the hint by maintaining silence while the compounder was got under way. Only by the gentle throbbing of her engine and the pitching of the boat in the seas could he tell when she had left her mooring.

A quarter of an hour had passed when MacGunn uncovered the lantern. He handed it to the captain. "We're off the point," he said. "You remember—"

Captain Town pressed his face close up to one of the port windows. After a moment he turned and motioned Falkner to him. "That's Presque Isle," he said. "Can you make out a light?"

The young man stared hard. A long distance away, it seemed to him, he could see what he thought to be the glow of a lamp in a window.

"That's where Burton's girl lives," said the captain softly, "I told her that if we took you to-night we'd show a light. She must see us soon. There—look!"

Falkner's heart gave a sudden throb of pleasure. For an instant the distant light vanished, then reappeared; and in a dozen flashes of light, followed by intervals of gloom, came the signs of recognition from the watching girl. There was almost a break in the young man's voice when he spoke to Captain Town. "She's—a trump!" he breathed.

He looked again, but now the light remained steadily in the window. He watched it until the tops of the heaving seas shut it out from his vision. Never in his life had he felt the blood pulsing through his veins as it did now, and when he seated, himself, facing Sandy, and the master of the compounder, he found the men eyeing him with keen interest.

"She is a trump!" replied MacGunn. "She's a—"

A sweeping run of the sea caught the compounder with the booming force of a ten-ton sledge-hammer, and at this first signal that she had come into the open lake Teddy swung the tug's nose squarely out from the point, three-quarters in the teeth of the wind and on a line for the international boundary. Falkner shivered.

"She's an angel!" finished MacGunn, when the compounder had straightened herself.

Jim Falkner passed around a box of cigars. The fish pirates seemed indifferent to the roughness of the night, and the fact gave him courage. But Captain Town had discovered his nervousness.

"We've gone out in worse seas than this," he said, lighting his cigar. "It was twice as bad that night Burton went out; wasn't it, Teddy?" he asked, turning to the wheelman. "It ain't customary to go out nights— unless you've got a couple o' thousand dollars' worth of nets at stake, as we've got right now. That's what took Burton out, in November three years ago. He had a fifteen-hundred-dollar gang—which is a string o' gill-nets—dropped three miles over the line in a heavy herring-run, which ground was scheduled to be dragged the next day by Canadian gunboat Petrel. It was that damned boat that settled for Burton!" he growled.

MacGunn had pulled a piece of paper from one of his pockets.

"Look here!" he cried, bringing a doubled fist forcefully upon his knee. "Look here what this feeds. I cut it from a fish paper. 'Cap'n Chayter,' it says, 'of the United States revenue cutter Morrell, on Lake Erie, states that all the fish this year are on the Canadian side.' And that's right! Nine out of ten of 'em are over there. Now, look here, Mr. Falkner," he continued in a voice that shook the little cabin, "fish is fish, ain't they? And they ain't got no nationality, 'ave they? And everybody ought to be allowed to ketch 'em, 'adn't they? But the law says not. The law says fish is CITIZENS! The fish this side of that damned line out there it says is Americans. The fish t'other side is Canadians. If an American pike 'appens to cross that line he immediately turns Canuck—accordin' to law—and we can't ketch 'im, no matter if 'e was born 'n' bred right in Erie harbour! Think of that! An Erie man can't go over there and bring back a runaway Erie fish! That ain't a decent law—it's a damned outrage. And that's the law which killed Burton."

"You see, Burton went out in a bad night to save his nets and was washed overboard," elucidated Captain Town. "The lights of the cutter hove in Slight, and it was in the hurry of trying to save a part of the gang that he was lost. The tug got away—but that was all—and it left Burton's girl and her mother in pretty bad shape."

The wheelman spoke.

"Then she went to work as a—as a—"

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"Shut up!" commanded Captain Town. "I won't have it said, Teddy—darned if I will!"

Jim Falkner reached over and gripped the fish pirate's hand.

"I believe I understand," he said, his eyes glowing. "She was a brick, old man!"

"But it wasn't long," interrupted the other. "We rented Burton's boat to a Dunkirk man, and got her a position in one of the fish-house offices. That was just before the strike."

"Remember the big strike a couple of years ago?" asked Teddy, looking over his shoulder. "Lord—"

"Them as owned boats was all right," spoke MacGunn. "But for them that didn't it was—hell! Half of us was reduced to soup bones, sir—soup bones, by thunder!"

"And atop of that came an epidemic of diphtheria," said the captain. "It was a desperate rub for some of the poorer fellows. That was when Burton's girl showed her colours."

A deep breath came from Teddy.

"I lost my little Nell then," he said hoarsely. "I'd lost the others—three of them—and the wife, too, if it hadn't been for her. She nursed 'em through it, and fed 'em, God bless her—s'elp me, she did; she FED 'em!"

"There are others, Teddy," said MacGunn, a peculiar softness in his rough voice. "There was the Stimsons, the Rogerses, 'Pig' Walcott's family, and a dozen others. We didn't know what she had done for 'em until—"

He stopped, and for a time there was silence.

Falkner listened to the wash of the seas, and waited. Teddy, the wheelman, was staring straight ahead into the gloom of the night. MacGunn was enveloping himself in clouds of smoke. After a little Captain Town finished what the other had begun.

"We didn't know until we found she had sold Burton's boat," he said. "The Dunkirk man had bought it at a half what it was worth, and by the time we discovered what she had done the girl had spent it all on poor devils of the fishing fleet. That's her, Falkner—that's Burton's girl!"

"We paid her back—afterward," came Terry's muffled voice. "But she wouldn't take a cent more than she had spent, not a cent."

"And at Walcott's she took diphthery herself," rejoined MacGunn. "God, how we prayed! And in the critical days some of us didn't work, but just hung around waitin' fr her to live."

"That was two years ago," said Falkner, after a silence. "What does she do now?"

"Nurses sick folks!" jerked MacGunn.

Teddy drew the tug a step into the wind and glanced at Captain Town. The master of the compounder thrust his head and shoulders out of the pilot-house, and, after peering for a few minutes into the darkness of the sea ahead, went forward.

Jim Falkner followed. The wind had shifted into the north, and was colder, but less violent. A mile over the starboard bow two or three steady, star-like lights were slipping swiftly up the lake.

After a little MacGunn's voice came from behind. "What is it, Cap'n?" he cried.

"It isn't her," shouted Town over his shoulder.

"Lights are too high for the Vigilant. We'll cut a quarter of a mile astern. Better douse the glims." He made room for Falkner beside him in the bow.

"The Canucks are in port to-night," he said to him. "They're pretty sure they wouldn't catch anything in a sea like this. I'd be tied up myself if I didn't have a couple of thousand dollars' worth of nets layin' out there!"

Captain Town kept a ceaseless vigil to the north. Once or twice Jim Falkner spoke to him, but received only monosyllabic replies. After a while he rejoined Teddy and MacGunn in the pilot-house.

"D'ye remember the Laughing Lass?" greeted Teddy. The incident of the Laughing Lass had caused talk of war, and the young man nodded.

"Well, right here is where the Petrel tried to shoot hell out of her, back in 1903. She was poaching on the other side and wouldn't stop—"

Captain Town interrupted him from the pilot-house door.

"Tell the engineer to ease her down, Teddy," he called. "We're sighting the point buoy. Sandy, give us a lift with the drag."

Falkner followed the two aft. A few days before he knew that he would have taken a keen interest in what was about to happen, but now his enthusiasm was lamentably lacking. He saw the international buoy come and go in the gloom. He heard the creaking of the net-lifter, watched Captain Town as he slowly paid out the drag-line,

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and was conscious of the suspense which followed.

He knew that the compounder was now in forbidden waters—that they were pirates, with certain prices upon their heads, and that at any moment a gunboat might bear down upon them. But these things did not thrill him as he had imagined they would. More than anything else they produced in his mind the picture of another night, when the father of the girl back at Presque Isle had gone to his death, perhaps very near to where he stood at this moment. After a little he noticed that the tug was moving at a snail-like speed. She seemed to be feeling her way through the seas foot by foot.

Then came a shout from the captain, a triumphant cry from MacGunn—and the throbbing of the compounder's engine ceased. He knew that the drag had caught. For a few moments he watched the line as the creaking windlass drew it in. He saw the first of a mile of net slip over the stern, and then, unobserved by the fish pirates, went back into the still darkness of the pilot-house.

Half an hour later Captain Town came in to get his pipe. As he lighted a match he caught sight of the young man doubled up in one of the cushioned seats. "Hello, mate!—Seasick?" he cried.

"A little uneasy," replied Falkner. As the fish pirate turned to go, Jim Falkner jumped to his feet and caught him by the arm. "Captain, can you tell me on what date Burton was lost?" he asked.

"On the day before the season closed—November fourteenth."

"And to-morrow is the thirteenth," mused the young man as the other left the pilot-house. "Lord deliver us, Jerry, there's no time to lose!" He whistled softly and happily, in the way of a man who is far from seasick.

In the early dawn the compounder came back into Erie. There were two tons of herring in her boxes. Her nets were wet and tangled. But Captain Town did not remain to see the unloading of his catch or to the reeling of his gang. With Jim Falkner he hurried ashore, the two almost running in their haste. A few moments later, divested of his oil-coat and sou'wester, Teddy disappeared upon a run behind the fish-houses.

When they reached Water Street, Jim Falkner and the captain halted. "You are sure you've got time?" he asked.

"I'll have twenty boats and a hundred men by noon!" declared the fish pirate. "We'll raise hell—if you can work your end of it, Falkner!"

The Herald man thrust out a hand. "I'll never look Burton's girl in the face again if I don't!" he exclaimed. "Remember—I promise upon my word of honour!"

He hurried toward. A block away he glanced over his shoulder and saw Captain Town going up Water Street at a trot. It was six o'clock when he reached the Western Union telegraph office.

"I don't suppose the manager is in," he inquired of the clerk.

"He won't be in until eight."

The young man reached for a pad and began writing. Five minutes later he handed the message through the window.

"This is a matter of great importance," he explained to the clerk, "and I don't want to spare expense in getting it to the right party. I want it sent to Port Stanley, Port Burwell and Port Rowan, Ontario. If Captain Fitzgerald is not in any of these three places have a tug sent out in search of him from each port, and I will stand the expense. He must get that message before noon at all costs."

As the clerk read he gave a low whistle of astonishment. This was the message which Falkner had written:

"CAPTAIN FITZGERALD, Commander Revenue Cutter Vigilant,—Ontario. This afternoon a powerful fleet of tugs will leave Erie for Port Dover, where it is their intention to recapture the three American fishing-boats recently caught in Canadian waters and now held in that port. It is probable that the boats will approach from the direction of Stromness. For assurance of responsibility of writer, wire managing editor, the Herald, Detroit, or W.P. Samson, M.P., Windsor. J.A. FALKNER."

Half an hour later the most sensational story of the year was being received over the Herald wire. It described in minute detail the daring plot of a hundred men to consummate one of the most thrilling exploits in lake history. After a column of it had gone the young man sat down and waited. Exhausted by forty-eight hours of sleepless exertion, he soon fell into a slumber, from which he was aroused by the clerk an hour and a half later. The Vigilant had been found by a Port Rowan tug near Long Point, and the message had been delivered to Captain Fitzgerald.

After breakfast at his hotel Falkner went to his room, but not to sleep. He had made up his mind to call upon

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Miss Burton as soon as possible, although he knew that she did not expect him until afternoon. He changed his clothes, shaved himself, and a little before ten o'clock appeared on Presque Isle. A small boy directed him to the Burton home. It was a comfortable-looking cottage, set well back in a group of maples. A gravel path, with flower-beds on either side, led to the big porch, and as he walked up this Falkner caught a magnificent view of the lake beyond. As he approached he heard whistling, unusually clear and musical.

"A man, by jove!" he thought. "I hope not——"

Suddenly he caught the whisk of a skirt around the edge of the cottage. He followed the path, and a moment later stopped dead still, while a flush of pleasure and embarrassment gathered in his face. Perched half-way up a ladder, a dozen feet away, was a young woman in a man's coat, a man's hat, and with a big brown shining braid of hair falling down her back. She was wielding a paint-brush upon the side of the cottage, and whistling while she worked.

As she partly turned to dip her brush into a can suspended to the ladder she saw her chance acquaintance of the other day. The whistle died on her rounded mouth. For an instant she stared in astonished confusion—and then she laughed, the merriest, sweetest laugh the young man had ever heard.

"There! I was afraid you'd go and do it!" she cried. "I told mama that just as surely as I came out to paint this morning you would show up—and you have! How do you do?" She reached down a hand, laughing, and Falkner climbed up the ladder to reach it.

"I wouldn't have missed this for anything," he said, looking up into her face. "You—you're beautiful up there! Besides, I'm here just in time to help you. I can mix paint——"

"I buy mine ready mixed," cried the girl. "See, it comes in cans." She turned to show him, and in doing so dislodged the paint receptacle, which dashed its contents down the ladder, discolouring the tip of one of his shoes. She looked at him with mock dismay.

"I'm glad of it," he said, descending. "Now you must stop work!"

"I've got a dozen more cans in the kitchen," she flung down at him. "And another brush—and a ladder! If you will help me paint this side I'll let you stay to dinner."

Jim's heart fairly jumped with joy. The girl came down and surveyed her work with critical eyes. Her hat had fallen off, and Falkner stood a few steps behind to look at her unobserved.

"Isn't it fine?" she asked, turning upon him. "I'm painting it copper-brown—because—well——" Her eyes danced with fun. "That's the prevailing style in ladies' dress-goods this year, you know," she added. "I painted the fence to begin with. Mr. Tubbs, our neighbour, gave me some home-made paint for that, and it was—it was like paste. Please don't look at the fence!"

Falkner turned and looked.

"I'll do it all over for you, and paint your whole cottage, too—if you'll have an early dinner," he replied,

"Why an early dinner?" The girl pouted her red lips. "Are you hungry, or are you in a hurry to get away?"

"I came over this morning, Miss Jo, because I couldn't come this afternoon," said the young man. "I've got a very important engagement, which begins at one o'clock, and——"

"Then we won't paint," she interrupted.

"But I'll come over and help you every day for a week after to-day, if you'll let me. I'll paint it copper-brown, or red, or—no, it must be copper-brown, for that's the colour of your hair—and your hair is beautiful. Will you let me come, Miss Jo?" he pleaded. "Please!"

"I'll have to ask mama about that," said the girl, laughing softly at him with her eyes. "I think—perhaps——Well, let's go in and see her. Do you mind going through the kitchen?"

When he rejoined Captain Town at one o'clock in the Water Street stone front he spoke his feelings. "I've been over to see Miss Burton," he said. "I never met a girl like her before."

"And you never will," declared the fish pirate. "Next to Laura—that's Mrs. Town—she's the finest girl that lives."

He led the way to the little room into which the young man was admitted the day before. "Well, I've got twenty-seven boats and a hundred and sixteen men. The tugs you want have steam up and are ready to leave at any time. You didn't let Burton's girl know?"

"Only told her part of the scheme," said Falkner. "She fairly begged me to let her go with us—said she knew Mrs. Town would go if you'd let her."

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"Lord, Falkner, how Miss Jo will fight us when she discovers just why we're doing this!" laughed the captain. "If it wasn't for the mother—" He shrugged his shoulders and blew a huge cloud of smoke from his pipe.

"Have you mapped out the course, Captain?"

"This is it." The master of the compounder thumbed a much-worn map hanging on the wall. "We strike due north to the international line; follow that on the American side until we're opposite Dunkirk, then cut a point midway between Stromness and Port Dover. The Canadian boats can't help from sighting us somewhere along that course."

"And we start?"

"It's sixty-five miles. We should leave within an hour."

"That will give me just about time to run up-town and wire a few paragraphs to my paper," said Falkner. "I'll meet you at the boats."

He hurried to the telegraph office again and found a message awaiting him. It was from W.P. Samson, member of Parliament, Windsor, and read:

"What the devil! Captain Fitzgerald, the Vigilant, asks who you are, and if responsible. Told him yes. Are you in trouble? SAMSON."

"Hurrah!" cried Jim Falkner.

The clerk turned a surprised face upon him from the window. "Good news?" he asked. "Money from father, perhaps?"

"Bully!" he exclaimed.

He scribbled a note of thanks to Samson, M.P., and then hurried half a column additional matter off to the Herald. When he came down to the docks he saw Captain Town advancing to meet him. "The Vigilant is taking the bait," he greeted, as the fish pirate came up. "Read this!"

He gave him Samson's telegram, and when they reached the foot of the ship Captain Town read it aloud to the little group of men assembled there. Broad grins overspread their strong faces, and each gave Jim Falkner a hearty grip of the hands.

A quarter of an hour later six of the largest and fleetest tugs in Erie trailed out of the harbour. As they passed Presque Isle Falkner stood high up on the engine-house of the compounder and gazed toward the Burton home. Soon he saw a figure run down to the edge of the beach, and with a joyful shout he waved his hat above his head. Then something rose in the air above the distant girl. For an instant it fluttered, only partly visible; then a gust of wind caught it, and every eye in the little fleet recognized the American flag.

From the pilot-house Captain Town shouted to his engineer, and a screeching blast from the compounder answered the salute of Burton's girl. In an instant it had been taken up by the other tugs, until a mist of steam floated out and hid the distant shore from Falkner's eyes. When he rejoined the fish-pirate captain in the pilot-house there was tense whiteness in his face which he did not know was there.

It was a strange fleet that passed along the international boundary that afternoon. According to Jim Falkner's plans, the six tugs followed one after another, in battleship line, and the blackest smoke that bituminous coal could be forced to make trailed over the sea behind them. Late in the afternoon a slim low craft, which was made out to be the auxiliary Canadian cruiser, was sighted in the offing. For an hour she remained parallel with them, running eastward; when darkness fell her lights showed that she was gathering great speed, and was making in the direction of Port Dover.

Opposite Dunkirk the compounder swung her course to a point between Stromness and Port Dover. At nine o'clock, with the sky faultlessly clear above them, they were in the edge of Outer Long Point Bay. In the distance the lights of Port Dover shone dimly.

Half an hour later the compounder, under low pressure, left the line and steamed silently in the direction of Stromness. Both vessels edged shoreward. It was nearly midnight when they returned to the fleet.

The compounder reported that the auxiliary cruiser was lying with steam up between Port Rowan and Normandale; the Vigilant had been found two miles beyond Port Dover. Both cruisers were on the watch, and ready to sweep down upon the little fleet the moment it entered the harbour.

For two hours more the tugs lay silently in the Outer Bay. Then the reconnaissance was made again. The cruisers had not changed their positions. A little after three o'clock the compounder led a course straight for Port

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Dover, and simultaneously with their movement the auxiliary cruiser slipped down from Port Rowan. Mile after mile, steaming slowly, the fleet of tugs approached the port in which the captured American boats were held. At dawn they had come to within half a mile of the town. Then the compounder darted eastward. In their battleship line they steamed boldly past the Vigilant gave a simultaneous blast of their whistles, and with their crews shouting themselves hoarse with joy struck a course for the town of Dunkirk.

Meanwhile, in the unguarded Canadian fishing-grounds, forty miles away, twenty-one Erie fish-tugs were making the biggest catch of the season. When they came into port they brought fifty-two tons of Canadian herring, and that afternoon a check for six thousand dollars was handed to Captain Town by the manager of one of the big fish companies.

That evening a deputation of fish pirates, headed by Captain Town, called upon Mrs. William Burton. Jim Falkner accompanied them until he could see the lights of Josephine's home. Then he stopped. For a few moments he and the fish-pirate captain stood alone, and their hands met in a firm grip. "Falkner," said the master of the compounder, "this was your scheme. I want to tell them so. I want to let Miss Jo know that the biggest thing that ever happened in Erie came from an idea of yours. I want—"

"She would never forgive me, Captain," interrupted the young man. "I don't believe she would ever let me see her again. She will regard the whole thing as a piece of charity, and she will fight it—hard! Remember, it's for the mother. It's a six-thousand-dollar ransom taken from the Canadians for Burton's death—and it comes from the fishermen of Erie. Please leave me out!"

Captain Town returned to the waiting men and Falkner watched them until they disappeared into the cottage, but he stood in the deep shadow of a tree and waited. An almost overmastering desire came upon him to enter the cottage and ask the girl to share her life with him. The sound of voices from a near-by shrub brought him out of his reverie. Several minutes passed before he noticed two forms coming toward him, and as they approached he recognized Burton's girl.

Her companion was a tall, good-looking athletic man in his early thirties. They seemed very happy and obviously in love. When they reached a few yards from where Falkner stood the man drew the girl toward him and said in anxious tones, "I love you, Jo. Won't you give me your answer to-night? I imagine you have changed since you met this Jim Falkner and I'm afraid. Do you care for him?"

Though eavesdropping was not one of the young reporter's accomplishments, there seemed to be no place to which he might go; and after what he had already heard, disclosure of his presence in the near-by shadows was unthinkable.

The girl hesitated a moment and then said, "No, dear, I like him—but I do not love him. I'll marry you whenever you are ready!"

They moved on slowly, but Jim Falkner remained where he had hidden himself without realizing how rapidly the moments were slipping away. An hour later the cottage door reopened and the men filed out. As they came out at the gate he joined them.

"It was a hard rub, Falkner," said Captain Town "but we made the little widow take it!" Then glancing at the young man's face, the captain continued, "Why, what—"

"I'm glad, Captain, very glad indeed. It will make it—easier for her."

CHAPTER IX. THE OBJECT LESSON

"By George! That's great stuff," declared the managing editor, "I thought Jim Falkner had it in him." And then the great man, than whom there was none more powerful in the estimation of the Herald's reporters, tossed upon the owner's desk a story which the youngest reporter was crowding upon the wires two hundred miles away. "Now you know why I sent him. Just read it, Fred."

It is the groaning, wailing horror of five thousand human voices that rises above the thunder of the sea, a deep-throated rumbling of men punctuated by the shrill screams of women—a sound that, has grown and grown for hours until all other sounds have seemingly died away. The wind lashes by unheard, and from where the waves sweep in almost to the feet of the assembled watchers there comes but a subdued murmur.

