

## Three Sheets in The Wind

(Continued from Page 6)

a port, I guess; but that's as you make it. Come on."

I was given a drink over Frisco Frank's bar, and after a few sharp words between Frank and Edwards, my chest was returned to me. Then, in separate rigs, we rode up to the wharf and boarded the schooner, shiny with fresh paint and varnish, but on close inspection showing unmistakable signs of age and decay.

SHE had been a yacht; but her long overhang, sharp lines, lofty spars and flush deck were the only yacht-like characteristics left her. Her original cabins, dining rooms and state rooms below had given way to cargo space, and all skylights and companions had been eliminated or turned into hatches—all but two of the latter. A companion just abaft the windlass led to a triangular forecabin in the bows containing bunks for five and a stove for cooking, and another, just forward of the wheel, led to an equally diminutive cabin that was nothing but a hall space at the foot of the stairs with a room each side—one for the skipper, the other for the mate. There was also a feature in this craft that I had never seen in any other. She was piped for gas lighting; each room in the cabin, the forecabin, binnacle, and even fixed side and mast-head lamps contained a wire enclosed burner, fed by a tank of compressed gas under the cabin floor.

"It seemed to work all right," explained Edwards when I had commented on the innovation, "so I left it rather than spend fifty dollars for an outfit of lamps and oil. And then, there are Pintsch gas buoys everywhere. We can always recharge the tank."

This, and his refusal of an advance, were not the only evidences of Edwards' shortage of funds. The dinner he sat me down to was boiled rice and weak tea—the same as he fed to his five Coolies forward—and when he took me ashore in the afternoon to act my part as sailing master in getting out ship's papers, he would "clear" at the Custom House only for the run to Yokohama, and insure at Lloyds only for the one month which I assured him was ample time. But, with the egotism of an uneducated man and the pertinacity of a managing owner, he insisted that the monthly clause in the policy be changed to read for an even thirty days; so, as it was now the fifteenth of November, the insurance on the schooner was made out to expire on the fifteenth of December at noon. With the schooner's rotten condition in mind I thought at the time that he also ought to insure our lives, but did not say so; he might have repeated his paraphrase: "Any ship in a port."

I did not see the Chinese partner, nor did I see any more of Edwards until, having put in a dreary afternoon in familiarizing myself with the weakest spots in the hull, canvas and gear, and in getting acquainted with the five Coolies—one of whom was cook—he came aboard promptly at five and gave me the promised brace, which I sadly needed.

At supper, which we ate on a small folding table in the hall space between our rooms, and which included, with the rice and tea, *trepan* or dried fish, a huge, emaciated, half-starved cat bounded down the stairs and into my berth where, like all cats in strange places, it voiced its distress in loud yowls. Pattering footsteps on deck indicated that it had escaped a real danger; for nothing is better in a Chinese stew than cat.

"Drive that brute ashore," he said, angrily.

"Sanctuary," I answered, calmly. "I'll feed it first."

"You'll do nothing of the kind. I want no cats on board. They're bad luck."

"I've always found them good luck.

Strange cats come to me, and I always treat them well."

I picked up my half eaten supper and turned to my door.

"Do you want your berth here," asked Edwards, rising to his feet.

"Yes," I answered, facing him with the plate in my hand.

"Then you do as I say. Drive that beast ashore or go yourself."

"Are you ready," I asked, "to hand over a month's pay?"

"What?—for half a day's work?"

"I'm on the articles as Sailing Master. You've got the papers, but you'll have to produce them on demand. Ask the Consul, Mr. Edwards."

"Captain Edwards," he spluttered.

"Mister Edwards," I replied, emphasizing the prefix. "I'm Captain here. You're managing owner, and until you pay me off, either now or at Yokohama, your rights stop where mine begin. I'm going to feed that poor cat."

He stared blankly at me, and I entered my room with the food. A few soft words and gentle strokes quieted the frightened animal, and it greedily devoured my supper. Then it purred so gratefully that I had no heart nor mind to drive it ashore; so, leaving it stretched out in my berth for a sleep, I went out. But Edwards had sought the deck, and, as I could tell by the heavy thump of his feet, he was working off his rage by pacing to and fro. Having conquered him I felt no anger myself, and going up, asked him when we would sail.

"We tow down the first thing in the morning," he answered, much more civilly than I expected; and for a moment I regretted crowding so hard a man who had befriended me.

"I'm telling you that," he added, slowly, as though restraining his temper, "because you have a right to know. But as you claim other rights that I'm not sure of, I fall back upon rights of my own that I am sure of. Don't speak to me except about work while you are in this packet. I want none of your conversation."

"Very well, Mr. Edwards," I answered, tartly, again emphasizing the prefix. "But I expect the same consideration from you."

THEN, as darkness was closing down, I went forward, lighted the port, or off shore, side light, as a warning to passing craft, inspected the mooring lines, set the night watch, and came aft in a mood to fight Edwards; but he had gone down to his berth.

I offer no excuse for my attitude toward him—only an explanation. All men, especially those that drink, are medically insane at times, yet never, perhaps, legally so. Though my nervousness and headache were gone, I was in the illogical, stubborn and short-sighted condition of mind that lasts a man long after he has stopped drinking. Edwards, as my owner and employer, was entitled to his own way in regard to the cat. But he had outraged my one moral commandment, and with this in mind I smoked myself into a sullen determination to meet him not only half way in his conversational inhibition, but to do my work beyond his criticism while with him, to care for the poor cat, to thrash him again at Yokohama, and to complain of the quality of the food. But, on going down to turn in for the night I lost my moral right to the latter, for at sight of his bottle of rum in a swinging tray above the table, I recklessly helped myself, not caring whether or not he heard me from his room. Then, lighting the gas in my own small closet of a room, I entered up the episode of the cat and the quarrel in the brand new log book, petted the wakened animal to sleep, turned out the gas, and went to sleep myself.

In the morning I left the cat in the closed room, until, after a silent breakfast with Edwards, I ostentatiously fed it; then, after the tug had

taken us clear of the dock, I released it for a run on deck, at the same time warning the Coolie crew that if they harmed it trouble would come to them. I warned them collectively, because Chinamen, like babies, all looked alike to me, and I never could remember their names five minutes. I said nothing to Edwards, however, nor he to me. He had heard the warning and possibly was