For hour after hour that multitude has stood here, facing one of the most terrific storms that has ever been known on Lake Michigan. At times it has prayed, but more often it has cursed. Even the women have shrieked into the teeth of the fearful hurricane the hope, the horror, and the malediction of that great crowd, changing—for ever changing—as to particular individuals, but always, to those who are privileged to observe, the same writhing, maddened concourse of helpless humanity. It is drenched, exhausted, and hopeless; drenched by the chilling spume shot in by the gale, weakened to delirium by the sight before its eyes, and hopeless—as hopeless as... One voice has said that, in maddened shriek, and it was a woman's voice. The woman lies crumpled in the sand; the spray falling over her in sheets. Her long black hair clings to her in drenched masses; her eyes are insanely terrible and her lips are bleeding. She has cried against God—and cursed the men behind her. An old man, with white hair and beard, clutches her dress and has joined her in unheard imprecation, though more often he is mumbling a voiceless prayer, his sand-blistered eyes turned red and wild toward the raging sea.

Four hundred—five hundred—yards out there a ship is going to pieces, a black steel thing of eight thousand tons or so. Aboard her there have been thirty living creatures like those that make up the watching multitude. Now there remain but six. The assembled watchers can see them—four clinging like ants to the forward upper works and two twisting and swinging to the end of the life-line aft. Between the two and the four the ship's back has broken, and as the midship has sunk and the sea spurted over it in a frothing maelstrom there has risen above all other tumult that great sobbing moan of human voices.

But that is all thus far. There has been no effort toward rescue. A boat might possibly live in those seas, but it would have no more than a thousand to one chance. Even the little group of men at the lifesaving station, a third of a mile away, deem it folly to take that thousandth chance. The multitude has cursed and threatened; but no one person among them all has offered himself as a sacrifice, with the exception of the old white-haired man kneeling in the sand beside the woman. He is a retired captain, named McVee. The woman who has joined him in his exhortation is a stranger in this locality.

"It's no use, Cap'n," the chief of the life-saving crew said to the old man. "We couldn't live two minutes in that sea! It would be death—"

"You lie!" shouted the old man. "You lie! You're afraid—afraid—"

The Herald's owner laid the yellow sheets carefully upon his desk, slowly removed his spectacles, and seemed about to comment—when a copy boy rushed in with additional material just as the throbbing wire had brought it.

Captain McVee has turned back to the crowd, the panting, wild-eyed woman close behind him, and called for men. Who will go with him? Who will join him in an attempt to rescue? His thin voice is half-unheard. The wind has caught and twisted it into unintelligible sound. Women have stilled their sobs and cries while men fall back quietly and let him pass. Those who have cursed the cowardice of the life-savers have become mute. The woman is upon her knees where the spume of the sea falls over her in torrents, and has stretched her arms out to the ship.

"Joe—my Joe—"

Only the old captain seems to have heard her moaning cry. He puts a thin trembling arm about her shoulders. The wind has whipped the masses of her hair around him, but the freighter has broken apart and she has torn herself away, with him clinging to her dress. Two men are hanging aft. There are four ahead. Only six—out of thirty! Something must have burst in her head, and swaying as if about to fall, she gropes blindly toward the old mariner for support.

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Now there is momentarily a terrible silence. From the distant life-saving station the crowded thousands have become an immobile line of black—lifeless and motionless. In an instant every voice has been hushed, and every eye is turned toward the wreck. The after part of the ship, where the two men clung, is sinking. It is going foot by foot, with an excruciating, torturing slowness. The multitude has seen twenty-four other human souls swept into eternity, but they have been swallowed in huge bursting seas that have quickly hidden detail. This is different. It is death measured by inches.

The forward part of the ship is solid, rammed hard upon the bottom. The life-line leading from it to the aft cabin is still unbroken, and an almost imperceptible stir has swept through the crowd as one of the two men has poised himself, with his arms stretched over his head. It is a black smoky city of lake people that lies over beyond the beach and those gathered upon the shore know what is about to happen. The stir is caused by women—and men—but mostly women, turning away. They might look upon death in certain forms stolidly—but not this.

For a brief spell the man has stood there, gargoyle-like, leaning over the end of the galley. Through the grey mist of wind-torn waves there has been no movement by him visible at that distance of four hundred yards. The sharpest eyes have seen, however, that his head is turned toward his companion, who, no more than a formless blot, has flattened himself against a davit. A man with a glass declares that this blot is a boy.

Now the standing figure has leaned out farther—slowly but perceptibly. He is almost horizontal as he swings down toward the frothing sea. For a few instants he has been hidden in a thunder of spume. Then the multitude has glimpsed him again, swinging like a toy on a string, with three hundred feet between him and the pilot-house. Hand over hand he is travelling along the life-line, with the sea now a dozen feet beneath him, now at his heels, setting him twisting and writhing whenever it can strike as high as his ankles. A few times he has doubled himself, like a jack-knife, and escaped the fury of the waves as they run under, but at each succeeding effort his legs dangle lower. He's gone a third of the distance! Now a half! The blot against the empty davit has lengthened itself, has crawled face downward to the line, and has risen to its knees. The boy is preparing to follow over the life-line.

From the woman there has been wrung a shriek of anguish—of warning—that was swallowed and smothered in the wind. There is no chance for him. The watching thousands know that, and again a murmur of horror has risen above the tumult of the sea.

The boy has slipped out, as the man before him had done, and he too has now gripped the cable. For a minute he waits and watches the struggling figure that is now within seventy feet of the pilot-house. It is progressing with terrible slowness. A minute more and it has stopped, arms and legs stretched down, as if weighted with lead. The cap of a sea has caught it as high as the waist, and for a few moments it has swung and twisted like a rag to the clothes-line. Now the next sea has come, and the line is bare. The boy draws back, the multitude watching, still voiceless. He has gripped the empty davit-arm, and again flattened himself until he has become once more a lifeless, formless blot.

The woman in the sand has staggered to her feet and now stands swaying. She is a young woman, and with the exception of the spots of red on her lips her face is deathly white. Her hair and her eyes have doubtless made many men call her beautiful. She has turned to the crowd, but is unperceptive of detail. There is only a mass of pallid faces. In her heart there is a bitter hatred of them all. They are afraid—afraid! The words burn in her brain, her lips tremble with them, yet there is no sound.

"Cowards—cowards—"

Jim Falkner's report of the wreck of the *Osceola* ended at this point. There was no response to urgent demands for further particulars, though the presses were held until the last moment possible. Eventually, however, the *Herald* got the balance of the story from the Associated Press.

A young man who had been looking at the wreck through a glass came out from the black line along the shore to help her. She struck at him and tore her way through the crowd, panting at every step those soundless words—"cowards—cowards—cowards." The young man followed her. They passed beyond the black line of people. In their haste they scattered a frightened throng of children huddled farther back on the beach. They sped toward the life-saving station; but that, too, and the little group of hopeless men there, were unseen by the woman. That hot, burning something in her head had given way. She ran—swifter and swifter, she thought—but at each step her feet dragged deeper into the sand. Beyond the station she fell in a wide sweep of dunes and lay there as if dead.

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But her brain was working. In a flash it leaped the distance of a hundred miles. She saw, in her moment's delirium, the little home there, their home, with its trees and its garden; she saw HIS room, with its pictures of ships, its charts, and its hundred memories of the lake he sailed. She had descended to that home, with its modest comfort and atmosphere of economy. She had given up a life of luxury to share this cottage with a man who would be a captain—soon. That was the story. And the man had failed—partly. He had not become a captain, and he brooded over the fact, mostly because of the woman.

"You were rich, Jean," he had said on his last short visit home. "You had everything that the world could give you, and I brought you to this. Sometimes—I—am—sorry."

That last scene came like a passing flash to the woman in the sand. She had put her arms up about his shoulders, and had smiled in her happiness, and had told him that there was one thing that the world had never held for her before—and that was love. After he had gone back to his ship the woman sat down and cried—for two reasons, but mostly for one. That abyss seemed always between them. A thousand times she had tried to bridge it. What did she care for what she had left so long as she had him! He had failed; at least he thought he had failed, but to the woman it was not failure. She loved him, and she loved the little cottage—nest that he had made for her, and there were times, when she remembered his thoughts, that she regretted the day she had been born in a mansion instead of in just such another little cottage, with the lilacs growing almost to its grey-aged roof. And then, one day, there came a sudden, thrilling knowledge into her soul, the knowledge that another soul—the embryo of a new life—had come into her being, and she was filled with a strange calm joy that remained always with her. Oh, how she longed to tell the man, how she longed to see him, and to tell him, with her face close up against his breast. She did not write. She waited, day after day; and then, urged by her great throbbing joy, she had gone to meet him—to surprise him— at a port fully a hundred miles away. Then the storm, the daring rush for the harbour, the treacherous shoal beyond the breakwater! It had all happened before her eyes, and now it was ending with HER looking on!

She staggered to her feet and ran desperately down to where the sea beat in, wild-eyed, half mad. If she could only let him know! If she could only let him know! She stretched out her arms and called to him, again and again. She ran along the shore, looking, hunting, with an insane fire in her eyes, and moaning his name. If she could only reach him, just to die there at his side—AND LET HIM KNOW! It did not occur to her that he might have gone with the other twenty-five. He was there—still—with the five!

She ran farther and farther, until she came to a ditch of water that divided the dunes—a narrow canal half filled with sand reaching back to a boathouse. Bobbing up and down in it was a skiff tied to an iron ring in an old spar. When the young man overtook her she was upon her knees beside the spar, her trembling fingers fumbling in futile efforts at the knot.

"Joe—Joe—I'm going out to Joe!"

Jim Falkner caught her by the arm. She could not hear his voice, but saw the negative shake of his head. "I'm going!" she shrieked up at him. "I'm going—going——"

Her companion turned his face toward the sea. For a moment he stood there, a furious heat in his soul warping his reason. If they went out—they two—and one of them a woman, would it inspire a spark of courage in those thousands? The woman was battling with the knot, sobbing for his help. Until yesterday she had been a stranger to him. On this beach he had learned a little of her story, and had rejoiced with her in the happiness that was to come with the ship. The blood of the lake-breed was strong within him. It grew hot now. New life throbbed in his limbs. He turned back to the woman with a knife in his hand, and cut the rope.

Together they climbed into the bobbing skiff, and the young man took both oars. The beach circled here, like the quarter of a cart-wheel, and the wind that beat in the face of the lifeboats aided the frail craft and swept it out into the heavy seas. The woman crouched in the stern, her hands gripping the gunwales. The deathly pallor had fled from her face. Her lips were parted. A feverish glow burned in her cheeks. Her eyes were luminous with excitement, hope, eagerness. They looked over and beyond the man—to the wreck. It was looming up larger every instant. She could see the pilot-house, like a grey rock outside the breakwater, and against it she saw black spots that were men. One of them—one of those remaining four—was Joe, her Joe! She reasoned no farther than this. And she was going to him! She released her hold of the gunwales to stretch out her arms and the wind caught her and tore her shrieked greeting. Did he see her? Did he know her? She heard her companion's voice cry out warningly, and shrank back, crumpled close down, as she remembered he had told her to lie. For a moment she

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turned her eyes upon him. He was fighting magnificently, like a giant.

Backward—forward—backward—forward—she watched the movement of his oars. And she smiled, smiled in her madness until her face seemed the most beautiful thing Jim Falkner had ever looked upon. His eyes glowed with new courage and his arms pulled a little stronger.

From the shore the gathered thousands saw the skiff and there rose again that monotone of human voices, killed by the wind and the thunder of the sea. The black line moved. The group beside the distant lifeboat split into a dozen units. People were moving swiftly along the beach. But the woman saw nothing of this. Again her eyes were upon the wreck. She realized no danger in the fury of the seas that almost engulfed them; the smothering volleys of spume whipped from their crests caused her only momentary discomfort; the wind, tearing her hair and driving the breath from her frail body, was the blessing of God. This she realized, even in her insane oblivion to all things but the wreck and the men upon it. It was driving them nearer—nearer, every fierce blast of it shot them more and more abreast their goal, and now the young man was pulling on one oar alone, pulling with both hands, with the exultant strength of youth in this last supreme effort.

The creatures on the wreck had seen them. Through the blinding spray the woman saw one of them raise his arm. It was her husband—her Joe! He recognized her—knew that she was coming to him! It made no difference that the man was only a blot to her—a moving, living being with swinging arm. It was JOE. And he recognized her! In her madness she believed this, and she held out her arms again, and shrieked his name. She felt herself swaying. Something seemed clutching at her throat, stifling the breath in her bosom, and she fell forward upon her face, her dripping hair burying the rower's feet. In a few moments she heard him shouting down at her and she struggled to her knees. The black side of the ship was very near. Two men were there, leaning far over in the beat of the seas, their arms stretched down to receive them. Through the white mist she saw one face, a face filled with the terror that may fall once, but never twice, to the lot of a human being, and there came out through that mist a great cry—HER NAME!

The woman staggered to her feet, swaying between life and death, and Jim Falkner dropped from his seat and caught her protectingly about the knees.

"Joe!" she shrieked.

She stretched up her arms as the skiff crashed against the steel wall, and then something lifted her up—up—and that something dragged her back out of the drench, and she knew that she was close, crushingly close, in a strong man's arms.

Back on the beach an old man turned and shouted: "By all that's good, they made it—safe!" And then there went up a roar from the multitude, as out into the seas, filled with men, went the lifeboat. What one man in a frail skiff could accomplish alone, a half-dozen in a stout lifeboat surely could also. Jim Falkner had given them an object lesson.

Reporting to the Herald, or any other paper, suddenly became most repulsive to Jim Falkner after that wreck and rescue. The lure of the Inland Seas was again upon the young man—and this time irresistibly. Henceforth he must be a working part of its life, no mere looker-on.

CHAPTER X. THE CAPTAIN OF THE CHRISTOPHER DUGGAN

On board the ships which ply the Inland Seas life is usually a very humdrum, routine thing. A sailor sleeps, arises, eats, works and sleeps again—the same unvarying programme day after day from March until December, except when in port for the shortest possible time to load and unload. Then the soul-breaking monotony ceases and there is feverish activity, every one on duty, or subject to instant call thereto, the entire twenty-four hours. Many sailors are but workmen during their whole lives. Ordinarily, romance and adventure are far removed from the existence of both the officers and their men, and there is no probable explanation available for the fact that Jim Falkner found so much of adventure and came so close to romance during his short career on the lakes before he became a reporter. As a newspaper man of course he had had a few exceptional opportunities.

But now three very ordinary years were to speed by after the young man resigned his reportorial position and undertook again—albeit unwittingly—to follow in the footsteps of his heroic father, late master of the Bannockburn. Jim Falkner was of the lake breed, and life elsewhere than on the bosom of America's fresh-water oceans just couldn't exist for him.

During the last of those three uneventful years he was in the Waverly—a ten-thousand-ton ore carrier—as second mate under Captain Ben Leonhard. Even such apparently promising youngsters as Jim Falkner had to make haste slowly, for it is both the written and unwritten law of the lakes that there is no worth-while substitute for actual experience on shipboard.

About the master of the Waverly there hung an aura of romance, mystery, and adventure which greatly attracted young Jim Falkner. It was the tale of Captain Leonhard's first command that first drew Falkner to him. All over the lakes—wherever officers or men chanced to assemble—the old story of the Christopher Duggan was known. At the club in Duluth, old Captain Matthew Haynes had told it to Jim Falkner.

"Father is dead!"

"Above the cracking and snapping of the icebound timber outside, and the thunder of the sea as it packed the little ice-devils closer about the sinking vessel, rose the voice of the girl—firm, almost triumphant, in the ears of the haggard, white-faced men who stood gripping their axes and ice-hooks under the glow of the swinging cabin light. Their watery eyes caught the indistinct white of the sheet under which the captain lay. Beside it stood Duggan's girl. Her fallen hair glistened in frozen strands. Her face was death-like, with a red spot on each cheek where the ice had bitten it. But her eyes were big, beautiful and fearless, as she scanned the faces of the men.

"Instinctively old Ramsay put a half-frozen hand to his grey head and pulled off his stiffened cap. Even in this last moment he cherished the old custom of the lakes.

"'I'm glad, Jean, girl,' he said. 'It's easier for a dead man to go down than for a live un!'

"Outside there was a terrific crash, as another dozen tons of ice-bound cedar loosened its hold of the Christopher Duggan. One by one the members of the crew bared their heads with Ramsay, until only the youngest of them, the boy from Ontanagon, who had never shipped before in his life, stood there with his head covered, staring straight into the eyes of the girl. Big tears rolled down his cheeks, his purple lips seemed to form a word; then he dropped his head with the others.

"'Father's gone!' cried Duggan's girl, her voice half drowned in the thundering rush of water and ice outside. 'But he didn't know he was going down, an' he said for me to take the ship,—me 'n' Ramsay. There's nothing to keep us from the boats now, if the cedars don't hold.'

"'If they do hold, Jean, all the devils from 'ere to the Soo can't pull us down! But they won't, girl—'ear that?' shouted Ramsay.

"A rumbling shudder passed through the Christopher Duggan, and a roar as of distant thunder came to the ears of the men as another avalanche of cedar posts pitched over her side.

"'Keep them as long as you can, and me 'n' Ben'll fix the boats!' commanded the girl.

"The men who were daring one last trip across Superior at double pay gripped their axes. As they hurled themselves out into the blackness of the bitter storm, with grey-headed Ramsay leading them, the boy from Ontanagon caught one of Jean's slim hands for a moment between both his own big bony ones. "'You dassen't do it—I mean you mustn't, Jean!' he said. 'You stay here. I'll fix the boats, an' then—then I'll come back for you!'

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"Ben, you do as I tell you!" retorted the girl, high above the tumult of the crunching ice and tumbling cedar. 'I'm cap'n now, an' you're too much afraid to do it alone. I ain't forgot you was a coward yesterday!'

"I warn't a coward, Jean—"

"The boy's expostulation died away in a sudden furious gust that sent the cabin door crashing inward. The girl steadied herself against the gale, her long hair whipping back for an instant into the young man's face. Then she forged ahead into the darkness, out of which came the stentorian voice of Ramsay, who saw her figure swaying onward between him and the light in the cabin.

"One of the boats is gone, Jean—other's clear!" he shouted.

"Then keep to the ice!" returned the girl.

"The barge rode smoothly now. She seemed to cut the waves like an iron wedge, and the way she hung in the seas, a dead weight without a tremor, put a thrill of hope into the heart of the green boy from the northern Michigan port. But Duggan's girl knew what that steadiness meant.

"Ordinarily a dying man is quiet in his last moments. A schooner always is when the little ice—devils have almost got it down. For sixteen hours they had been freezing to the sides of the Christopher Duggan. They hung in solid tons from her deckhouses and rudder. They had crept up her sides until they smothered her outlines of wood, and when now and then a part of the cedar cargo pitched over into the sea, it was like a mass of broken ice that went. Everywhere the ice—devils had got their hold, and the Christopher Duggan continued to settle inch by inch. Above the regular swish of the waves came the sounds of hacking axes, like the beats of a death—watch at one's bed—head.

"The girl joined the men. One of them slipped and fell at her feet, but it was too late to turn Samaritan now. The frozen sailor struggled to his feet again and gripped his axe, but his blows were weak and ineffectual. In the glimmer of the lanterns tied to the deck Jean saw Ramsay fall helplessly down from the cedars, a coil of rope tangled about his arm. His grey head was bare, his beard and hair frozen stiff, and his face filled with an awful agony. His fingers refused to respond as he tried to grip the girl's arm.

"I can't tie 'em any more!" he cried. 'We ain't goin' to hold the cedars much longer!'

"How long?" The girl had dropped her axe. Her voice was almost metallic in its firmness.

"Ten minutes; mebbe less," said Ramsay.

"Then hustle the men into the cabin, and thaw 'em out. We've drifted close into the Michigan shore, an' we'll make it in the boat!"

"Duggan's girl came in last. Never had the lad from Ontanagon seen her eyes so big and dark; never had he seen her face so white. Somehow he did not feel afraid at all when near Jean. If the boat went down—and he knew that it would go soon—he had determined to do a desperate thing. Duggan's girl should go down in his arms. It would be better lying down there in one of the deep pits of Superior's bottom if Jean were near him.

"He found himself wondering in that moment if all the women of the lakes were as splendid as she; and then his dream was interrupted by that same cold, passionless voice telling Ramsay that it was time to go to the boat. At that moment it was a disappointment. He would rather have met his end there, with Jean, than out in the cold and alone. Looking straight at Duggan's girl, he said: 'I'd rather stay here, Jean!'

"Are you afraid to go, or is it because you ain't afraid to stay?" There was something in Jean's voice that sounded queer. Just a flash of softness came into her eyes, and quickly disappeared again. Then she pushed old Ramsay through the door, and followed. Two of the sailors had axes, and the girl brought another.

"Under the broad stern of the barge the waves beat mercilessly against the ice—hung rudder. Now and then there was a lull; and in one of these the boat swung down, and two sailors were in it before another of the heavier waves came to beat its ribs against the ice. Then Ramsay seized Jean's arm, this time firmly.

"You next, Jean, girl!"

"Not now, Ramsay!" she cried, jerking her arm free. 'Have you forgotten that father's in there? Ain't it my right to be the last to leave the boat?'

"You'd better go, Jean," urged the boy, close up to her ear. 'I'll be the last.'

"You won't!" almost shrieked the girl. 'Ben, git into that boat,—and you, too, Ramsay. Ain't this my boat now, and ain't it my right to leave father last?' Without a word old Ramsay clambered over the side, and the boy followed.

"You ready?" called down the girl.

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"Only a second, Jean. There—now—"

"In the light of the lanterns Jean's axe flashed above her head. Once, twice, it rose and fell, and the crew of the Christopher Duggan disappeared in the blackness of the sea.

"Jean! Jean!" came a despairing cry.

"I'm goin' to stay with father!" shouted the girl through the trumpet of her hands. 'Good—bye!'

"The crash of another mass of cedar as it slipped off the barge drowned the voices from the small boat. Fearing that the end was very near, Duggan's girl hurried back and sat down beside the white—sheeted cot in the cabin. Her eyes were softer now, and with her chin in her hands she listened unflinchingly for that last gurgling swish of waters which would tell her that the nose of the Christopher Duggan was going under.

"The water dripped from her long beautiful hair, and once or twice a phantom smile seemed to soften her lips as she thought of the clumsy deck—hand from Ontanagon. The seconds passed—they seemed like minutes to the waiting girl—and only the recurring sounds of slipping cedar posts came where there should have been that last triumphant gurgle of the little ice—devils. Then there came another sound—a great human cry of 'Jean, Jean!' as the door burst open and in it stood the boy, dripping with ice and water, his face white as death itself would ever make it.

"Jean, Jean!" he cried again. 'I've come back!'

"With a wild cry the girl sprang to her feet and held out her arms blindly. 'Ben, you went out in the boat—'

"An' I jumped back, Jean!"

"Through the open door there came an awful sound. It was a soothing, rustling sound, like that made by the swish of crunched ice against the sides of a copper vessel, only long—continued. The girl stood as if transfixed, and unconsciously she lifted her eyes upward.

"Jean, is it coming?" asked the boy in a low, thrilling voice. The girl nodded. "Then listen Jean! I came back to die with you; for I'd rather die with you here than live out there! But I want you to go down in my arms, Jean—will you?"

"A soft light came again into Jean's beautiful eyes as she put her arms around the boy's shoulders. 'I couldn't die in braver ones, Ben,' she said.

"The boy from Ontanagon held her closely. He could feel her heart beating against his own, and a little fearfully he brought his rough cheek down until it pressed against the girl's. Somehow he forgot to listen to the ominous sound outside, and he kissed her very gently.

"One, two, three minutes passed, and the girl lifted her head. There was a pink glow in either cheek now, as she gently pushed the boy back. 'Ben, I guess I was wrong. The time ain't come yet!'

"As if to argue for the young lover, there came a tremendous shock that seemed to rend the barge from end to end. For a minute the Christopher Duggan tossed in the seas as if a charge of dynamite had lifted her out of the water. Her stern shot up with a suddenness that pitched Jean and her companion violently against the wall of the cabin. Then the vessel settled again, and rolled violently, as if caught in another and fiercer gale.

"Ben, Ben!" shrieked the girl. 'The ice has broke!'

"The landsman caught the meaning of the words. In a flash he was out at the door and on the deck. The wind blew fiercely over his head. He could hear the cedars slipping, but it was only a thick spray of the wave—crests that dashed into his face now. He found difficulty in keeping his feet, and out of his throat came a yell of joy. With the cabin lantern in her hand, Jean stumbled out to him, and together they held it over the ice—smothered rail of the barge. The CHRISTOPHER DUGGAN was up four feet out of the water.

"No word came from the lips of the girl. She seemed limp and helpless now, and caught hold of her companion for support. In turn the lad from Ontanagon put an arm about her, and half carried her back into the cabin. Then he took the arm away, and Duggan's girl fell upon her knees beside the dead man.

"After that Ben went out and chopped and chopped. Then he tied the cedars down and hung lights as high up the slippery masts as he could climb. When he came back a sickly grey was climbing up into the sky, and by straining his eyes he could make out the white crests of the waves a few fathoms out. The girl still knelt beside the cot—asleep, the boy thought—so he went out again, and watched the coining of the day from the sheltered side of the cedars. His vision grew wider and wider, until half a mile away, deep down, and pounding steadily toward the Soo, he caught the outlines of a huge steel freighter.

"When Jean awoke, the landsman was seated near her, calmly smoking a pipe. There was a good fire in the

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stove, and the room was warm and exceedingly comfortable. Moreover, the Christopher Duggan seemed to be riding squarely in the sea. As the girl jumped to her feet, and brushed the thick hair back from her face, the boy dropped his pipe to the floor and caught her gently by the arm.

"Come here, Jean!" He led her to the door, and opened it. A hundred fathoms ahead the steel freighter was hurrying on her last trip to the Soo. 'We're in tow,' he explained.

"The wind caught Jean's hair and whipped it about his face. The boy from Ontanagon half put his hands up to it, hesitated, then caught Duggan's girl in his arms."

CHAPTER XI. THE LAKE BREED

Jim Falkner, guided ever by a destiny he did not understand, sailed as second mate on the Winona—a much larger vessel than the Waverly— during the season of 1906; and when that ended, he went up for his papers as first mate and obtained them easily.

During the weeks that passed before he knew what vessel he would have the next season, he lived quietly in the little city on the Erie shore that had been "home" to him ever since that short but eventful cruise as master of the Lady Gwendolyn—pirate—craft of his youth. Here he became a member in good standing of the Master Mariners' Society; and on a Thursday evening—while the wind whistled menacingly about the cornices—he told his assembled friends why he had chosen a berth under Captain Bartholomew Holmes in the Winona.

"Holmes had become known since the death of his young wife as a grim slave—driver," said Jim Falkner. "I wanted some experience under such a master, but I found him merely a rigid disciplinarian—hard, to be sure, but always fair—a man who expected always the best his crew could do and who never was satisfied with less. I dare say that had anyone here passed from mate to master under similar circumstances— and then, within the year, lost what he thought most precious in the whole world—he would scarcely have stood it as well.

"Captain Wiggs' girl arrived in Buffalo on the eight—fifteen train. Ten minutes later the excited captain was hurrying her down to the thick, coal—grimed darkness of the river, where the din of loading and emptying vessels, the glare of tug lights, and the signals of the incoming and outbound ships filled the night with the light and life of the dirtiest and busiest port on the lakes.

"Captain Wiggs was overflowing with joy. Above the rattle of wheels on cobblestone pavements, the wheezing of innumerable exhaust pipes, and a hundred other noises, his voice rumbled cheerfully, while his daughter, panting and laughing, ran at times to keep pace with him. The skipper of the JENNIE CULLOM was short and thick; he stood five feet seven and weighed two hundred and eighty pounds. When he paused at last where a vista of ships' lights hung low, like a thousand varicoloured stars, he was wheezing like a stranded fish, but still talking.

"'There she is!' he announced, catching his breath in a staccato of gasps." She's lit up—ready f'r you—ever'thing nach'r'l!"

"He pointed to a rim of lights hung along the gangway of a freighter which, in the lantern—lit gloom, looked like its master, short and fat; then he whisked his girl over the plank and released the last volume of breath in him in a bellow for the mate.

"'Bart—Bart, m'lad, where are y'?"

"Bartholomew Holmes had purposely lost himself in a group of men working about the windlass. For hours he had been preparing himself for the ordeal of meeting the captain's daughter. As he came slowly out into the light, responsive to Captain Wiggs' summons, he was struggling to control the uncomfortable bigness that welled up into his throat, his heart beat like a drum and his face was red with hot blood. The girl saw him almost before he had detached himself from the darkness. She hurried to meet him.

"'You don't seem a bit anxious to see me,' she cried, an inflection of disappointment in her voice. 'Aren't you glad, Bart?' She held out her two bands and the mate took them in his big trembling fists.

"'I'm glad,' he said. 'I—I've been wanting to see you for a long time, Jean, ever since you—' he swallowed hard, and added: 'I've been wanting to see you damned bad, Jean!'

"The girl was laughing before he realized what he had said. Then she became very sober. As the captain came puffing up over the deck she drew her hands from the mate's grasp and said, with a touch of piquant naivete: 'You're the same old Bart, always bashful—dreadfully bashful!' Then she turned away with a laughing good night and Bart Holmes went back among the men, dully wondering if he knew what she had meant, and with a new and growing happiness in him.

"'Heave up, boys!' he cried. 'Let's get under weigh before that big fellow signalling out there comes in and blocks us. Ho, there, Cap'n Stevens! He shouted down into the blackness alongside, where for half an hour a tug had been lying. We're ready, Cap'n Stevens. Pay out your line!' This trip was to be his last one before he went up for his own papers as master.

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"He walked slowly forward, lighted his pipe, and watched the dock lights as the old freighter slipped out silently and elbowed her way between giant steel ships into the thousand-mile highway that led to Duluth. When the thin white breakwaters were left behind, like ghost-lines edging the city, the tug dropped off and drifted back, and with the cheerful good-byes of the crews the JENNIE CULLOM began pounding her way into the Upper Lakes.

"A mile or more over the starboard rail occasional lights shone faintly along the New York shore. The mate always watched these when going out. He knew that where the edge of the city's night-glow melted away into gloom there were two little cottages, side by side, hidden behind a great apple orchard that was there before he was born.

"In those cottages, years before, he and the captain's girl had lived; in the orchard and along the beach they had passed their childhood days together, he the son of a fisherman's widow, she the daughter of a schooner's master. Every time the JENNIE CULLOM left Buffalo his retrospection ended with the scene of a summer morning when little Jean, crying as though her heart would break, had joined him in the old orchard with the terrible news that her father was going to send her away. He remembered how he had blubbered then, and how he had gone to Captain Wiggs and begged of him not to make the girl go. But it had long been the skipper's dream to make a lady of his motherless child, so she was sent to an aunt in Boston, and for many months the boy was alone and miserable.

"To-night he went over those days again in his memory. He smiled, and his heart warmed throbbingly, as he thought of the letters they wrote—letters in which Jean called him 'Dearest Bart,' and in which they both said things which made him flush now as he recalled them. Jean came home once or twice during the first year, but after that her visits were few. The letters became more and more infrequent until at last the boy was ashamed of the scrawls he wrote. Then he went to sea, and while he matured among the rough breed of the lakes, Captain Wiggs' girl became a lady. The Jean he had known seven years before had returned, more beautiful than he had ever dreamed she would be, and he began to fear that their chumship lay only in the old memories of the orchard.

"Bart Holmes watched the fading shores until a mist came into his eyes. Jean was with him again, but it was not the Jean of his boyhood, the little girl of the old cottage and the big orchard. He stood thinking of these things until there was nothing but darkness of the lake about him, except where a glow hovered over the receding city. Then he went to his cabin and lay awake until midnight, thinking of Jean,

"The JENNIE CULLOM was a wooden freighter, and slow. A thousand times the mate had regretted this fact, but during the following three days and nights he wished that she sailed under canvas instead of steam. They were the happiest days he had ever lived, and most of his time, even when he was on watch, was spent in Jean's company.

"The first morning out from Buffalo she appeared on deck with her hair in a long braid, and Bart smiled in honest joy. In the afternoon she discarded her yachting suit for an old dress belonging to the cook, and began to take a keen interest in the running parts of the ship. She made friends with the stokers, ate supper with the hands aft, won the heart of old Robbins, the wheelman, by raising blisters on her pretty hands at the wheel, and lifted the mate into a seventh heaven by insisting that he should accompany her in all of her explorations and assist her in her experiments.

"Once, when Jean smiled up into his face, her eyes filled with sparkling happiness, he caught one of her hands in his own and held it for a full half-minute while his clumsy tongue struggled to say what was burning in his soul. But the words failed to come.

"At another time, during a blow off Saginaw Bay, when the girl was leaning over to see the rush of waves under the vessel's bow, he dared to put a supporting arm partly around her waist. Jean turned her tempting face up to him and laughed, and the mate felt himself blushing so furiously that he was glad when she looked into the sea again. He knew that he was a coward in her presence. At times he cursed himself roundly for it, at others he reasoned that it was his better sense which had prevailed.

"As the days and evenings passed, days and evenings when he was almost constantly in Jean's company, Bart Holmes found that in spite of his battle against it the spark of hope was beginning to burn in his breast. He could not but see that Jean was sometimes more than kind to him. Her smiles, the little pressures she gave his arm, and the occasional touches of her soft hands against his own consumed him with the thought that he might still be something to her. He imagined at times that her voice was almost tender as she talked of the days they had spent

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together in the little cottages back of the old orchard; and once, when they were sitting in the soft moonlight, he could have sworn that there were tears in her eyes as she recalled memories of the old home. He had taken her hand for a moment then, but in his nervousness and his fear he had remained silent.

"That was the evening they were approaching the Soo. Jean had gone to her cabin early, with the promise that she would come on deck again before retiring for the night. The mate took advantage of this interval by reviewing the events of the past three days. As he went over them one by one, from the day Jean had chided him for not greeting her more warmly, he became more and more convinced that she had encouraged him to speak. For the time, what he considered to be his own unworthiness was forgotten, and Jean's actions, her smiles, and her gently spoken memories of the past bore a new and potent meaning for him. He was filled with a throbbing, overmastering hope, and when at last he saw Jean come out of the cabin and walk to the side of the ship he came quietly up behind her, his love burning on his lips. The girl heard him and turned, and the words he was about to speak were interrupted by her own.

"I was thinking of you, Bart,' she said softly. 'I've wanted to tell you something all day, but—I haven't. Will you do something for me?'

"Anything, Jean!"

"Well—' The girl slipped a hand through his arm.' Well—you see,' she continued, 'I've got a friend coming aboard at the Soo.' She shot a glance into her companion's face, then gazed demurely at a schooner fading away in the moonlight. 'It's a man.' She felt a sudden tremor in the arm she held 'A young man from Boston,' she added, 'who has come almost two thousand miles to take this trip across Superior in my company. He's rather foolish don't you think?' She did not wait for a reply. 'I want you to help make it pleasant for him. Will you, Bart?'

"As the apparent meaning of Jean's words came to him the young mate straightened. Through him went a shudder which the girl did not feel, for he had dropped her hand. It was like an electric shock, something fatal to all that had risen in him, something which destroyed in an instant every vestige of those things which had lifted him for a brief time above his own level. When it had passed away it left behind the ugly truth that he was his old clumsy self again, an uncultured, cross-grained specimen of the lakes. Once more Jean was the lady. But the revulsion had come with more than ordinary force. In his own respect it left him little more than a wreck of what he had been when the girl came aboard at Buffalo. He had made a fool of himself—the biggest fool in the whole world, so far as he knew. A moment more and he would have brought upon himself Jean's pity, or her contempt.

"He realized the narrowness of his escape. But with the knowledge of his own stupidity came the thought that Jean—not the old Jean, but the new Jean from Boston, the Jean who had been made into a lady, and in whom he would have placed his honest confidence beyond all others— had been playing with him. She had allowed him to place his arm around her, she had let him hold her hand; he knew that he might have kissed her, if he had dared. Yet she had known that her lover from the East would be with her within a few hours.

"To Bart Holmes, strong in the honour of a simple lake mother and ignorant of the ways of women, such a thing was unbelievable. Unseeing, unhearing, he gazed steadily for a few moments out into the darkness, then turned without a word and walked away. Though he heard Jean call him and knew that she followed him a few steps across the deck, he did not pause. Loving her, yet despising what she had done; crushed but cured, he went among the men aft, while Jean, her heart beating with sudden tumult, her face flushing hotly, hurried into her cabin.

"For a long time she sat quietly near the partly opened door of her room, listening for footsteps which might be those of the mate. She realized, slowly at first, the significance of Bart's actions, and knew that she had wounded him bitterly, though unintentionally.

"In the silent darkness of her room she condemned herself for what she had said. Why had she hinted that the man from Boston was her lover? Why, instead of playing the hypocrite with Bart, had she not told him the truth—that the man at the Soo was a brother of her dearest girl chum, doomed by a malady which it was hoped a lake trip might retard? She had pitied the man, and, for her chum's sake as well as for her own, had invited him to the hospitality of her father's ship. Why had she not told all this? If she could see him now—to-night—she would explain, she would tell him that she had lied—yes, lied—and that she was sorry.

"For more than an hour she watched for the mate but he did not go to his cabin. She walked forward and aft. If Bart was on either deck, he kept out of her sight. This was like a touch of fire to the girl's spirit. She regretted what she had done, but if the mate was not inclined to be even courteous she would postpone the explanation she

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had intended to make. And why should she explain to him, after all? He had been disagreeable, he did not return when she called to him; anyway, morning would do. So she went to bed, uneasy, a trifle angry.

"Early the following morning the Jennie Cullom entered the Soo locks. At dawn, two hours before the watch was up, Bart Holmes aroused the second mate and went to his cabin without waiting for breakfast. He knew that, according to the precedent she had established, Jean would come on deck with the break of day, and he did not care to meet her, much less his rival from the East, who would probably come aboard before the freighter started on her lifts into Superior.

"Smoking incessantly, he counted the hours in his cabin. He figured by the position of the ship that the man from Boston came aboard between eight o'clock and eight-thirty. He tried to work himself into the belief that now he cared nothing about his presence, or that of the girl, but failed dismally, and finally fell asleep fighting against his jealousy and his love—the best thing that could have happened to a man who had slept less than an hour out of ten in a period of three days and four nights. From his slumber he was aroused by a knocking at the door which called him to dinner.

"The first persons the mate encountered as he came from his cabin were Jean and the man from Boston. In a single glance Bart measured his rival, a thin, pale young man, stoop-shouldered and with eyes that had the light of a fever in them. He was not good-looking; but there was something likeable about him, something that unconsciously and instantly appealed to one, even to the mate, who was prepared to hate him. But the knowledge that he was Jean's lover and that he was taking Jean from him kept back the greeting that the sailor would otherwise have given. As the girl smiled Bart touched his hat stiffly; as she advanced a step to meet him, her eyes questioning, her lips framed to words, he bowed slightly and passed within a dozen feet of her on his way to the mess-room.

"During the remainder of the day he managed to keep out of Jean's presence. Several times in the afternoon the girl sought a reconciliation. Twice she waved her hand at the mate and smilingly beckoned. Once she left the Boston man's side and approached him, but the sailor went among the men aft as though he had not seen her. At this the girl tossed her head and deigned no more glances or smiles or friendly beckoning's in Bart's direction. This was what the mate desired. He felt relieved, for he was still buried deep in his conviction of Jean's hypocrisy and was determined not to lend himself again to her amusement. He was even more relieved when later in the afternoon a light gale sprang up and Jean and the stranger sought the shelter of their cabins.

"As the afternoon advanced the gale increased. When the second mate came to relieve Bart at six o'clock the waves were beginning to roll against the JENNIE CULLOM with thundering force and the sky was filled with the peculiar slate-grey thickness that presages a riotous storm on Lake Superior. Bart knew the signs and smiled grimly as he went down among the men to eat at mess. He wondered if the man from Boston was accustomed to the sea. If not—he chuckled inwardly as he pictured results, and when he came out of the dining-room, where dishes were beginning to slide about a little, he steadied himself in the sweeping wind and regarded with pleasure the thousand choppy billows that plunged up as black as ink on all sides of the JENNIE CULLOM.

"After a little he went to his cabin, divested himself of his clothing and crawled into his bunk, comfortably satisfied that a beautiful storm was brewing, that the Boston man had already collapsed, and that Jean would be compelled to amuse herself alone during the remainder of the trip. Then he fell asleep and dreamed of hoisting the Boston man to the top of a mainmast, whence he dropped him to the deck.

"When his rival struck there came a concussion that sounded like the explosion of a cannon. There followed a dull, rending crash, and the vessel shuddered. From his dream the mate was hurled into wakefulness—a wakefulness that brought him into the great dread of all men, the dread of death.

"In the first seconds of consciousness he realized what had happened, and, with a shout of warning to those who might hear him on the other side of the cabin walls, he hurried into a part of his clothing and dashed out upon the freighter's deck, where the loud cries of men forward and aft mingled with the terrifying clanging of the great gong which called upon every man aboard ship to fight for his life.

"A hundred tons of water were running off the decks of the Jennie Cullom. Most of her deck-lights were shattered, and she pitched in the heavy seas with reverberating booms that told she was driving broadside in their troughs. As Bart Holmes ran forward the second officer met him. "'We're stove in!' he shouted. He waved his hand around the blackness of the sea. 'God knows what—mebby a derelict—a rock—and we're taking in a lot of water under the for'ard chains!'

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"From the bridge Bart could hear the booming of the captain's voice. Down in the engine-room tinkling bells set the pumps at work and men's faces went pallid under their coats of grime. Cassidy, the engineer, stood with courage mapped in his face, a heavy wrench gripped in his hand as he shouted curses at his assistant, who had bolted for the stairway. From the lower landing the mate came and roared down words of courage.

"Give 'er all she'll take, Cassidy!" he shouted. "Don't let the old tub rest for a minute, or we'll sink. We'll let you know if it comes to the worst!"

"He shot back and slammed the door behind him. The jarring of the pumps sucking on vacuum sounded beneath his feet, and he turned back to listen. Then came the heavy, choking run of water, and his heart sank. He hurried on deck, and a moment later the second officer came out of the forward way and coolly informed him that the ship was sinking. 'Little need of sounding or pumping,' he said. 'We're filling like a tin can with the bottom out!'

"The mate repeated the words to the captain and ran down to verify. He could hear water pouring into the hold with the noise of a small cataract. After he returned, the signal-call to boats was sent down into the engine-room and stoke-hole. Captain Wiggs descended the pilot-house stair to the first and second officers, who stood close as he shouted his commands.

"Firemen an' deck-hands into the starboard boat, Wilkins!" he boomed into the second officer's ears. 'Head south by a little east! Bart, you'll take charge of Jean!' The captain almost screamed the last words at his first officer, then rushed amidships among the gathering men.

"Bart Holmes hurried toward the girl's cabin. He did not think of the Boston man until he reached Jean's door, and then it flashed into his head that perhaps he, too, had come for her. But Jean was alone. As the mate came in, naked to the waist and breathing deeply, she stood holding to the cabin table, her beautiful hair loose about her shoulders, her face white but filled with courage. She was waiting bravely, and as Bart burst through the door she smiled her gladness and held out her hands. Even then she wanted to tell him—to close the breach between them, but in this hour of danger there was still a coldness in his manner. Without speaking, he fastened a couple of lifebelts around her and then slipped one over his own shoulders. He knew that Jean understood, that there was no need of explanation.

"I've been waiting for you, Bart." said the girl as the mate hurried her to the door. 'I knew you'd come—you or—' She meant to say her father, but the sentence was not completed. As she passed out of the cabin the wind smothered what she would have said, and the mate heard only that which reminded him of the man from the East.

"He made no reply, but half dragged her along the deck to where the lanterns were flitting around the boat davits. As they came amidships a faint cheer sounded above the noise of the sea, which was battling less noisily now against the sinking vessel, and Bart knew that the second officer's boat was launched. In an instant the cheers gave place to curses as two men rushed across from the starboard davits, one of them shrieking maledictions.

"He slipped the fall!" the latter shouted, pointing at his companion. Then he turned upon the other like a beast: 'You slipped the fall, curse you!' He struck out fiercely and the sailor staggered under the blow. 'He slipped the fall!' shrieked the man again. 'They've gone 'n' left us.' A cry of anger and despair went up from the men, and Jean, trembling with fear and horror, clung tightly to the mate. "'Ten of us!' boomed the captain. 'Make the best of it, men—make the best of it—one at a time!' He crowded among them, a great fist raised threateningly, and the mate sprang to his side.

"One at a time!" Bart shouted after the captain.

"One at a time—and to name!"

"Those of the men who had gone into a panic at the thought of crowding ten men into a boat that should hold but eight began to recover their reason. One after another Captain Wiggs called out their names and they lowered themselves into the blackness of the sea. When four had gone below the captain turned to his daughter.

"Jean," he shouted, 'Jean, girl, you next!'

"The mate led her to the side. 'I'll hold you,' he cried in her ear. 'I'll hold you—safe!' He took her in his strong arms and lifted her over the rail, and for a single moment in that passage his lips were pressed against those of the girl. 'Jean, I love you—I love you—'

"The girl heard him, and in the darkness she put up her hands, but other hands reached up and pulled her down. Bart fell back just in time to see another figure, reeling as if drunk, stagger up among the men. It was the Boston man, his thin face deathly white in the light of the lanterns, a deep sickness showing in his bloodshot eyes.

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The fifth and the sixth men were climbing over, and did not see; the seventh, who stood with the captain and the mate, was Cassidy, and though despair came into his face he did not speak.

"'Eleven!' groaned the captain in his beard. 'My God!' He motioned to the engineer, but Cassidy remained at the fall, with the boat's rope wound tightly around his waist. 'Somebody's got to stay!' he growled. 'I ain't afraid!'

"Bart sprang to the Boston man's side and caught him under the arms. 'You're next!' he shouted. 'Quick—' He dragged his rival to the side of the ship and almost threw him over. Cassidy had kicked off his shoes and was tightening his lifebelt with one hand while he held the fall with the other.

"'Cassidy!' thundered the captain. The engineer hunched his naked shoulders with dogged determination. 'There ain't room f'r all,' he growled. 'I'm going to stay!'

"Bart Holmes caught the engineer by the shoulders. 'Quick, Cassidy,' he urged. 'We're all going!' He caught the fall in his own hand and pulled the engineer to the rail. 'For God's sake, go down' he cried in his ear. 'Go down and shout up there's plenty of room, or Cap'n Wiggs'll never leave the ship. Roar it out, Cassidy, roar it out!'

"The engineer climbed over, and Bart, leaning far out, looked down into the boat. He could see by the light of the lanterns in it that it was already dangerously overloaded. Jean was in the bottom amidships, and the others had pulled the Boston man over beside her. Soon Cassidy's voice came up in a trumpet-like roar.

"'Plenty o' room, Cap'n Wiggs, plenty o' room!' he shouted. 'We'll ride five hundred pounds more!'

"'Hear that?' yelled the mate cheerfully. 'Over the side with you, Cap'n Wiggs! I know you want to go last—but you can't. You're too heavy. I've got to give you a powerful lift or you'll swamp the boat!'

"He pulled the captain to the side, as he had urged Cassidy, and crowded him over the rail. As the master of the ship slipped heavily down among his men the engineer stood erect and stretched up one great arm imploringly, but instead of reaching for it the mate tossed the loose rope in Cassidy's face and the small boat shot away from the sinking vessel.

"For an instant Bart caught a glimpse of ten white, horror-filled faces looking up at him. Then, above the first outburst of men's voices there came a piercing cry from Jean, and as the boat was swept out into the night he saw her standing with outstretched arms. But he made no response. Silently he leaned over the rail and watched the flashes of the lanterns in the small boat as it was lifted on the crests of the waves. He knew that Captain Wiggs would attempt to return for him, and he knew, too, how futile his efforts would be in the heavy roll of the sea. At first he heard men's shouts, more and more indistinct with growing distance, but after a little these last human sounds failed to reach him.

"During the few moments that followed, moments which he realized were probably closely preceding death, there came contentment into his heart. He did not fear the end which he knew was fast approaching; he had told Jean of his love and had taken her in his arms and kissed her, and he was now giving up his life for her. After this Jean could never forget him.

"Soon there came from beneath him a barely perceptible shock. It was followed by another, a shuddering, noiseless throb, as if a charge of dynamite had exploded in the hold without making a noise. Where two or three lights were burning aft the mate could see the black tops of the seas coming higher and higher until they broke in a roar over the Jennie Cullom's deck. Sullenly they crowded forward, and like a thing fighting inch by inch against her doom the wooden ship was submerged until only her lighted peaks stood for a moment triumphant in the centre of a whirling maelstrom. In another moment they, too, had disappeared.

"Where for a brief spell a hundred different currents shot up bursting tons of water the mate was tossed like a piece of water-logged wood. He was twisted this way and that, now entirely submerged, now buoyed to the surface of the buffeting seas by the cork belt under his arms. Instinctively he husbanded the breath that was in him; and when at last the place where the freighter had sunk ran once more in the regular sweep of the waves, he floated with his head above them, exhausted, almost dead, but still possessed of that unconquerable last spark which calls upon every man to struggle for his own preservation. Slowly his limbs responded, until strongly and regularly they obeyed the instance of the man into whom at the last moment had come the great love of life.

"In the first half-hour of his fight in the sea Bart figured out his chances. Unfortunately he did not know at what hour the Jennie Cullom had struck. If he had possessed this knowledge he might have estimated pretty accurately his distance from the Michigan shore. It could not be more than thirty miles; possibly it was less than ten. The mate had never heard of a man who had lived to swim thirty miles, or even twenty, in the chilling water of Superior. But ten—he might do that. Already he began to feel the chills, the bites of the summer ice— devils of

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Kitchi Gummi, as sailors call them, and he worked doubly hard to keep the warmth in his body.

"All would have ended soon if the shore had not been very near. But in the early dawn two teamsters from a lumber-camp came down to the edge of the lake, and there they found Bart Holmes, crumpled up in the sand, with that glorious last spark still alive in him, but burning feebly—so feebly that they thought him dead at first. He was taken up and carried to the big cabins back in the woods, and for days only unintelligible mutterings fell from his lips.

"On the tenth day something like reason fought its way back into his head, and, as the facts came to him one at a time, he revealed disjointedly the story of the JENNIE CULLOM. After a time the spark that was burning brighter each day brought him out into good, wholesome life again; and after that, still too weak to leave his bunk, he would pass wearisome hours wondering what had become of Jean and the JENNIE CULLOM'S crew. The thought that they had drowned began working upon his mind. Horrible pictures would come to him even in his sleep.

"He prayed for the day when he could regain his feet and start through the woods for the nearest town, which was twenty miles away, but his worry brought back the fever, and so when the camp-supply wagon left on its monthly trip to the station he could only sit up and watch it as it rattled off over the logging trail. But in the driver's care was a slip of paper upon which he had scribbled a few words, addressed to Captain Edward Wiggs, Buffalo, and which were to be sent by telegraph. In the message he did not speak of Jean, nor did he say that he was sick.

"Two days and nights passed. Early in the morning of the third day, while the camp was still asleep, Bart knew that he heard the distant, hailing cry of the returning driver. Like a shadow he slipped from his bunk and stole half-naked out into the greyness of the dawn. When four tired and dripping horses came out into the edge of the clearing, they stopped suddenly as the man stumbled up to them, almost falling under their feet in his weakness. His words came hysterically, sobbingly, as he stretched up his naked arms.

"Anything for me—for me—?"

"The driver fumbled for a moment under his seat as he recognized the sailor, then gave him a little yellow envelope, and lowered his lantern. The mate snatched the light from him and crouched beside it upon the ground, with the precious little envelope.

"There was not much to read, but when he was done the light of reason was almost gone from Bart Holmes' feverish eyes, and he fell face downward in the road with a cry that brought the driver to his side. As the lumberman raised the mate in his arms his eyes fell upon the little slip of paper and he reached out for it. He could see nothing in it that should cause a man to act as the sailor had done. He spelled it out twice, but he was not enlightened, for he saw only those plain simple words, not knowing that they would change the whole course of a man's career:

"My life went out when I thought that my Bart had died. In the little old cottage behind the orchard I am waiting for you, praying, as I have prayed each night and day, that my beloved will come to me soon. JEAN.'

"And even as the lumberman read, Bart Holmes, in his delirious half-consciousness, was seeing a picture of the old orchard, a picture of Jean in it—the old Jean—his Jean, for ever and for ever."

CHAPTER XII. LOCHINVAR OF THE LAKES

It was the night of the big wedding in the little town of Dunkirk. Since early morning, many strangers had, been arriving, and now the great house of Henry Ellery Dixon—fat, florid and hated, but the owner of ships, millions and a beautiful daughter—was filled with them. Among his guests were men who represented tremendous corporate wealth and power—half a dozen presidents of banks, a dozen steel and ore men, twice as many kings of lake traffic lines, influential chiefs of the powerful Lake Carriers' Association. With them there were their wives and daughters. But with the exception of the minister and the servants there was not a man or a woman among them who belonged to the common lake breed of the town of Dunkirk.

Not that the people of Dunkirk were either surprised or disappointed! The best of them had expected the slight, and would have resented anything else, although each had anticipated the affair, which was to be the biggest and grandest thing that had ever happened in their town so far as the oldest of them could remember. They had watched with interest the coming of the guests, and most of them were willing, if not a little anxious, to be somewhere near Dunkirk Hill when the great and last moment arrived, but they would all be relieved when everything was over. They had come to look upon the event that was to transpire in the big house that night as something like an execution. Certainly the sorrow and sympathy in their hearts would not have been greater had such been the case.

Miss Isobel was to be married—that is, she was to pass through the formality of a marriage, a sort of legal contract, stipulating that from a certain hour she was to consider herself owned and governed by a man for whom she possessed no love and who knew that he was not loved but yet was immensely satisfied with his bargain. From several view-points everything was satisfactory. The bridegroom-to-be was securing youth and beauty, Henry Ellery Dixon was gaining the co-operation of new power and wealth, and his daughter, at the slight expense of a broken heart, was obeying his wishes to the letter.

The people of Dunkirk knew why this was so. Not many years had passed since the millionaire's wife had travelled a very short road to ruin, and, though Isobel did not proclaim it from the housetops, the simplest minds in the place realized that her blind obedience was an atonement for another's sin.

For these reasons there had come a real grief into the hearts of the people of Dunkirk. In her sweet, unaffected way Isobel had worked herself into their lives, and her sacrifice now was the sacrifice of one of their own children. She had grown up among them, with her laughter, her smiles, and her help when it was needed, and from among them she had chosen the man whom she loved.

During the last hours preceding the wedding the women of Dunkirk talked of these things. They recalled days that had passed, years before, when bare-footed, sunburned Jackie McTarr, called "Tarry" for short, played along the beach with pretty golden-haired Isobel Dixon, despite the protests and threats of the high-toned mother and father on the hill. But the business of the master of the house was in Buffalo, where he remained for weeks at a time, and for this reason the chumship of a rich man's little girl and a fisherman's son continued unbroken.

The men and women of Dunkirk had watched the courtship that followed, and it seemed to them the most beautiful thing that had ever come within their sight.

When Jack broke away from the fishing fleet to seek his fortune among the big steel ships of the lake highways, they confidently predicted success for him. One day he returned, mate of a six-thousand-ton ore carrier. All Dunkirk rejoiced in a public celebration in his honour, and that same day Isobel had met him in their tryst on the other side of Dunkirk Hill, and with glistening eyes told him how proud she was of the man who was doing all these things for her.

"When I become a captain," said the young mate, "your father will not hate me so."

Isobel had believed him, and, strong in the knowledge of the girl's great love, the plucky young sailor had won his way until he came into the command of a ship. Almost that same day there happened on the hill the scandal which changed all things for Isobel Dixon and the man who had become Captain John B. McTarr.

So, to the people of Dunkirk, the wedding this night was the last chapter in a living romance which they had all followed from the first page to the last. In that last chapter Isobel had been bargained for and sold. They had seen the young captain's final efforts to move the heart of stone which lay in the breast of the millionaire

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ship-owner; they had watched him in his almost frantic attempts to win the girl from her determination; some of them had even taken a part in the drama which was being enacted before their eyes; but, in spite of it all, the tragic end came, and with it the disappearance of Jack McTarr. Men and women wondered where he was this night as they looked at the great house aglow with light on the top of Dunkirk Hill. For weeks the fisher-folk had not heard of him. Some believed that he had changed his command; others inclined to the rumour that he had given up the lakes and was now on the ocean; and all of them prayed, deep down in their souls, that vengeance in full measure would fall upon the head of Henry Ellery Dixon and the man who was to become his son-in-law.

With Isobel Dixon the struggle against her old love had been a long and bitter one, but, in a way, she had triumphed, and deep in her heart she had smothered her passion as a stoker in one of her father's ships might have banked his fires. Now and then the old feeling would burst through, and, while at these times her determination would never weaken, she would think of her absent lover for hours at a time.

During the few days preceding the wedding these spells had come to her oftener than before, and she was thankful that the young captain was not near. But in these same moods she often wished that she knew where he was. She pictured him in a hundred different places and the old spirit that she was trying to kill groped out for him, searching—always searching. Yet she knew that if her lover appeared to her in person she would send him away again.

Still this something that went out from her, this telepathic message which she unconsciously directed, was working in a way of which she little dreamed. At the end of the thousand-mile highway which leads to Duluth it found Captain Jack McTarr, and, seizing upon him, like a messenger of life and death, it called for him to return.

Three days before the wedding Captain McTarr's ship left Duluth, and burned half a hundred tons of coal more than she should before she drew up in the night off the town of Dunkirk.

With the exception of the men of his own crew, no one saw Captain McTarr when he came ashore in one of the ship's small boats. He landed on the beach an eighth of a mile below the Dixon home, where a row of old willows concealed the stretch of white sand over which he and Isobel had walked a thousand times together. Through these trees he could see the glow of light on the top of Dunkirk Hill.

Swiftly he ran along the beach until he came to a rough seat built between two trees, from which he could see the windows of Isobel's room. More times than he could remember he had come to this place, and had signalled his presence to his sweetheart on the hill. His heart seemed ready to burst as he stood there now, and he gave a choking sob or two, as a man sometimes will when alone with a great grief. He knew the hour of Isobel's marriage, and he pictured her already prepared for the ceremony. Perhaps the guests were even now assembling in the great Dixon hall. He pulled out his watch, and saw by the light of a match that there was still three-quarters of an hour before the ceremony.

Indistinctly the sound of music floated down to him, and as he heard it he staggered out beyond the shadow of the willows, softly crying Isobel's name. He approached nearer and nearer to the big house on the hill. The music came to him plainly now, and he could hear the laughter of men who were smoking on the veranda overlooking the lake.

He crept still nearer, crouching now like a criminal until he could look almost straight up into Isobel's windows. In that room was all that he had ever lived for. Isobel had been his guiding star; she had fired him with ambition; she had made of him what he was. Without Isobel—The captain's fingers came in contact with cold metal in his pocket. Why not kill himself here? They—the people in there, Isobel, all of them—would hear the shot and would rush out and find him, and Isobel, he knew, would take him in her arms, would kiss him—God, but it was a terrible temptation! He drew the pistol from his pocket.

"Isobel! Isobel!" he murmured softly.

From the veranda a man's laughter came down to him. It jarred upon him, and into his head there came the thought that he would like to kill somebody up there as well as himself. At the last moment why should he not steal in and destroy the man who was taking his life from him? If he could only kill them all—all but Isobel, and carry her away from him!

At the thought his heart seemed to leap up within him like a living thing just released from chains. He sprang to his feet and turned his face in the direction of the ship, every nerve in him throbbing with excitement. He lighted another match and looked at his watch. There still remained twenty-four minutes. Twenty-four—twenty-four. He repeated the words tremblingly, and then, turning down the hill, he ran like a

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deer, past the seat among the willows and up the hard water—run of the beach to the small boat.

"Quick, to the ship!" he panted. He caught the boat by the prow and shoved it out into the water, the sailors running in ankle-deep to catch him. In the glow of the boat—lantern they saw his face, and rowed with the fervour of men who knew that minutes were precious.

Half a dozen times in the short trip to the ship Captain McTarr looked at his watch, but only once did he speak to the men, and then it was to urge them to make greater speed. To him the time seemed slipping away with fearful rapidity. There were only nineteen minutes left—now eighteen—seventeen—fifteen!

In his excitement he stood up in the boat and shouted the name of his first officer, and by the time he shot alongside the steel freighter a score of astonished men were lining the rail.

"Falkner!" he called. "Jim! Your hands!"

He stretched himself up, and the stalwart first mate leaned over and hoisted him as easily as an ordinary man would have lifted a child. The men knew why they had raced day and night from the northern—most sea, and most of them stared fixedly through the darkness shoreward, confident that their captain had done something for which he was being pursued.

Their thoughts were interrupted by Captain McTarr. "Men, I want a dozen volunteers to go back with me and stop that marriage!" he cried pointing toward Dunkirk Hill. "We've got ten minutes. Who'll go?"

In an instant several were running to the midship davits, calling for others to follow, and half the crew were soon crowded about the falls. "A dozen!" shouted a voice disdainfully. "A dozen! We'll all go!"

A sailor launched himself down into the small boat beside the freighter, and others came after him as fast as they could slip safely over the rail. With a splash the midship boat dropped into the water, and an instant later the third boat went down on the other side of the ship.

Captain McTarr's boat got away first, and started for the shore with four men pulling at the oars. The second fell close in its wake, and a little later the third shot around the freighter's bow, loaded to the gunwales with excited, eager men. Three—quarters of the crew were following their captain.

For the first time in weeks the heart of Isobel's lover thrilled with hope. He had not stopped to consider the consequences of what he was doing; he only knew that he would stop the wedding, that he would see Isobel and save her from the man who had taken her from him—if he reached the Dixon home in time. He gave no thought as to what would be the outcome for the men of his crew. They were backing him, and that was the most satisfying thing that could happen just then.

As the first boat scraped in the sand of the beach, Captain McTarr sprang out and started on a slow run toward Dunkirk Hill with six or eight men close at his heels. Jim Falkner soon overtook him, accompanied by others, and before they were half—way up the slope the men of the third boat were following swiftly on their trail.

As the little crowd of men, led by the big mate and the captain, came nearer the Dixon home, they could see that the verandas were deserted, and the thought that they were too late sent Captain McTarr ahead like a shot, with Jim Falkner close at his side. Together the two men rushed up the front steps of the house, a dozen rough, excited fellows at their heels. The big doors were open, and through them now came the soft strains of the wedding march.

With a shout to those behind him, McTarr launched himself into the Dixon hall, and led a half of his breathless men into the great room where a hundred guests were assembled. "Isobel!" he cried. "Isobel! Isobel!"

He stared about him, almost blinded by the glare of light, his men crowding behind him like wolves ready to spring forward at his bidding. The orchestra stopped playing. Startled men and women sat for the moment as if transfixed by the sudden apparition of the wild—looking crowd, and before they had recovered from their astonishment Falkner came in, accompanied by half a dozen men from the third boat.

"She's out there!" he said quietly, pulling the captain toward the hall. "Hurry with your business. I'll keep these people back!"

McTarr went out, and at the head of the stairs he saw Isobel looking down upon the scene below, her face white and startled. Beside her was the man whom he had almost determined to kill. He bounded up toward them, three steps at a time, and when the girl saw him she uttered a piercing cry which rose above the voices of men and the frightened screams of women in the drawing—room. The man beside her advanced a little to intercept the other, and when they came together they went down in a close smothering grip at the girl's feet.

When McTarr disentangled himself a few moments later the other remained in a limp heap. Jim Falkner, who

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saw it from below, was afraid that the worst had happened.

The captain hurried to the girl, his face white and a little bloody. "Isobel, you must come with me!" he said deliberately. He seemed faint and swayed a little as he stretched out an arm for her. "You must come!"

The girl made no resistance as he led her down the stair. As if in a stupor, she followed him to the open door. Behind them were now the sounds of struggling men and of rough voices filled with exhortation and command. But Isobel was unconscious of it all. She only realized that her lover was with her, and that he had come at a moment when it seemed as though all possible happiness in her whole life was slipping away from her. For a moment she forgot. She clung to his hand, ran when he told her to, and murmured his name again and again, incoherently, joyfully.

Still running, they came down to the edge of the lake. Then, when she saw the lights of the ship, the old sense of duty returned to her. It came like a shock, weakening her, and she dragged back, falling upon her knees in the sand. "Jack! Jack! What have you made me do?" she sobbed. "I can't go with you—I can't—I can't!"

Captain McTarr kneeled beside her and caught her in his arms, pressing his face close to her own, whispering his passionate entreaties. He knew that there was no time to lose. Back on the hill the sailors were slowly retreating, and he could hear their loud voices, suddenly punctuated by a number of pistol-shots. At the sound of the reports, Isobel gave a cry of alarm and struggled to free herself from her lover's embrace. "Go, Jack! Please go!" she pleaded. "I can't go with you. I won't go!"

She thrust out her hands forcefully, but the captain only held her closer. Suddenly he lifted her from the ground and ran toward the boats with her in his arms. His determination robbed the girl of her strength, and when at last he placed her gently in one of the boats he thought by her silence that she had surrendered to him. But when he brought one of the lanterns and looked down into her eyes, his nerves tingling with the joy of possessing her, he saw something in them which startled him. He might have thought that the girl despised him. He struggled to speak, but his tongue seemed tied. The next moment two of the sailors hurried up, bringing the little Dunkirk preacher between them.

"Jack 'n' me, we've collared the preacher, Cap'n," said one of the men. "We figgered as 'ow he might be wanted, so we brung him!"

"Let him go!" commanded the captain. He held out his hand to the little man, who gripped it with an enthusiasm which the other did not guess the meaning of. "They didn't know," he explained. "I didn't intend that they should do it, Mr. Wilfred."

One of the sailors expressed his astonishment audibly.

Isobel sprang to her feet with a little cry, and involuntarily the minister's friendly grip relaxed. Deep accusation shone in the girl's eyes as she flashed them at Captain McTarr. "Then you meant to take me out there—alone?" she said, in a low voice.

But the little minister heard her, and in an instant he had jumped into the boat and was at her side. "No, he didn't mean that!" he cried, looking at the captain sharply. "Sit down, Isobel. I'm going with you!"

Captain McTarr's gratitude filled him with a desire to embrace Mr. Wilfred, who had cleverly turned an embarrassing situation, but almost immediately the first of the retreating sailors came running along the edge of the lake, and the boat was soon filled with noisy, hard-breathing men.

As it pulled out for the ship, Jim Falkner's voice could be heard on shore commanding his men to make a dash for the second and third boats. The rowers in the first boat rested on their oars and looked expectantly to see what would happen, but those who had expected excitement were disappointed.

The crowd of black-frocked, white-shirted men who had come in pursuit hesitated, then stopped, as Falkner and the second officer fired half a dozen shots from their revolvers into the air. A triumphant shout rose from the sailors, but Captain McTarr was silent. Never had Isobel seemed so far from him as at the present moment, and until he reached the side of the ship he maintained a silence which began to cool the enthusiasm of the crew.

He was the first to climb aboard, and as he lifted the girl up over the rail he held her so close that he could feel her breath on his cheek. "Forgive me, Isobel—forgive me if I am doing wrong," he whispered.

He led her across the deck into the officer's parlour, and there the girl flung herself in a chair beside the cabin-table and buried her face in her arms.

"Isobel—if I had known—" said the man gently, his voice trembling. "If I had known, perhaps I wouldn't have returned." He looked tenderly upon the sobbing girl, his face tense with suffering. "At the last moment something

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seemed to call me to you, Isobel, something I couldn't resist. I kept my reason until I went ashore and looked up at your windows from the old seat under the willows; then—"

He leaned over until his lips touched the girl's silken hair. For many minutes he let them rest there, and Isobel made no effort to push him away. He began whispering of his love again, of the hope that had risen and fallen, and of what she meant to him, when the telephone on the end of the table rang interruptingly. He reached out and pulled the receiver to him. It was Falkner at the other end.

"They're getting a big freighter under weigh in the harbour," he called. "I think it's one of the old man's ships!"

McTarr answered quietly: "That looks like—"

"Hell!" came the response, firmly and convincingly.

McTarr turned toward the girl. She had raised her head and was looking at him, white-faced, questioning. "They're pursuing us!" he said.

"What's that?" came the first officer's voice.

"Wait a moment, Jim," called the captain.

He placed his hand over the transmitter. "They're pursuing us, Isobel," he repeated. "Quick, dear, say that you will marry me—that you will let Mr. Wilfred—"

"I can't say that, Jack. I can't say it!"

Captain McTarr faced the telephone. "Let her go, Mr. Falkner," he commanded. "Head up the lakes—and blow her up if you see we're not winning!"

He hung up the receiver with a bang. When he looked at the girl again it was with a consciousness that everything he possessed was at stake. Something in his face, an unnatural flush gathering in either cheek, a daring—even menacing—glitter in his eyes told the girl a little of what was in his mind.

"You told me once that you despised cowards, Isobel," he said. "Wouldn't I be a coward if I gave you up now? I'm going to fight for you to the end; I'm placing my position and my liberty in the balance, and, if it comes to the point, I'll risk my life. Your conception of honour, your determination to make restitution for another by the sacrifice of yourself, makes you more priceless than ever to me. I don't know what I'm going to do. I have no plans. But as long as we've got a ton of coal in our bunkers and a mile of clear sea ahead I give you my word of honour we strive to win!"

The captain gathered enthusiasm as he spoke. He took both of Isobel's hands in his own, and no anger or reproach shone in the tearful eyes that looked up into his. "It will be a splendid race, dear," he continued, his voice vibrating with partly suppressed excitement. "It will be a magnificent race! Listen!"

From under their feet came the dull trembling throb of the freighter's engines. "Jim's getting us under weigh!" he murmured. "They're all with me—Falkner, the ship and the crew. There's only your father against—and you! I ought to win!" He bent over and kissed the girl, and then walked quickly out, closing the door behind him.

Falkner was watching for him. He shouted from the freighter's bridge, and as the captain came up he saw a little group of men standing under the pilot-house. Their arms and shoulders were naked and from the arm-pits down they wore woollen shirts. They were long-armed, sinewy men, with faces burned brick-red by stoke-hole fires. There was one exception, and that was Robinson, the second engineer. The men were silent as McTarr passed them, for sullenness comes naturally and without meaning to men who spend a third of their lives in the blazing bowels of a ship.

"We'll need the second shift," explained Falkner. "We fed our furnaces sixty times an hour coming down; we'll feed each of the twelve every fifty seconds going up. It'll take six men."

He followed the captain to the end of the bridge, and the two looked back at Dunkirk. The pursuing ship was already well out, gathering speed slowly, her lights slipping out into the night at right angles to Captain McTarr's trust ship, then heading on as the vessel came into the lake.

Jim Falkner, upon whom the possibilities of the whole affair were steadily growing, had sent instructions down into the engine-room, but now his fingers set other gongs clanging with greater and more thrilling import. The wheelman looked down at the second in command with the excitement of battle shining in his eyes. A sudden thrill passed through the captain as he saw his mate's fingers playing on the signal-board, and Falkner himself allowed his voice to quiver in a subdued way as he turned and asked for instructions.

But McTarr had thrown aside the dignity of his position as master of an eight-thousand-ton freighter. An hour had changed the men about him from hirelings into friends, even to the men of the galley and the

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furnace-rooms; and upon them now depended everything that he possessed.

So he held up his hand to the wheelman, and said: "Joe, it's all up to you. I've got no instructions to give. I want to lose that ship behind as quickly as possible. If we can do that we'll shift our course and make Buffalo; if we can't do it—well, there isn't a wheelman on the lakes that can play a better game than you!"

He turned with Falkner and descended the pilot-house stair, and the two headed the file of waiting men into the engine-room corridor. In the furnace-pits the signals of the first officer had resulted in a tumbling of fire that was rapidly growing into a deafening roar. Four men, naked to the waist and grimacing in the heat like black ghouls through their coating of coal-dust, were working like fiends in their endeavours to feed the twelve furnaces. In an instant the second and third shifts plunged into the glare of the pit, and the noise of the freighter's engines was drowned in the booming of the charges which followed. McTarr shouted encouragement from the edge of the furnace-room, and then returned to the deck, followed by the mate.

Scarcely were their ears free from the booming of the fires than they heard the screeching of the whistle on the pursuing vessel. As the blasts continued, Captain McTarr ran into the forward deck and mounted the pilot-house stair three steps behind him.

"Any lights?" he cried.

"Plenty of them," replied the wheelman. "But those two—out there—are coming up fast!" He spoke slowly and with emphasis, and pointed to starboard of the Dunkirk ship.

A mile in the offing McTarr discerned a pair of lights keeping pace with the trust ship, and even as he looked other lights flared up beside them and the strange vessel changed her course until they seemed to group themselves in a few square feet of space.

In Falkner's eyes there was undisguised alarm, expressed in a curse as a rocket went sputtering up into the blackness of the night from the deck of the pursuing freighter.

"A distress-signal, my God!" he shouted.

The words had barely left his lips when a second rocket shot into the air, and in an instant there came a series of signals from a medoc whistle on the third ship. McTarr grinned into Falkner's startled face, then turned down the stair and hastened to the cabin in which he had left Isobel.

As he opened the door he was greeted by the little Dunkirk minister. Isobel was standing, her face flushed and her cheeks wet with tears. "I want you to come with me, Isobel," said the captain, approaching the girl and taking her by the hand. "Will you—please?"

For a moment the girl hesitated. Then she allowed her lover to lead her out upon the deck. The pursuing ship had loomed up clear of the coast lights now, and Captain McTarr pointed her out as a third rocket streaked the sky with a ribbon of fire. "Your father is sending up distress signals to a revenue cutter out there!" he explained, guiding her eyes to the rim of lights bearing down upon them. "Those rockets are asking for help. It looks bad for me, doesn't it?"

Unconsciously the girl allowed a little cry to escape her lips. Captain McTarr watched her silently as she leaned over the rail. For several minutes they stood without speaking, and during that time the Dunkirk ship dropped back until her lights seemed to mingle with those of the cruiser. "We're beating them," said Isobel, turning to him at last. "I believe—"

She caught herself as the captain came up and put his arms around her, firmly, gently, as he had done many times before. The girl was very white, but McTarr could still read the firmness in her eyes, which told him that the little slip of her tongue was unmeant. Suddenly there came the thunder of one of the cruiser's guns, and the man's arms tightened so fiercely that the ship-owner's daughter cried out in pain.

"We were beating them," he said, his voice trembling with a passion which he vainly attempted to conceal. "It's a coward's trick—I mean, it's unfair, to set a warship after us. I've got to break with the Government now!"

He released the girl as running footsteps sounded behind them. It was Falkner, his eyes still filled with the light of battle, his face eagerly questioning. "Does that make any difference?" he cried.

"No!" thundered McTarr. "Tell Joe to get into Canadian waters as soon as he can."

As his first officer ran back the captain caught Isobel's hands firmly in his own again. "It's war!" he almost shouted at her. "It's war, and you're going to see me fight it through. I'm going to show you what men will do because they know I'm right. Did you see old Jim? God! but he's true—they're all true!"

He hurried the girl toward the engine-room companion. The two ships behind had separated again, and the

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cutter, ablaze with light, was forging swiftly ahead of the Dunkirk vessel. A half of her broadside was visible as she edged out into the lake in her design to cross the fleeing ship's beam, and as Isobel and the captain paused for a moment to look at her there came a vivid flash of fire from her bow and the report of a second gun.

With a word of caution to the girl, McTarr climbed down the stair, and Isobel followed him. In an instant she was hurried into the chaos of the ship's vitals, where five hundred tons of iron and steel were groaning and crashing, and where Muldoon, the first engineer, and Robinson, the second, were sweating and swearing, and exhorting the greasy helpers around them.

As she looked into this network of fighting machinery a glow came into the girl's face, and her eyes flashed with a little of the fire that was in Captain McTarr's. For an instant Muldoon's eyes gleamed white at her from out of his black countenance, but that lightning flash of attention was all that he gave her or the captain. Isobel felt a sudden thrill pass through her as she watched these men, and, forgetful of the significance of it all, she betrayed her admiration as she looked at the captain.

Suddenly a gong clanged near Muldoon's head, and one of the engineer's naked arms shot out and grasped a lever. In that instant he sent an inquiring glance at Captain McTarr, and the master of the ship hurried to his side.

"He wants more!" shouted Muldoon. He pointed a black finger at the steam-gauge, where the little indicator-hand was hovering restlessly over a figure which gave warning that the ship had reached her maximum steam capacity. "He wants more! Shall I—"

Captain McTarr nodded his head and thumbed a line ten pounds ahead.

When he turned he found Isobel had come up close behind him. Her face was flushed a deeper red. There was excitement in her eyes, a glowing, thrilling look which made McTarr's heart leap within him. She looked inquiringly at him, questioning him with silent lips.

"We're ready to blow up," he cried in her ear. "Are you afraid?" Then he led her into the furnace-room corridor and swung back a steel door. It was as if a flood of fire had rolled into the girl's face. She drew back, gasping for breath, and covered her face with her hands. When she looked again McTarr was down in the pit, and she followed him. When he took her out a minute later she seemed to have a vision of a bursting inferno of flame and heat. The men, the grim faces, the charging of roaring fires and the swinging of furnace doors had been only indistinct details in a dazzling picture that filled her with terror.

McTarr saw that she was trembling, and he put an arm around her as they returned to the companion. Before they had ascended it the second engineer rushed out of the engine-room door and intercepted them. "We've gone twelve pounds beyond the limit!" he almost shrieked. "They're still calling for more! We can't give it! We can't give it!" His voice was filled with emphatic warning.

McTarr hurried up the companion, half carrying the girl with him. "I'll see what's the matter, Robinson!" he called back.

There was alarm in his voice, and unconsciously Isobel clung tightly to his hand as they came on deck. Even she could understand now what those signals coming down into the engine-room had meant. The warship was rapidly overtaking the freighter. She could easily distinguish men working about the cruiser's forward deck-gun, and as she looked it spouted out a tongue of flame, and the report came in an ugly, jarring sound. "That was a loaded gun," said McTarr. "I say, Isobel, it looks bad for me, doesn't it?"

He repeated the question of a few minutes before with a little laugh which made Isobel shudder. "They can't hurt you, can they, Jack?" she whispered, coming very close.

"No—not exactly hurt," said the man. "That shot fired across our bow means they'll give me three minutes in which to heave to. If I comply, they'll take me back to Dunkirk, where I'll probably receive a sentence for abduction and a fine for breaking the laws of navigation. If I don't heave to—"

"If you don't, Jack—" urged the girl.

"Well, if I don't they'll send a solid shot through me somewhere. Then I'll be treated as something of a pirate, and will probably spend a few years in prison."

He did not see the look of terror that came into the girl's blanched face, for Jim Falkner had come back into the lantern-glow of the stern, and the two men looked into each other's faces with grim understanding. The first officer held an open watch in his hand and McTarr pulled out his own. "There's two minutes and ten seconds," he said. He spoke to the mate, but Isobel Dixon caught the meaning of his words, and her two hands tightened in a convulsive clasp about the captain's arm.

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McTarr turned from Jim Falkner and put his arms around her. "My fate rests with you now, Isobel," he said, so low that the first officer could not hear him. "You can save me, even from the charge of abduction; but if I keep up the fight for two minutes longer—and I will unless you do save me—I shall be ruined!"

Falkner saw the girl throw her arms around McTarr's shoulders, and he turned away. Twenty seconds later the captain shot to the engine-room companion and disappeared down it in a single leap.

"Muldoon!" he roared. "Muldoon! Muldoon!" He rushed to the door of the engine-room, shouting the engineer's name above the crash of machinery. "Muldoon, cut 'er down!" he commanded. "Cut 'er down like lightning!"

He saw the engineer's arm shoot out, heard the roar of steam and the throbbing, metallic coughing of retarded engines, then sprang up the companion and called to the mate.

"Where's Mr. Wilfred?" he cried.

"In the cabin," replied the first officer, and McTarr turned and caught Isobel's hand in his own, his face shining with joy in the lantern-light.

"He's in the cabin, Isobel," he repeated. He caught the mate by the arm as he hurried forward with the girl. "We'll want you for a few minutes in the cabin, Jim—if you'll be so kind!"

A few minutes later, as the United States cutter ran alongside, Mr. and Mrs. Jack McTarr came hand in hand from the parlour cabin of the trust ship, prepared to explain matters to the captain of the cruiser.

CHAPTER XIII. SALVAGE

Van Gaff, well past his fortieth year and now confidential agent of the Great Lakes Salvage Company, was on what he mentally described as the assignment of his life. He knew that if he succeeded in this present mission he would be regarded as one of the greatest salvage hustlers on the lakes.

He had carefully laid his plans, and in his mind he foresaw their culmination. Already he considered that he held within his grasp the fortune he had gone out to seek. In his wallet were checks which called for one hundred thousand dollars. Van Gaff was to spend that much, if necessary. With it he was to purchase a treasure-ship which had been lost a decade before, with half a million dollars' worth of ingot copper in her hold. He was to get her for a song if he could; and, if necessary, he was to lie to conceal the fact that his company had discovered the vessel, deep-sunk in the edge of Georgian Bay. These were the instructions of the head men at Buffalo.

For an hour Van Gaff had been comfortably ensconced in one of the cabins of the Belle Isle, Captain James Falkner in command, upbound for the Soo. He smoked incessantly, and as he smoked he pictured again the tragic story of the copper-ship. Of course, he had all of the facts at his tongue's-end. The vessel had disappeared after a daybreak mutiny during which the master had been dangerously wounded before he had a chance to observe the ship's position—before he could realize the need to do so—and no man of her crew had ever returned to tell of the fate that had overtaken her. Then had come the unavailing search by the man who owned the ship and the red metal in her. That man, he had been told, was now living in comparative poverty at the Soo. Perhaps Van Gaff could buy him out for a few thousand.

Up out of the pearl-grey mist of the morning came the copper-ship. In her hold was a treasure in red metal from the Michigan mines. Near her wheel lay a dead man. Amidships a group of sailors, armed with knives and pistols, stood half faltering, facing the captain's cabin. In that cabin kneeled Jimmy Bosworth, and beside him, her face white with fear, was the girl for whom he was risking his life.

Captain Jimmy's face was red with blood. A trail of it led to the barred door, and between his knees a pool of it had gathered. The man's pistol hand trembled weakly as he levelled his blue-steel revolver.

"I guess they ain't coming any farther, Mi-Miss Williams," he faltered. The man was scarcely conscious of his terrible wound. He knew that he was losing blood quite freely, and the objects around him were very slowly fading away. If he had known more, he would not have turned.

The girl's pale face became whiter still as she looked at Captain Jimmy. But the young man failed to notice it.

"You must let me tie up your head, Captain—"

Something choked back the words. If Captain Jimmy could have used his eyes well he would have seen that the girl was crying. But Jimmy was losing himself. He knew that the treasure-mad crew were outside preparing to take his life and hers, and that the girl near him was the owner's daughter. Beyond that he only knew that he must shoot through the door when he heard the sound of feet. He had great reason for keeping this in mind and for battling against the weakness that was overpowering him. From the time they had played together as little children Captain Jimmy had loved this girl. When he was given his first ship, only a few months before, he had asked her if he might still love her and hope some day to call her his wife. The girl's answer had nearly broken his heart.

Now she was going to Detroit, in his care, and he must take her there safely.

A sudden sound outside brought the wounded man to his senses. Men were approaching. Captain Jimmy could hear their feet and the voice of one of them talking. They came in a clumsy, stumbling way, as though bearing a heavy object, and though the man with the revolver could scarcely grasp the true situation, the girl beside him did.

"Jim—Jim—they're going to knock down the door!" she cried.

The captain seemed to hear and comprehend as though just awakening from a sleep. One word burned in his brain, and that was his own name. He knew that the girl had called him Jim, and that, as he levelled his revolver, a supporting arm encircled his shoulder and a warm little hand grasped his own. That encouraged him, and he fired. The girl saw a tiny black spot come like a lightning flash in the panel of the cabin door, and in an instant another bullet bit its way through, a few inches below. From outside there came a cry of pain, then the falling of a heavy

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object; and Captain Jimmy leaned back against the girl with a faint smile. "I guess I fixed one of 'em," he said. "Oh, God, how I wish I could see!"

"You must let me bind your head," replied the girl softly. She lowered the man gently to the floor and hurriedly wet a towel in a pail of water. Her beautiful eyes grew big with agony as she bathed away the blood. She felt certain that Captain Jimmy would never see again. As she tied the towel around the wound the man struggled feebly to a sitting posture.

"I can't see t' shoot," he pleaded; "please take—"

The girl's hands helped to support him where he sat. "Jim," she whispered, "do you remember how you taught me to shoot with the old horse-pistol when we were children? Well, I'm going to do the shooting now!" She caught up the big revolver, cocked it, and laid it beside her on the floor. Then she put her arms around Captain Jimmy and gently drew him back against the wall.

"It's a good thing I've got the only big gun aboard," said the captain, as if talking to himself. "If I 'adn't they'd soon get our range through the door."

The ship-owner's daughter picked up the revolver again, and, steadying her arm over the back of a chair, levelled it coolly at the black spots Captain Jimmy had made. Outside there was an ominous quiet. The girl listened for a time; then she said, without taking her glance from the little spots: "Jim, why didn't you let them kill me? They would not have hurt you; they wanted you to join them."

The blinded man groped out with his hands. The girl heard his move, but did not look behind. "Mildred, ain't I—ain't I fought for you a hundred times—when we were kids?"

"You bet you did, Jim!"

This time the girl turned and looked down upon the huddled figure against the wall. Her face was wet with tears, but there was a smile upon her lips and a look in her eyes that would have made Captain Jimmy's heart leap with joy could he have seen them.

"You were my hero then—and now."

There came a rap on the door as if some one were tapping it with a long stick. The big revolver wavered for a moment between the two black spots; and then a third came, to the right and a little high. Before the girl could fire again a voice called from the deck.

"Don't shoot ag'in, Cap'n Bosworth, I want t' talk with y'!" Captain Jimmy recognized his mate's voice. "We want t' give y' one more chance, Cap'n. We'll give y' a third of the copper aboard if y'll jine us 'n' give up th' girl."

Mildred felt something touch her arm. It was the captain's hand. He groped blindly for a moment. "Milly—Milly—please give me th' gun!" he whispered. "Will y' answer, Cap'n Bosworth?" came the voice from outside. "Th' girl's got t' go down with th' ship. We've got our reckonin', 'n' nobody kin salvage the copper but us. If y' don't jine us, we'll send y' t' hell along o' th' girl—"

"Please—please give me th' gun, Milly!" almost sobbed Captain Jimmy. He reached up, a pathetic figure, swaying weakly on his knees. In place of the revolver the girl put one of her hands in his and then she fired again through the panel of the door.

There came a yell of rage from outside.

"Curse y'! If that's yer answer, Cap'n Bosworth, we'll send y' t' hell with pleasure."

The girl smiled. Her white teeth gleamed between her red lips and her bosom rose and fell with excitement. But she was taking courage from Captain Jimmy. She listened for a sound outside that might guide another shot, but in place of that there came a throbbing of the floor under her feet, and, in a sudden spasm, the wounded man almost crushed the little hand he held.

"They're stopping th' engines!" he exclaimed. "Here—" Captain Jimmy held up a box of cartridges. The girl took them and counted out six while her companion broke the breech of the gun. After she had reloaded the weapon, the owner's daughter tiptoed to the door and for a full minute stood with her ear against it. When she came back the captain was figuring on his fingers and his lips were moving. The girl watched him. In the excitement of the last hour her hair had become loosened and now it fell in rich waves around her shoulders. As she leaned quietly over, attempting to catch the murmur from Captain Jimmy's lips, a mass of it tumbled about the man's face and he caught it in his hands before she could move away.

"Milly—" he whispered.

The girl gently drew her hair away.

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"What were you doing, Jim?" she asked.

Captain Jimmy sank back on the floor.

"Excuse—me—Miss Mildred," he mumbled Almost fiercely the girl bent over again so that her hair swept the man's face. But Jimmy did not touch it. "I was figurin' where we were," he continued "If you get away, Miss Mildred, tell your father they scuttled th' ship somewhere on a line b'tween Hammond's Bay 'n' Grand Manitoulin Island. I reckon she'll go down in—fifteen fathom—"

In a moment the girl was upon her knees beside him.

"And you, Jim—you—you—"

Captain Jimmy raised a hand to his head.

"I'm burning up!" he gasped. "I shouldn't wonder, Miss Milly—" He slowly wavered and fell back. With a cry of agony the girl caught him in her arms. "Oh, my God—Jim—Jim, my darling—" She pressed her lips passionately upon the dead-white face against her breast, but Captain Jimmy did not know it. For a few minutes the owner's daughter held him pressed to her, sobbing over him, kissing his hair and beseeching the man to speak. "I love you, Jim—I love you—I love you—" she repeated again and again. "I love you—I love you—oh, I love you so!"

Captain Jimmy was dreaming. He dreamed that his boyhood sweetheart had not refused him, and that she had become his wife. It was a long dream, but the same thing over and over again, and so pleasant that he thought he was always smiling. When he awoke again somebody was bathing his head in cold water, and he sighed deeply.

"Are you feeling better, Jim?" asked a voice.

Captain Jimmy came to his senses with a powerful effort. "I feel better, Miss Mildred—I guess I've been sleeping!" The man straightened. Then he sniffed the air. He seemed to be in a different atmosphere—hot, stifling. A crackling sound rilled his ears, too, and he staggered to his knees, the girl's arm supporting him.

"Milly—" His voice was full of inquiry.

"It's the ship, Jim," she whispered. "She's sinking, and they've set fire to her, too. They left nearly an hour ago. You and I are the only ones aboard, Jim."

The girl spoke in a calm, sweet voice. She brushed back Captain Jimmy's hair and half bent over as if to kiss him, but caught herself and only smiled into his sightless face. "I tried to pull you out," she continued, "but I couldn't."

Captain Jimmy staggered to his feet. He was stronger, but his eyes burned terribly. "You wouldn't leave me, then—"

"No, Jim."

The two made their way slowly to the cabin door, the girl straining to hold up half of the man's weight. Jimmy reached out and drew the bolt. As the door opened a breath of hot air struck him in the face and his nostrils were filled with smoke. For a moment he stood there and listened. There was no sound of the sea lapping the ship's sides. There was no singing of the wind in the spars overhead. All was lost in a sullen rumbling that seemed to freeze Captain Jimmy's blood.

"She's burning deep down," he said. "The fire ain't more'n amidships in the hold. I don't believe there's any danger—yet." Captain Jimmy lied bravely. The girl knew that he was lying and looked at him as though she would have liked to take him in her arms again.

"I don't believe there is either, Jim."

But the girl could see. Away aft, the cook's cabin, and everything behind it, was a mass of flames. Out of the midship hatch poured a cloud of smoke and now and then a column of fire shot out with it. Even as the two stood there, hand in hand, there came a jarring explosion under their feet.

"Milly, I must see—I must see!" cried the captain. He tried to pull the towel from his eyes, but the ship-owner's daughter stopped him.

"You mustn't take it off, Jim," she pleaded. "It will blind you if you do. And there's nothing that you can do. The boats are gone. There were only two life-preservers in your cabin and—" The girl caught herself suddenly. Captain Jimmy had now noticed the preserver about his waist, and he began to fumble at it. Again his hands were caught in those of his companion.

"They're on—I mean it's on all right, Jim!"

There was something almost pleading in the girl's voice. The man straightened as if he had been struck a blow.

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He reached out, but the girl eluded him. Once more he groped and caught her by the arm. With all his strength he pulled her to him. "You've put them both on me, Milly!" His voice trembled with excitement. "You've put them both on me—"

It seemed as if his old strength had returned to him. He held the girl in a grip that hurt her as he worked one of the life-preservers over his head and then slipped it over the shoulders of the owner's daughter. When it was done he was conscious of a great pain in his head and a sudden weakness.

"Milly—I—I—didn't think y'd play me like that!" he gasped.

There came a detonation from under their feet and a pillar of fire leaped out of the midship hatch. Nothing else in the world sounds like the rumbling of fire in a ship's hold. For a time there is a rolling, muffled roar, punctuated by explosions which become louder as the fire grows hotter. Then the end comes like a powder-flash, and instead of a smouldering hulk, a thing hidden in flames rolls upon the sea. It was not the first time that Captain Jimmy had heard that sound under his feet, and he knew that the end was not far away. He measured the throbbing of the deck and could tell that the fire had passed the midship hatches and was burning forward like a furnace.

Unperceived by the girl, he drew the towel down from his eyes. There came a stinging, biting pain as the smoke and heat touched his wound—but no sight. He put the towel back, and from deep down in his soul there struggled a faint cry of anguish. "My God—I—I—wish I could see!"

The girl turned to him again. "You'll see after a time, but you mustn't lift the bandage, Jim," she said. She took the man by his hand and led him around the end of the cabin. A steady pillar of fire now poured out of the midship hatch, and the owner's daughter held up her skirt to protect Captain Jimmy's face from the heat as she slowly led him into the bow.

"Is the for'rd boat gone, Milly?" he asked.

"It's gone, Jim."

"'N' the rafts?"

"They threw them overboard, Jim."

Captain Jimmy caught hold of the ship's rail as the girl brought him to it and leaned over. He could smell the clouds of smoke that were pouring from somewhere along the water-line. "Oh, God, if I could only see!" he cried again.

"What would you do, Jim—what would you do?" The girl caught him eagerly by the arm. "Be my captain, Jim—and I'll be the crew! I can do anything—"

"Wood and a rope," cried the man. "Milly, has the fire reached the cabin?"

"Not yet—"

"Then take me back!" almost shouted Captain Jimmy. "We must have th' table—and there's a rope under it!",

"Stay here, Jim, and I'll get them!" In an instant the girl had gone. Captain Jimmy shouted for her to return, then groaned and waited as he received no reply.

Abaft the midship hatch the copper-ship was now wreathed in flames. The muffled thunder under the deck was lost in the crackling, snapping roar of the superstructure, and the heat that came from it almost stifled the girl as she bowed her head and plunged into the smothering clouds of smoke. Almost blindly she felt her way along the side of the cabin until she came to the door. The room was filled with smoke, and in one corner of it lurid tongues of flame were licking their way up to the wall from the bursting door. Almost sobbing for breath, she caught up the rope, ran to the door and flung it forward. She heard a shout from Captain Jimmy—a shout that had in it warning and terror—but she hurried back again without losing a gasp of breath in reply— One end of the cabin was spreading into a sheet of flame. The girl could feel her face blistering in its heat, but she tugged at the long table and dragged it foot by foot toward the cabin door. Each moment her strength seemed going. She knew that she was suffocating, almost burning, but still she fought, with the deck crashing in half a dozen yards away and the cabin fire almost at her feet.

Out upon the deck she stumbled and fell. For a moment she felt as though she would like to lie there and rest; then came reason and one more effort to reach Captain Jim. The table dragged like lead. Through the smoke the fire seemed to be gaining upon the panting girl. It shot up until it wrapped the spars in a shrieking mass and the whole end of the ship went in with a thundering explosion. Around the ship the sea was turned into a boiling caldron and clouds of hot steam poured about the fighting girl. Her heart seemed bursting for want of air. One foot—two—three, inch by inch she made them! The girl heard shouts near her, but she could not answer. Then

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she backed into something, and was conscious that Captain Jimmy was there helping her, and she tugged all the harder—tugged—tugged—until the table slid out into the free air of the bow, and there she turned and put her arm around the man's neck.

"Oh, Jim—Jim——" she whispered in a breaking sob.

Captain Jimmy held her close to him. He would have stood like that until the fire had utterly consumed him, but in a moment the girl took his arms away.

"We must hurry, Jim!" she said.

She caught up the rope from the deck and gave it to the man. With trembling hands Captain Jimmy cut it into three lengths. One of these he fastened around the girl's waist, another around his own, and then he tied the three ends to the table. The free end of the third rope he fastened to the rail of the ship. When this was done he lowered the table over the side, the girl helping bravely.

"You must climb down the rope, Milly," he said, "We're all tied together. We can't lose—" Another section of the deck crashed in behind them. With it there came another sound—a sound which Captain Jimmy had been straining his ears to catch since he had come to consciousness in the cabin. It was the rush of in pouring water. Captain Jimmy knew well that the last moments of the ship had arrived. "Quick—quick!" he cried.

His voice spoke their danger. The running of the water was changing into a hollow roar. In an instant the girl was over the side and her voice came up cheerfully to the man. "I'm here, Jim."

Captain Jimmy slipped over and swung down the rope. He bit hard on the handle of a knife between his teeth, and, as his partly submerged body rested in the water, he seized the knife in his hand and pressed its blade against the rope.

"Are you right, Milly, girl?"

"I'm not only right—I'm comfortable," replied the girl.

The man pressed hard and the rope parted. Then he began working his feet and arms in the water and slowly the table drifted away. Each moment the roaring of the burning ship grew less distinct. Soon the noise of rushing water died away, and Captain Jimmy ceased to paddle. With difficulty he pulled himself half upon the table, and the girl put one of her arms around his shoulder.

"How far, Milly—"

He did not finish. Her eyes big with excitement and horror, the girl stared at the ship. The blazing stern shot up into the air, and like a hissing rocket the copper-ship sank into the sea. There went up a spout of milk-white steam, and then there came a rolling of the water under the table. After that there fell a strange quiet in the air, and Captain Jimmy's face was death-like as he turned it toward the sky that he would never see again.

"She's gone, Milly—" A boyish sob almost choked him. "She's gone— I've—lost—my—first—ship——"

In the path of the copper-ship that day there came a freighter, but it was many hours later. She picked up a young man and a younger woman— both badly burned and one blind—far from where the treasure craft had been scuttled.

From the experience of earlier days Van Gaff knew that a hungry man, or a man who is poor, will snatch at small things. He himself had done it in the days which had made him what some people called a misanthrope. He had been throttled, he had been held down by adversity until he was black in the face and while he was down everything that he had ever cared for had gone out of his life.

Then he had made a titanic struggle and had risen like a man with the soul burned out of him. He had been successful; he had made money; but the love for men and women had gone out of him. He lived because his heart persisted in beating, not because he found especial pleasure in it, and he worked hard because work seemed to be the only thing left for him to do.

It was this way with Van Gaff now. The story of the ill-fated copper- ship had aroused no enthusiasm in him. In fact, he was quite unresponsive to the romance in it. To-night, as on most other nights, he was in what he called the rut. His loneliness was with him, illimitable as ever, and he sat and brooded as he had done a thousand times before, and something in him went back yearningly to the days before the rut existed for him, when he was like other people and enjoyed himself as they did. From his thoughts he was aroused by the ringing of a telephone hanging against the wall of the cabin.

"Hello, Van Gaff, this is Falkner," he heard. "I want you to come over and join us in a game of poker. There's a—"

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"Much obliged, Captain, but I'm feeling a little under the weather to-night," interrupted Van Gaff. "I—"

"There's a girl!" cut in the captain. "She asked me to invite you over, and I don't see how you're going to get out of it. We're waiting for you." The receiver at the other end went up with a bang and Van Gaff returned leisurely to his chair, a puzzled look in his face.

"What the—? A girl—poker—" he mused. The sullen dejection in his eyes was chased out by a gleam of humour. A vitally human spot in him had been touched. "Devilish funny," he smiled, lighting another cigar. "A girl—poker—in the captain's cabin!"

The idea tickled Van Gaff. "I wonder—" What he wondered he left unsaid, but there came into his face an expression of curiosity, of hesitancy, of doubt. "Guess I'll go," he chuckled. "Guess I'll see—" He laced his shoes, rearranged his tie, brushed his hair and went on deck.

Jennings, the first officer of the ship, opened the door when Van Gaff knocked, and over his shoulder the newcomer saw Captain Falkner laughing down into the face of a girl sitting at one end of the cabin table.

The salvage agent was only a casual critic of women. He observed that this one, sitting under the glow of the electric light, had a glistening crown of brown hair and that her eyes, as they encountered his own for a moment, were dark. There was nothing unusual about her, it seemed to Van Gaff. She was pretty, but in a quiet sort of way, and mere prettiness had for a long time ceased to interest him.

"I thought you'd come, Van Gaff," said the captain, rising to shake hands. "It isn't often you have a chance to play poker with a pretty girl, eh?" He winked and laughed, Jennings joining in heartily. "Miss York," he cried, turning toward the girl, "this is Mr. Van Gaff, one of the swindlers attached to the Great Lakes Salvage Company. You'll like him!"

Van Gaff flushed, but the girl did not seem to notice. She looked up at him and smiled, and that smile, he thought, was one of the sweetest he had ever seen.

"I'm afraid Captain Falkner may give you a bad opinion of me," he said. He seated himself, facing the girl, while the others placed themselves at opposite sides of the table. The first officer began sorting out little piles of coloured chips, and while the captain dealt, Van Gaff repeated what he had said. The girl's only reply was another smile and the pressing of a pretty forefinger upon her lips.

"She doesn't like to talk to strangers," rumbled Jennings. "I think it's admirable!"

"Tush—h—h—h!" said the captain warningly.

Van Gaff felt the hot blood rushing into his face. He looked straight at the girl, and in her eyes there came a sudden shadow of perplexity. Her mouth formed itself into a red O and she shot a suspicious glance at the captain and then at Jennings. In a moment, catching up a small paper pad, she wrote a few words upon it and handed it to Van Gaff.

"Please don't think that I am rude," she had written. "Haven't they told you that I am deaf and dumb?"

For an instant Van Gaff's fingers closed tightly over the pad. In the rut he had learned to strike, and strike suddenly, and for that single instant he was filled with an intense desire to even up with the men beside him. He turned to the captain, who was smiling broadly. He could feel Jennings laughing silently at his other side. In another moment he would have responded to the spirit that was calling for physical action, but the girl had seen a flashlight struggle in his eyes, and now she reached out a hand and laid it gently upon his doubled fist. It was a touch that thrilled Van Gaff.

"I beg your pardon," he scribbled in his big, almost illegible hand. "I did not know."

The girl laughed over the table at him, and he wondered if he had exhibited bad taste in getting angry at an incident which was regarded by the others as a good joke.

"It's all my fault," apologized Jim Falkner, his good-humoured face red with merriment. "Miss York thought I had told you. But it was too good a chance, Van Gaff—too good—too good—"

The girl shot a warning glance at him as she picked up her cards. Van Gaff watched her intently. For a moment her long lashes lay almost upon her cheeks as she studied her hand, then her lips were pursed into that round, red O that was beginning to fascinate Van Gaff, and she pushed out a little pile of chips.

The salvage agent showed his interest. He realized that this girl, whom he had known but a few minutes, was tremendously appealing to him. Something in her reached out and set chords tingling in him which he thought had died for ever in the days of the rut.

Twice during the first few minutes of the game he forgot the significance of her silence and spoke to her. Each

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time the girl replied with a smile which seemed filled with sadness to Van Gaff, and which made him curse himself inwardly for his forgetfulness. For a time he failed to notice that she was playing a splendid game, and when Jennings called his attention to this and he saw that she possessed two-thirds of the chips upon the table, the warmth that had begun to glow in his heart received a sudden chill. He had his opinion of women poker-players.

He wished to ask a question of the captain, but feared that the girl would understand. By the changing lights in her eyes and the colour that would come and go in her face he at times thought she read what the others were saying by the movement of their lips. Once while looking hard at his cards he spoke in a low voice to the first officer, saying that Miss York reminded him of a young woman he had seen years before in a play. "But that girl was a professional gambler," he added, with a suggestive emphasis upon the last word.

When he looked across the table he saw that Miss York's face was flushed, and as the girl's eyes encountered his own there was a look in them which was almost accusing. Was it possible that she understood? He would be frank—and ask her. In black and white the question seemed impertinent and in bad taste, but he pushed the writing across to her and watched her closely while she read it.

"Sometimes a deaf-and-dumb person understands without hearing," she wrote equivocally.

A little later the girl nodded toward the cabin clock, signifying that it was time for her to retire. Before rising from the table she invited Van Gaff to escort her across the deck to her cabin, and when the two paused before her door she gave him one of her hands, smiling up into his face in a way that set the man's heart beating wildly. At that moment the memory of his old life went out of him. He forgot the copper-ship, the big checks, and the man at the Soo. His lips burned with words which he crushed back.

After he had returned to his room he was sorry that he had not in some way let the girl know what was in his mind. He might have written in her tablet, he might have—but he immediately reproached himself for allowing this second thought to come into his head.

It occurred to him then that perhaps he was making a fool of himself. A dozen times he asked himself why he should be so interested in this girl. He had known her less than two hours; she was deaf and dumb—and she played poker. These were things which would have fatally prejudiced Van Gaff a short time before. But now something had risen in revolt in his soul, he acknowledged to himself that a new interest had come into his life, and that he was experiencing sensations which were pleasing and which thrilled him with a desire to be near the girl again.

When the salvage agent awoke in the morning his first thought was of the girl. For an hour he lingered over his breakfast, hoping that she would join him. He talked of her to the captain, who told him simply that Miss York lived at the Soo and that her father was a friend whose good opinion he cherished, but that he had not seen much of the girl and, consequently, knew little of her. Beyond this information Jim Falkner was so reticent that Van Gaff was made to feel the impertinence of his questions. A little later he went to his cabin and through his window watched for the girl's appearance on deck. When she came from her room he hurried out to meet her.

"I've been watching for you all the morning!" he cried. "I—" He caught himself, the girl laughing at his forgetfulness. Her face was so filled with sweetness that Van Gaff's confusion was banished in an instant.

He led her deep into the midship and leaned with her over the rail of the vessel with the nearest eyes two hundred feet away. He pointed out the beauties of the lake to her, and she understood him and mutely thanked him with her eyes; he made two trips to his cabin to bring cushions and chairs, and then for an hour he sat beside her and fell deeper and deeper in love with her. As he watched the beautiful colour in her face, the changing lights in her eyes, and the pouting expressions of her red mouth, Van Gaff knew that everything that had been in his life had now given place to this girl. The thought of her great affliction only added to his passion. It brought her nearer to him, for in a way they were both unfortunate; it made him feel that there existed between them something which made up for the briefness of their acquaintanceship. He wrote this for his companion, and she asked him to explain. It was a big thing for Van Gaff to do. It called for the old, long story of the man in the rut. He pencilled it, bit by bit, and the girl urged him on.

When he had done he wrote under the last words: "I am going to tell you something now which may make you angry. In one night I learned to love you—and I never loved another living creature in my life—except a dog."

In a moment the colour left the girl's cheeks, and when she raised her eyes slowly to Van Gaff's her face was as white as the little flower at her throat. The man's whole soul shone in his eyes, and it seemed to him as though

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his heart for the moment had ceased to beat. An arm's distance away was the only salvation the earth seemed to hold for him. This girl had dragged him from his old life—she could hold him from it for ever. Without her he knew that he would fall again, deeper than before, and he half stretched out his arms, his lips forming words of entreaty.

The girl seemed almost on the point of speaking. Her lips trembled, she seemed struggling to give sound to the words she wished to say, and Van Gaff leaned eagerly toward her as though he expected to hear her voice. In the face of his ardour she lowered her eyes and wrote in her tablet.

"You would not have said that if you had known more about me," he read. "I have accepted your friendship, but in allowing you to tell me that you love me, I deceived you—deceived you so shamefully that I am afraid to tell you how."

His eyes glowed and his face was filled with a white, tense earnestness, as he wrote the reply. "Deception has been a part of my life. Sometimes deception is necessary, as it has been with me; then it is not a sin, but just. That is my eleventh commandment, and by obeying it I have made the world give me the little that I would not otherwise have had. At this moment I am obeying it." He was thinking of the copper-ship and the man at the Soo.

"Are you deceiving me?" wrote the girl.

In a moment he had launched himself into the story of the copper-ship. Briefly, strongly, he described wherein his deception lay, and the girl read while he wrote, her face so near to his own that at times he could feel her hair blowing against his cheek. Before he had done she drew back, and when Van Gaff looked up she was standing, her eyes big and staring, as though she had been frightened.

"I must think over what you have said," she wrote when he had returned the tablet. "I must go to my cabin. You may see me again—soon." She gave him her hand, and Van Gaff held it for a moment between both of his own.

He made no attempt to detain her after that. He watched her as she walked into the forward deck. For the first remembered time in his life Van Gaff was happy. In the beginning he had steeled himself against disappointment. He had feared that the girl would regard his attentions and words as impertinent, if not insulting. But she had accepted both, and there was something in her way of receiving them that made his heart throb with hope.

He loved her with the sincerity of a man in whom the great passion was burning for the first time, and he did not go beyond this fact. Only in a vague sort of way did he wonder how she had deceived him. He believed that he had guessed something of her secret the night before, and he felt assured that the captain could explain to him if he so desired. But he did not care for explanations now. The girl had become a part of his life, a part vitally necessary to his future, and nothing could keep him from loving her.

Anxiously he awaited her reappearance. But the girl's dinner was served in her cabin, and as hour after hour passed and she did not come out on deck Van Gaff's suspense became acute. Late in the afternoon he received a note in which she said that she was suffering from a headache and that she was sorry she could not see him until the next day.

The salvage agent was up early the following morning. He had not noticed that the ship's engines had ceased to throb beneath his feet, and when he came on deck and saw that the vessel was lying motionless in the smooth sea he was greatly surprised. The captain called down to him from the pilot-house.

"Guess we've fractured a shaft, Mr. Van Gaff." He pointed in disgust, and Van Gaff, following his arm, saw an indistinct haze of smoke a dozen miles away. "That's the Soo," explained the master, with a significant shrug of his shoulders. "It'll cost us a good lump to get towed in—and it'll take us a day!"

A sudden thrill of joy shot through Van Gaff. This delay was what he wanted. Every minute of it would be precious to him. His happiness shone in his face as he ascended the pilot-house stair and asked the captain if he had heard how Miss York was.

"Do you see that bit of smoke?" he asked, pointing toward the distant city. "That's our launch, and Miss York is in it. She said that it was necessary for her to get to the Soo without delay and I sent her on. I have my suspicions—that you—" he paused fumbled in one of his pockets, and handed Van Gaff a letter. "She left that for you!" he ended gruffly. Van Gaff seized upon it like an animal and tore it open. It began:

Dear Mr. Van Gaff:

I know that you will think me very, very wicked when you have read this, but I hope that you will forgive me. I told you last night that I had deceived you, but since then I have deceived you again and in a way that will do

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you great injury—financially.

In the first place, I am neither deaf nor dumb. Please do not blame Captain Falkner. I told him, the night that we played cards, that I was going to have a little fun at your expense, and I got his word of honour that he would not betray me, for I did not expect that I would see you again after that evening.

Before we parted yesterday morning I would have revealed myself—but you spoke of a long-lost vessel, a copper-ship, which went down years ago. Those words sealed my lips. You told me how and where your company found it, and the name of its owner, and by the time you read this I will be on my way to that owner.

I almost despise myself for betraying your confidence in this way. But you have taught me an eleventh commandment—and I am obeying it to the letter.

Sincerely yours,

ELIZABETH YORK.

When Van Gaff turned toward Captain Falkner again his face was as hard as stone. Something rushed back over him like a flood, and he knew that the mask had fallen from him and that he was no longer a fool, but Van Gaff once more—the old Van Gaff, with perhaps a deeper and darker place waiting for him at the bottom of the rut. What little hope there had been in him was now mangled. He had not only betrayed himself, but his employers as well. He had allowed an adventuress to hook and strangle him. But still—his heart throbbed as if it would burst when he thought of her. Whatever she was, she had brought him back into good wholesome life for a few short hours—and he loved her! He would always love her for that. But now the old spirit in him called for action.

"Captain Falkner," he said, "it is also necessary that I should get to the Soo—without delay. Over there is a yacht that will take me in. Will you signal for her?" As he spoke he handed the other the open letter. "That will explain why!" he added.

The captain read, and when he had done he rumbled out an oath that could be heard amidships. "She's a trump!" he shouted. His face became red with excitement. Running into the pilot-house, he levelled a pair of glasses at the distant launch, then sent a signal down into the engine-room.

"I'll call the yacht for you," he cried. "I'll call it—because you can't catch up with her! She'll beat you—easy! If I thought she wouldn't I'd hold you here till doomsday! But she'll beat you—she'll get there first—she'll—"

The roar of the freighter's whistle interrupted him, in an unbroken signal that clouded the aft deck with steam it called until the yacht swung bow on and bore down within hailing distance. In response to the captain's invitation it ran alongside, and Van Gaff swung himself down into it. There were two young women and a man in the boat. Before any of them had expressed their surprise at his action he had accosted the latter, who was staring at him in blank astonishment from the stern.

"I beg your pardon," he said, lifting his hat in acknowledgment of the presence of women. "We've broken down. It's important that I should reach the Soo without a moment's delay. I will give you five hundred dollars if you get me there within three-quarters of an hour, and I'll give you a bonus of one hundred dollars for every five minutes you save under that time."

He seated himself opposite the man at the engine, pulled out his wallet, then looked at his watch. "Please don't waste a second," he urged, as he counted out a number of bills. "I'm going to pay you three hundred in advance—I'll give you the rest when I see that you have won."

The little boat was edging away from the steel wall of the ship. Her engine kicked up a billow of foam behind, and as the craft shot out with her nose pointed toward the distant city, Van Gaff handed over the bank-notes. Then he leaned against the cushioned rail and silently watched their progress.

Thirty minutes later he gave four fifty-dollar bills to the man at the engine. Ten minutes after that, as the yacht glided with dangerous speed up to one of the low wharves of the town, he handed him two others, and while the craft was still in motion clambered ashore. He knew that to hunt for a cab would mean delay, so he hailed a delivery-wagon, climbed in beside the driver, and, thrusting a bill into his hand, told him to make the run of his life to an address which he gave him.

In a few minutes the salvage agent was hurrying along a winding cinder-path that led to an old-fashioned white house set in the midst of a small grove. As he ascended the weather-beaten steps to the front door he caught a glimpse of a grey-haired man through an open window, and he felt assured that this was the man he had come to see. A moment after he had knocked an elderly woman came to the door, received his card, and ushered him

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into a small reception-room.

Van Gaff was filled with hope. It seemed evident to him that he had beaten Miss York. He knew that the girl had landed at least half an hour ahead of him, but it was possible that something had delayed her after she had reached the city. The quiet, unexcited aspect of the man he had seen and the equally calm demeanour of the woman, whom he took to be his wife, convinced him that the couple had not yet been approached on the subject of the copper-ship.

But he knew that there would be no time in which to bargain, for the girl might come in at any moment. He would offer fifty thousand dollars at once. If there was a sign of hesitation on the part of the copper-ship's owner he would increase the offer, but in a way that would not create suspicion. He had figured this out, when light footsteps sounded in the hall, and a moment later Miss Elizabeth York stood in the doorway!

The girl wore the costume in which he had seen her aboard ship. There was a smile upon her lips, the sweet, soft smile that had made a fool of Van Gaff, and she advanced toward him, her hand outstretched.

"Won't you please congratulate me, Mr. Van Gaff?" she asked. A rich colour suffused her face and her eyes glowed with a light that Van Gaff had never seen in them before. "Please—"

Van Gaff had not taken her hand. He knew that he was beaten.

"You have ruined me," he said coldly.

"And consequently you think that I am very wicked," smiled the girl. "But I'm not. I've just been obeying your eleventh commandment, and by doing it I have kept your company from stealing a fortune from my father. My name is not 'York.' I am Mildred Williams Bosworth."

CHAPTER XIV. JIM FALKNER PIRATE

The big clock in the City Hall was striking ten when Jim Falkner reached the pitch-black cobblestone street to which his letter had directed him. It was a curious letter and an unusual hour for an appointment with a rich man; but it struck him, as he stopped to light his pipe, that up to date the street was the most disquieting feature of all. It ran close along the lake front and smelled dankly of fish, tar and oils. It was narrow and the buildings rose high on each side, unlighted and black, giving a tunnel-like effect to the passage between them. For a few moments Falkner stood and looked into the mouth of this city abyss, whence came no sound of footsteps or voices, wondering how he would find the number he wanted and why it was that a millionaire chose this sort of a dungeon for his offices. Suddenly, a block and a half down, he saw a thin streak of light shoot out into the street and remain there, and he at once made up his mind that this was meant to guide him. Puffing at his pipe and with his right hand in his coat pocket where his fingers touched a chilly little automatic revolver, Falkner dived into the darkness.

There was something about his present adventure that curiously stirred Falkner, to whom adventure of one sort or another had been the spice of existence ever since he could remember. Never had he entered a thing more blindly than he was going into this. A week before a letter had been delivered to him aboard his ship at Milwaukee—a letter which he would have attributed to a crank or a madman if it had not borne the signature of a well-known Chicago millionaire. Among other things it urged upon him, if he valued his future prospects, to be on hand at a certain appointed hour at a certain number in a certain street in Chicago; and enclosed was a check for five hundred dollars as a guarantee of faith on the part of the sender.

It was just five minutes past the appointed hour when Falkner halted under the stream of light that shot out of a second-story window, struck a match and found the number he wanted.

A narrow stairway, blacker than the black street, led to the second floor; and Falkner stumbled up, making considerable noise because of the unusual narrowness of the steps. Scarcely had he reached the top when a door opened and a flood of light poured forth. In this light stood a man whom Jim Falkner had never seen, and whose round pink face, good-humoured smile and cheerful corpulence dispelled in an instant half of the doubts that the black street and the blacker stairway had forced upon him. The man appeared to be about fifty, though his short-cropped hair was almost white. He was puffing vigorously at a big black cigar and chuckled audibly when Falkner stumbled at the last step. "No lights out here," he apologized. "Is this Captain Jim Falkner?"

"It is," replied the younger man.

"Of course it is! I knew it. Foolish question," jerked out the other. "In fact, I've got your picture on my desk." He reached out a hand and Falkner was surprised at the strength of his grip.

"Cut it out of a paper when you found that lost copper-ship," he explained. "Mighty good piece of work that! The scoundrels who beat you out of your salvage ought to be hung."

Falkner laughed as he accepted a cigar which the other had already pulled from a bulging waistcoat pocket. "I suppose I ought to ask if this is Mr. Winn," he said.

"Yes; I'm Winn—J. Cortlandt Winn. Come in."

Falkner entered from the main hall into a yet smaller one and Winn closed the door behind them. Then he opened a second door and gently thrust his visitor ahead of him into a brilliantly lighted room, in which the only furniture seemed to be a big table, half a dozen chairs and an empty bookcase. The floor was bare. Directly over the table burned a small arc-light; and under this, gazing straight at him as he entered, was seated a young woman.

"My daughter—Captain Falkner," said Winn.

The girl bowed slightly. Her broad-brimmed hat shaded her face, but not enough to conceal from him its remarkable beauty. She continued to gaze at him intently for a moment, her lips parted and her dark eyes filled with a questioning curiosity. As Falkner seated himself opposite Winn he caught a glimpse of her profile and the glint of the light in her hair. On the table before her was a diminutive paper pad, bound in a red morocco cover, and between her fingers she held a slim yellow pencil. Falkner faced the millionaire ship-owner with new and ill-concealed interest.

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"I won't detain you long, Captain Falkner," said Winn, his voice becoming sharp and decisive. He ran a number of papers between his fingers as he continued: "You are undoubtedly puzzled at my communication and you will be more mystified before I am through. One thing I must ask of you, however, before I continue with the proposition that I have in mind: Whether you accept it or not, I must be assured that not a word of what passes between us is to go beyond this room. If you do not wish to go into the adventure which I have in mind, and which will take perhaps a month of your time, we are to shake hands and forget that we have ever seen each other. If you join me I will pay you twenty-five thousand dollars for your month's service."

Falkner's glance shot from Winn to the girl. Her beautiful eyes were glowing with subdued excitement as she looked at him.

"That's rather an unusual price to offer an ordinary lake captain," he replied. "It arouses my curiosity. I can only give you my word that whatever you may say will be regarded as confidential. If you can accept that you may go on."

A curious smile played over Winn's face.

"I do accept it, Falkner," he said. "Listen!" He leaned half over the table, his plump hands clasped in front of him. "This is a remarkable adventure that I am about to put in your way. Success means—well, everything to me! I have been planning it for months, and up until one month ago the one thing I lacked was a man—a brave man; a man who was willing to take a risk; a man whose word was as good as a Government bond. I remembered you because I was one of the owners of the ship whose copper salvage you lost. Here—right here—" he paused to tap the papers under his hand—"I've got your record down in black and white. I sent a man to find out what you were as a boy, and I've followed you, year by year, clean up to the present time."

Falkner gave a gasp of astonishment. He looked at Miss Winn, then stared back at the ship-owner. "I hope you missed some things," he said.

"A few—perhaps," resumed Winn, glancing over the papers; "but we at least discovered enough. I'm confident you're the man I want. A little matter of holding up a ship on Lake Superior and abducting eight of her passengers will be just a sort of holiday recreation for you. That's what I want you to do."

Falkner had recovered his self-possession. Coolly he relighted his pipe, which had gone out. "This is all mighty interesting," he said, with an ominous hardness in his voice. "You've searched out my life story and at the end you sum me up as a high-class criminal, eh?"

A low exclamation that was scarcely more than a fluttering throat note came from the girl. Falkner looked straight at her, wondering if she would speak. Her eyes were filled with a sudden painful anxiety as she looked from him to her father.

"Great Heavens—no!" almost shouted the ship owner. "Falkner, I want a man!—and a man isn't a criminal. If I've given you a wrong impression, I'm a fool. I've called you here because I feel that I can place absolute confidence in you—because, in three words, you are brave, adventurous and at the same time honourable. You're the only man of your sort on the lakes; and you must understand the confidence I place in you when I tell you that I am practically surrendering my own reputation, as well as my daughter's, into your hands. If you cannot have faith in me, will you in Gladly—Miss Winn?"

Again Falkner looked at Miss Winn. The girl's eyes met his with clear frankness, but she did not speak. Her silence was beginning to disturb him "Go on, Mr. Winn," he said. "I am at least anxious to hear something of the business which you have mapped out for me."

"It is this," said the ship-owner in a low voice and the girl leaned nearer. "Three weeks from to-day the steel freighter Uranus leaves Duluth for Buffalo with a load of ore. In her cabins she will carry eight passengers—all men. I want you to board this freighter, kidnap those eight men and hide them somewhere in the wilderness along the north shore for a week or ten days. At the end of that time your work will be done and I will hand you a check for fifteen thousand dollars. I will give you the first ten thousand to-night if you agree to do the work. More than this I cannot tell you. You must remain in the dark as to my motive for kidnapping these men and hiding them away for a time; but I can assure you that there is practically no danger in the undertaking."

Falkner's strong face lighted up with an amused smile.

"Only a little matter of piracy, eh?" he laughed. "And do you know what that means, Mr. Winn? On the Great Lakes piracy is subject to the laws of the state for which the vessel upon which the piracy is committed is bound. The Uranus, you say, will load for Buffalo. In New York the one penalty for piracy is death. Don't assume that I

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am afraid. I like excitement. Perhaps I am too fond of it. But as for flying the black flag and committing crime—"

"You won't be committing a crime!" cried Winn, striking the table with his fat hand. "I give you my word on that, Falkner. I know it's hard to believe, but it's true. You run absolutely no risk, except the small one of holding up the crew of the freighter while you unload her passengers. You can't believe this, of course; so I've arranged for a way to checkmate your suspicions. Would I sacrifice my daughter, Falkner? Ask yourself that. And she is to accompany you. She is to captain the expedition. You are to obey her orders implicitly. If you become a pirate she becomes one. If peril faces you it confronts her as well. I am sending her as a pledge that in boarding the Uranus and kidnapping her passengers you will not be committing a crime. You will so completely surprise the vessel's crew that, with a little display of arms, they will give you no trouble. You will need half a dozen good men to board the ship, armed with revolvers. Load the pistols with blank cartridges, but give each man some sort of weapon—a sand billy, for instance—that will stun but not kill if you are forced to fight. What do you say? Will you undertake this expedition—under Gladys, my daughter?"

With that soft strange throat sound, so like the fluttering note of a bird, the girl suddenly leaned over the table and held out one of the little pages of the note-book to Falkner. She smiled straight into his eyes, and then she pouted her red lips pleadingly as he took the slip, upon which she had written the following words: "Please pardon me for not speaking; I must unfortunately write all that I have to say. But I can hear. You will go, won't you? Please!"

With a curious thrill, Falkner understood the meaning of the diminutive pad under the slim white hand of the ship-owner's daughter. She could not talk. She was dumb. He looked at her again. Her mouth was still pouted; her eyes glowed with luminous and anxious questioning. It was this girl, and not Winn or the fortune he offered him, that he thought of now. Her beautiful face still pleaded with him, and he felt a sudden tremulous stir within him that held him silent while he looked into her eyes. Her lips moved. He could see the words as she framed them: "You will go? Please!" She held out a hand to him; and with a low strange laugh he clasped the hand in his own big brown palm, trembling like an excited boy.

"Yes, I will go!" he said.

He felt her fingers tighten about his. She laughed—a sweet voiceless laugh—her dark eyes glowing with joy; and in that moment Falkner felt the earth slipping away from, under his feet. "I will go," he said again, speaking to her alone. "I will go—with you as my captain."

An hour later, in the cabin aboard his own ship, Falkner pulled two slips of paper from his coat pocket. One was a check for ten thousand dollars; the other was Miss Winn's note. A dozen times he read the words she had written, a slow flush burning in his face. As he refolded the slip he noticed a bit of writing on the other side of the paper. In a careless hand the girl had written:

"Captain Jim Falkner, Pirate."

Three weeks and two days after Falkner's first interview with J. Cortlandt Winn, the sloop-yacht Silver Fox lay thirty miles off Thunder Cape, riding lazily and with a scarcely perceptible rolling motion in the long Superior swells.

In the bow stood Miss Winn, searching the level sea with a pair of powerful binoculars. As Falkner came from his cabin he stopped for a moment in the shade of the deck-house to look at the girl, whose tall slender form was silhouetted against a late afternoon sun. She looked bewitchingly girlish as she stood posed a step or two back from the rail, her shining hair done up in a big, long braid, her white arms bared to the elbows. He drew a deep breath and stepped forward. The three days they had been together since leaving Duluth had sped with blissful swiftness for him and yet it seemed as though he had known her for years. They had been days of a steadily increasing yearning—days of joy; days of pain; days in which there had come to him, in the same hour, hope and hopelessness. And with these there was a growing fear—a fear that this girl, in spite of Winn's protestations, was facing a deadly peril.

She turned as he came up, with one of those sweet smiles that made him want to take her in his arms. "I can make out three freighters," she wrote on her pad. "One of them is a big boat. It ought to be the Uranus."

He took the glasses from her hand.

"It is," he said quietly, after a few minutes. "I can tell by her funnels." Before leaving his cabin he had steeled himself for a certain unpleasant task, and the girl saw something of what was coming in his eyes. Her face became serious before he had spoken. "Miss Winn," he said, "I have restrained myself from questioning you during the

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past few days, but I feel that it is my duty now in spite of my contract with your father. There has come a change—" his voice trembled a little as he came near to the truth that was making his heart beat excitedly and that sent again that tell-tale flood of warmth into his face. "There has come a change—in me! I must know. Why is there need of all this mystery? Why am I about to board that ship? What is the reason for the abduction of its passengers? You know. You must know. I am risking everything blindly—my ship, my men, myself. And I am doing this—" He stopped again, and she saw his throat twitch. "I am doing this, not for the money your father is paying me, but for you. If I am doing this, cannot you be honest—fair with me? Cannot you trust me?"

He was almost sorry that he had spoken. For an instant the tremulous look of pain that he had first observed in Winn's office shot into her eyes. The colour left her face and her lips quivered, as though he had hurt her. She wrote on her pad and he saw that her fingers trembled. "I am sorry," she said. "I can tell you nothing—nothing more than you already know. I trust my father. I have faith in you—absolute! Cannot you have faith in me—in us?"

"In you—yes!" he cried quickly, and somehow her quivering little hand came into his. "Miss Winn—Gladys—forgive me for what I am about to say. I do not fear for myself or for my men. I understand and they understand what we are undertaking. But it is for you! Listen! I can run to Thunder Cape, send you ashore and still overtake the Uranus to-night. Will you let me do that? If there is danger—and I am sure there is—you must not face it. I will board the ship to-night, but you must go ashore."

His voice and eyes told her more than the words he uttered. He still held her hand; and she answered him with the beautiful glow in her eyes, the pouting of her red lips, as she shook her head—the colour surging back into her cheeks.

"You must go ashore!" he repeated.

She drew her hand away and wrote rapidly, and he read the words as they came from her pencil: "If you care at all—about me—you will let me go with you to-night. I will not go ashore voluntarily. If you force me ashore you will be a traitor—to me. I must share the responsibility of what is going to happen. It is necessary—to save you from possible peril! I refuse to let you go on alone."

Her face was white again when she looked up. Her tremulous lips made an effort as if to speak, and then suddenly she turned and left him, running lightly to her cabin.

For ten minutes Falkner stood staring out over the lake toward the black trails of smoke of the approaching freighters. Then he returned to his own room and wrote on a piece of notepaper to be delivered to Miss Winn by the woman cook:

"You're a little brick! The Uranus is in sight—the third ship. We'll board her at the end of the first watch to-night." And then he added, with a happy smile: "Captain Jim Falkner, Pirate."

Miss Winn took her meals in her own little cabin and Falkner did not see her again for many hours. At eight o'clock the Silver Fox was running three-quarters of a mile astern of the Uranus, and Falkner had a final talk with his men. There were six, including himself and not counting the engineer. On this trip the regular stoker had been eliminated and the cook's place had been filled by one of the men's wives. Falkner felt that he could trust every member of his crew. Clarkson, Findy and McGraw were old companions in adventure who would stick by him in any project; Hawkins, the engineer, and Peters, mate and wheelman, had been in his service for three years. Only of Sullivan was there a question, and Falkner allowed his eyes to fall more fully upon him as he gave his final instructions. He saw that each man was armed with a short sand billy, and to each of them he gave an automatic revolver loaded with blank cartridges.

"Don't fire a shot unless you are compelled to," he warned, "and then, if you can, shoot so that your powder will be felt. And don't crack any heads with the billies. You're going to get a thousand dollars apiece for this job and we've got to do it without seriously injuring a person aboard that ship."

At nine o'clock he went to Miss Winn's cabin and knocked upon her door. The girl opened it. She had changed her light suit for a heavier and darker dress, and had coiled her hair upon her head. Her face was tense and pale as she looked beyond Falkner to where the lights of the Uranus were glowing half a mile to starboard. With a low laugh Falkner offered her his hand. The girl's was as cold as ice, and the old shudder of fear ran through him. After all, it was to be piracy—nothing less. Then the girl smiled and nodded her head.

"Yes; we are ready," he said, a little grimly. "We are bearing down upon her now. Will you remain in your cabin?"

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She shook her head negatively and went with him to the starboard rail, her hand resting snugly in his arm. He had little to say now. His face was stern and set, his jaws were squared; in his eyes there was a light which the girl had not seen before. In a few moments he left her to join his men. Rapidly the Silver Fox bore down upon the freighter. At last Falkner raised his megaphone.

"Ship ahoy!" he cried. "Is that the Uranus?"

In a moment the reply came back! "This is the Uranus."

"Then slow down and let us run alongside," shouted Falkner. "This is the yacht Sea Gull, of Port Arthur, and we have important telegrams for you from the owners."

As he had expected, the ruse worked. He heard the resonant clang of the signal-gong in the engine-room of the Uranus and the big ship began to lose speed. Two minutes later the Silver Fox ran alongside and Findy and McGraw attached grappling hooks. The freighter lay so deep in the water that from the deck-house Falkner jumped aboard, with Clarkson a bound behind him. The ship's mate and the watch were the only men on the big freighter's deck, and before either had spoken a word Falkner and Clarkson covered them with their revolvers.

"If you make a move or a sound we'll blow your heads off!" warned Falkner. "Up with your hands!"

The two startled men complied in an instant. The chilly glitter of the automatics was too real to question. As quick as cats, Findy and McGraw came up behind them and smothered whatever words they might have uttered under the folds of cloths specially designed for that purpose. Within three minutes after boarding the two men lay flat upon their backs, bound and gagged.

"Findy, you go and gossip with the wheelman," commanded Falkner, "and you, McGraw, watch the door to the captain's cabin. If he sticks his head out get a hold on him that won't let any sound get beyond your own ears. We don't want to arouse the crew aft, or there'll be the swellest sort of a fight. Now, boys, for the passengers!"

Falkner, with Hawkins and Peters close behind him, made for the observation room above the forward cabins. The door was unlocked, and Peters struck a match while the other two searched for the electric light switch. In the flood of light that followed its discovery the three men dropped black masks from under their hats over their faces. Falkner could not restrain an amused chuckle as he looked at Hawkins and Peters, who stood with pistols in their hands and looked as piratical as any cutthroats that ever sailed with a Kidd or Blackbeard. Hawkins, with his red hair and huge red beard that fiercely bristled out from under his mask, was alone worth a small army as a terrorizer, and for this reason Falkner sent him in advance as they tiptoed in a single file down the narrow stairway that led to the state-rooms. Scarcely had they reached the foot of the stair when the sound of subdued laughter came to them, and from under the door that opened from the sleeping quarters into the ship's sitting-room there issued a brilliant streak of light. Without a word Falkner strode forward and flung open the door. At a small table in the centre of the room sat four men, playing poker. Two others were looking on at the game. For a moment the players were so engrossed in the movement of certain piles of chips that they did not notice the interruption. When they looked up three dangerous-looking men and three chillingly murderous automatics menaced them from the door.

"Please make no noise, gentlemen," said Falkner. "We shall be compelled to shoot the first man who makes an outcry. We want you outside!" he thrust the fierce Hawkins out into the room and pointed to the door that led directly to the deck. "Open that—and brain the first man who shows an inclination to run! Now, gentlemen, we want you to travel out that doorway in single file."

The occupants of the room had not uttered a word; and now, as they rose to their feet, even the sombre Peters could scarcely restrain a laugh at the spectacle they made. The man who followed Hawkins was one of the fattest Falkner had ever seen, and the waistbands of three of the remaining five seemed ready to burst in an effort of envious competition. They were not a dangerous-looking lot. There was only one young man among them and Falkner grinned when he saw that three of the prisoners against whom he had brought such a formidable force were completely bald. Every man there breathed respectability and affluence; the very glisten of the bald heads, the huge and immaculate white waistcoats, bespoke their importance and social standing—and a sudden uncomfortable chill shot through Falkner. He had expected ordinary passengers—or at least nothing like this appalling aggregation, whose very rotundity and all-round luxurious appearance made him realize more than ever the enormity of the act he was committing. Not one of these men made a remonstrance as they followed Hawkins through the door except the huge fat man, who spluttered and rumbled beneath his breath, but not loud enough to call forth a warning from his captors. For a moment they stopped where Sullivan was guarding the deck and the

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two bound men, while Falkner showed them how to board the Silver Fox. Not until they were seated in a row on the yacht's forward deck, with Sullivan leaning over the rail above them, did Falkner rejoin Hawkins and Peters, who were already returning for the other two passengers.

Suddenly a terrific and blood-curdling yell split the calm stillness of the night, followed almost in the same instant by the rapid firing of an automatic. "That's McGraw!" cried Falkner. "Hustle up the others, boys! I'll go to him."

He ran across the deck toward the outer entrance to the captain's cabin and, to his horror, found McGraw flat upon his back, with a giant of a man on his chest, busily throttling him. He knew that it would now be only a matter of a few minutes before the ship's hands aft would be pouring on deck, and he brought his sand billy down upon the captain's head with considerable force. The grip on McGraw's throat relaxed, the captain rolled over and, before Falkner could strike again, had staggered to his feet. He prepared for the other's rush, but his blow went wild—and just what happened after that he could never tell. He knew that some hard and heavy object landed on his head, and he crumpled down as completely helpless as though his back had been broken. He was conscious of a flood of something warm pouring over his face; then he heard loud voices, shouts, the firing of pistols—and everything went blank.

Falkner's first return to consciousness was marked by a strange pain and the realization that a cool hand was stroking his face and smoothing back his hair. He opened his eyes; and the second dawning that came to him was that he was in his own well-lighted little cabin and that the Silver Fox was under way. Then he saw Miss Winn, her beautiful face leaning over him; and before he knew what he was doing he put up his hand to her shining hair. He recovered himself in a moment and dropped it back with a laughing groan.

"Soaked—soaked good and hard," he smiled up at her, a little painfully. "Did we get 'em all?"

She nodded affirmatively, smiling down on him with her lips and glowing eyes in a way that made laugh joyously up into her face, like a boy. She ran her hand through his hair again, and he took her other hand and pressed it to his lips. It lay there for a moment, warm and sweet, and then there came a knock at the door; and as Miss Winn drew back Peters entered. From the door the girl smiled back at him once more and left the cabin.

Peters sat down and grinned at his chief. There was something almost sheepish in his look. Falkner sat up. "What happened?" he asked.

"Cap'n Dix slugged you a good one on the head with a piece of iron pipe," explained Peters, his long thin face still wearing a grin. "Before McGraw got him with his sand billy he yelled like a pack of hyenas and half a dozen of the crew came running from aft. Sullivan and Findy held them back until we got the other two aboard and cast them off. Good Lord—!"

"What the devil is there to grin at?" demanded Falkner.

"I can't help grinning at what we got," said Peters. "The other two were fat an' there's four bald heads. One of them, too, was so old and fat we had to help him aboard. I put 'em in the long cabin an' set Clarkson an' McGraw to guard 'em; but they're as harmless as children. They hadn't been there fifteen minutes before the whole bunch was playing setback and poker, and smoking cigars that smelled so good I'd like to eat a box for breakfast. Listen to that!" Above the yacht's throbbing engines Falkner heard a distant rumble of laughter, as if many voices had joined in a sudden burst of merriment.

"They're taking it easy," went on Peters, "and the devil of it is they're telling pirate stories while they play and predicting all sorts of things for us. They've got Clarkson and McGraw sweating blood; and every little while that whale of a fat un describes an execution he once saw in New York, where they killed a pirate with electricity."

Falkner's face wore anything but an amused look as he arose to his feet and examined himself in the glass. "Clarkson and McGraw are still wearing their masks?" he inquired.

"You couldn't pry 'em off with crowbars," said Peters, "and Hawkins is shaving off his red whiskers in the engine-room. That bunch has scared 'im stiff."

"And how about you?"

Peters laughed uneasily. "I don't like the layout, Falkner. They're too big, too fat an' rich! I shouldn't wonder if we'd tied up to the eight richest men in the United States, mebbly counting out the two skinny ones—and that's dangerous!"

"Tell Clarkson and McGraw to leave the bunch and lock the door," said Falkner. "I don't believe they need a guard."

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With early dawn the Silver Fox was running close in to a wild and forest-covered shore, and just as the sun appeared above the wilderness the yacht began picking her way slowly through a maze of black reefs and small islands until at last she ran into a small cove completely shut in by a rocky ridge and a thick forest of spruce and balsam. Between the water and the forest was a white strip of sandy beach a hundred yards in width. Falkner pointed this out to Peters and Findy, who stood beside him.

"Pitch your tents there," he said. "We'll give our prisoners absolute freedom ashore. They can't get away. There isn't a settlement within thirty miles and I don't believe any one of them could make his way for five hundred yards through those rocks. They're as safe as if in a jail. Land all the provisions and after you've done that make ready to sail."

While the mate set about to carry out his instructions Falkner went to Miss Winn's cabin. The girl gave a little gesture of surprise and pleasure when she saw him. "I'm so glad you weren't badly hurt," she wrote for him; and then, as she looked up with the witchery of her wonderful smile and saw the unchanged seriousness of his face, her own became suddenly quiet and questioning. A little frightened by what she saw, she put out her hand and rested it on his arm.

"I have come to say good-bye, Miss Winn," he said, struggling to speak calmly. "Within half an hour the Silver Fox will be under way for Duluth, with her whole crew on board, except myself. You must go with her."

A sudden blue fire shot into the girl's eyes. She wrote rapidly in her little book: "Yes, I must return to Duluth with the yacht. But why are you remaining behind—alone?"

"Because I refuse to imperil for a moment longer the lives of my men," he replied, and the hard ring in his voice sent her back a step, staring at him. "I shall carry out my contract—not with your father, but with you," he continued. "I shall remain with the prisoners. Within a few hours two revenue cutters and a dozen tugs and swift yachts will be scouring Superior and searching the shores for the criminal who boarded the Uranus. If we are discovered—" He shrugged his shoulders. "If we are—I will take the punishment alone."

She stood looking at him still, but in her eyes there came a glorious change. A flood of colour rose into her cheeks. She wrote again and gave him the slip of paper. "You are the bravest man in the world!" she said to him. "If they find you I shall come to you—and confess my part. And you—when you are done here—will you come to see me at my home?"

He looked at her and for a moment dared not speak. She put her two hands on his arm and looked up into his face. "You really—want me to come?" he asked softly.

She nodded. Her red lips pouted, "Yes."

"Then—I'll come," he said. "Good-bye, Miss Winn—Gladys—" She seemed to come a little nearer to him and suddenly he bent down and kissed the beautiful, tremulous mouth so temptingly close; and then, with his brain reeling, he stepped back through the open doorway of the cabin.

The prisoners were already ashore; tents were going up in the shade of the forest and the supplies were being rushed from the cook's pantry; but Falkner paid little attention to these things as he stepped across the long planks that were laid from the yacht's deck to a big rock ashore. He realized that at the last moment he had surrendered to his baser self. His kiss was an insult to Miss Winn. In the shelter of a rock he drew pencil and paper from his pocket and wrote: "Can you forgive me for what I have done? Can you still believe me to be brave and honourable? If you can, God bless you! There is only one excuse for what I did—I love you!"

He called Peters and asked him to deliver the note. Then, pulling his mask low over his eyes, he walked back to the rocky ridge. He did not catch another glimpse of Miss Winn; and as the last tent went up and the last box of supplies was carried ashore his heart sank dead within him. The girl had refused to pardon him for his insult. He went down to the shore, shook hands with the men of his crew and gave Peters his final instructions.

"Lay up the Silver Fox at Duluth," he said; "charter a tug with the check I've given you and join the big search that will be made for the kidnapped passengers. Be sure and get a new crew—two men will put back into this cove. If we're not discovered before then no one will suspect the game we're playing. I'll disappear back into the woods and you can make some sort of pursuit if you want to. See the point? You'll be the lucky rescuers."

Peters hurried aboard and Falkner stood watching the yacht as she got under way. She was just passing the mouth of the cove when the mate appeared from behind Miss Winn's cabin and launched a heavy object through the air.

"Hi, Cap'n; that's for you!" he yelled.

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It fell close to Falkner—a dainty linen handkerchief tied about something heavy. As he untied it a stone fell to the beach and a piece of paper trembled between his fingers. A glad cry broke from his lips as he read what the girl had written: "I cannot understand your note. Forgive you! I wanted you to kiss me. I guess I was to blame—if there is any blame—for I think you are the bravest man in the world! Besides, I got even with you—when they brought you in and I thought you were dead! I don't believe you will ever want to see me again, for I have deceived you terribly. I am not dumb, as you suppose. It was only a trick—almost a contemptible one, I am afraid—to keep you from questioning me too much; but if you should care, please come and see me when you get rid of those troublesome prisoners. Then—then perhaps I can make you understand!"

Trembling with joy—a happiness greater than that of any dream he had ever dreamed—Falkner stared after the yacht until she disappeared beyond the island; then, reading the note again, he turned back to the prisoners. They made a funny spectacle, for Peters had followed his instructions and each of the eight men stood with his hands securely bound behind him and his eyes blindfolded. It was Falkner's plan to give all his prisoners the use of their vision, but to free only two or three of them at a time, so that they could not make a combined rush upon him. He had scarcely released the enormously fat man, however, before the latter thrust out a hand and, with a good-humoured laugh, said: "If you're out for ransom, old man, you've won. You've done a mighty slick job—so deuced slick that we've agreed not to squeal on you. You might as well pull that rag from your eyes, because we know who you are. You're Captain Jim Falkner and your boat's the Silver Fox. You dropped this and I picked it up."

He handed Falkner a slip of paper. It was the note which Gladys Winn had given him in her father's office nearly a month before, on the back of which she had written: "Captain Jim Falkner, Pirate."

A cold chill ran up Falkner's spine. Then he laughed and gripped the fat man's hand. "You're right!" he said. "I might as well take this thing off. And I'm not so very sorry. It tickles my nose"

Twenty-four hours after the bold hold—up of the freighter Uranus every newspaper wire in the United States was hot with the news. Nothing more sensational had come into the hands of the editors since the blowing up of the Maine. At first the reported facts were accepted with a great deal of care by the more cautious. It was scarcely believable that a piratical crew, armed with bludgeons and automatics, had actually boarded a lake ship and by force of those arms had carried off her passengers. Managing editors smiled as they printed the first stories, but smiles quickly changed to looks of astonishment, and even horror. The thing had really happened. As the details came in, "extras" with glaring headlines were printed by the million throughout the country. Three American and two Canadian warships rushed to the scene of the piracy; and the authorities of both Governments were instructed to fit out armed yachts and tugs along both shores.

On the second day, the larger newspapers came out with full-page headlines covering columns of type and pictures. In the first rush, photographs of the Uranus and her captain and pictures of her crew brought from ten to twenty-five dollars each, while the pictures of the eight abducted men appeared in almost every issue. With these there were thrilling portrayals in pen and ink and crayon, covering half-pages, showing the masked boarders leaping over the side, the struggle with the crew, the terrific fight between Captain Dix and McGraw, imaginary struggles between the passengers and the invaders of their cabins, and every other scene that could be worked out to fit the situation by hungry editors and artists.

Who were the daring pirates? Where were they? What had become of their prisoners? These and a thousand other questions were asked by the newspapers, in business offices, over clicking typewriters, at breakfast tables—even by the children in the schools. Not one of them could be answered. Each day added to the mystery; and as the mystery grew deeper and more thrilling the newspapers devoted still more space to it, many of them sending their own correspondents to join in the search for the pirates. War between the two greatest nations in Europe could not have created a bigger sensation.

Falkner, hidden away in a wilderness cove, behind another wilderness of reefs and islands, guessed what was happening. For a few hours after the discovery that his identity was known to his prisoners he felt as though the gates of doom were already opening for him. He could see no escape. There was but one chance, and that was in flight. It was possible for him to strike straight northward into the wilderness and to lose himself for ever, but this left his crew to face their terrible penalty alone; for now that he and his vessel were known, the men who had accompanied him on the desperate expedition could be easily traced. So he discarded the thought of personal escape. In spite of what seemed to be the utter hopelessness of his own situation he could not help being deeply

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interested in the strange deportment of his prisoners. At first he attempted to hold aloof from them, but the fat man and his associates would not stand for this.

"No matter if you are a bloody pirate," said the fat man, "you've got to join us and play rum."

Every hour added to the mystery of the situation and to Falkner's uneasiness. He was astonished at the contents of the boxes which Winn had sent aboard the Silver Fox at Duluth. They contained everything in the way of delicacies and solid luxuries, from potted lobster and pate de foie gras to dill pickles and Limburger cheese. There was one case of wine and several of good old-fashioned lager, and it occupied the time of at least two members of the kidnapped band to cool the beverages in the chill water of Superior. Not for an instant was there a flash of ill-humour in the crowd. The six fat and well-fed men and their two lean companions seemed bent on making a holiday lark out of their unusual predicament, and from morning until night the luckless Falkner was a mark for a thousand questions and the butt of innumerable jokes. How long was he going to hide them in the jungle? Why didn't he demand his ransom? What would happen to him when he was caught? Would he be hanged, shot or electrocuted? At least six times a day the fat man described some new and blood-curdling feature of the execution he had witnessed.

At last he was forced, through lack of further material, to come down to the curious wiggling of the victim's toes; and he asked Falkner, in all seriousness, if he thought he would wiggle his. Would he rather be shot, hanged or killed by electricity—or wasn't a pirate given his choice? He assured him in all friendliness, both for himself and his associates, that they would all be on hand to see his last wiggle, whichever way he went. On the fifth day the fat man said that he and his friends were willing to pay a thousand dollars apiece for their freedom. He said they had enjoyed the little picnic thus far, but that the lager was gone and they were growing tired of it. He offered Falkner a check for eight thousand dollars. Falkner refused it.

It was on the sixth day that matters came to a climax. During the night preceding, a big and hungry bear wandered down from the rocky fastness of the hinterland and helped himself to the camp supplies. He left footprints behind him as big as a hat; and no sooner were these discovered than the eight prisoners took up the pursuit, with the hope of catching a glimpse of the beast a short distance from the camp. Falkner followed close behind the rear-most, a short, pudgy man with a rosy face and long ash-grey hair that fell almost to his shoulders. The pursuers were hurrying between a narrow break in the rocks, the fat man leading, when a balsam limb swept back, entangled itself in the pudgy man's hair, lifted a wig from his head and sent it flying through the air like a bird on the wing. The man gave a startled cry as he faced Falkner. What came from between Falkner's lips was not intelligible. Before the other could speak he leaped at his throat and bore him down on the rocky trail. There was the threatening glare of an animal in Falkner's eye as he almost snarled down into his victim's whitened face.

For that face was the face of J. Cortlandt Winn, the millionaire ship-owner!

After a few moments Falkner loosened his fingers and lifted part of his weight from the other's prostrate body. With his first glimpse of Winn's face it had rushed upon him that his disguised employer was at the bottom of some diabolical plot, for which he was to pay the penalty; and now as he heard returning voices he pulled out his automatic and pressed the cold muzzle of it hard down against Winn's forehead.

"Get up!" he commanded. "Get up—and remember that this isn't loaded with blank cartridges now. Come on! You've got to go with me!" He pulled Winn into the thick undergrowth and did not stop until the two were a hundred yards back in the forest. To his astonishment the ship-owner smiled at him. "Falkner—congratulations, old man. You're a brick!"

"We're going to have explanations now or I'll bore ten holes through you!" said Falkner.

"Sure!" said Winn, regaining his breath. He looked admiringly at Falkner, while he rubbed the red marks on his own neck; and with that look it suddenly dawned upon Falkner that he was the father of the girl he loved. "What a dad-blinked, son-of-a-gun of a man you are, Falkner! I wish you were my son—honest I do! See here!" He fumbled in his pocket and drew out a big black wallet. "Here's your check for the fifteen thousand. It's all turned out gloriously. I had planned to explain the first day ashore, and wanted to; but the others wouldn't let me—said you might queer the game if you knew too soon. By the way, Jim"—he chuckled as he spoke Falkner's name—"can you guess whom you've kidnapped?"

Falkner stared. The beginning of the dawning of a great understanding held him speechless.

"I'm tied," said Winn, "and half choked to death. Good Lord, how you can pinch! Here—have a cigar." He paused to light one of his big cigars. "Well, to begin with," he continued, "the ship which you boarded was mine."

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"Yours!" gasped Falkner, chewing his unlighted cigar.

"Yes, mine," went on Winn, smiling and mopping his red face, "and when you boarded that ship and captured my friends and myself you captured every blessed member of the board of directors of the one—and—only Sanspareil Biscuit Company. You took us off the map. And you did away with us just at the psychological moment. We knew you were coming. We were waiting to be kidnapped. It was our salvation!"

He stopped, and Falkner's eagerness blazed in his face. "It was a put— up game, then!" he cried. "But I don't understand it. Go on."

"It's simple," continued Winn. "Gladys has an imaginative turn of mind. She thought the scheme out and then turned it over to me. You see, the Sanspareil Biscuit is the best biscuit on earth, but in running up against competition it ran up against what began to look like death for it. It wasn't allowed to go on its merits and we couldn't advertise it enough to beat our competitor. It looked like bankruptcy. But now—now, my boy!—why, can't you guess what every newspaper in America has been doing for a week? Think of it! The entire board of directors of the Sanspareil Biscuit Company kidnapped by pirates and perhaps murdered! There isn't a six—year—old child in the United States to—day—Dutch, Irish, Chinese or Hunk, but who's heard of Sanspareil Biscuit! The Sanspareil Biscuit is a household phrase from the Atlantic to the Pacific. It's in everybody's mouth, literally and orally. We've had a billion dollars' worth of free advertising, and we'll get another billion's worth when we turn up and tell 'em we can give no explanation for the kidnapping. This has been the biggest advertising coup of any century since the night Nero burned Rome! We won't be able to make enough Sanspareil biscuits. Everybody will want to eat 'em if for nothing more than curiosity—and once they taste 'em they'll never buy any other. Do you understand, Jim, my boy? If the truth ever leaks out—and there isn't one chance in a hundred that it will—we're all here to swear that the whole thing was a joke to create a little excitement. It was my ship, my board of directors—and my treat!"

Four days later a black and ugly tug nosed her way into the cove a little before sunset. The next morning she landed a hatless, coatless and generally dishevelled lot of passengers at Sault Sainte Marie. At nine o'clock Falkner sent the following telegram to Gladys Winn:

"All O.K.! Am on my way to see you. You're a brick! But you've got a big debt to pay. James Falkner."

THE END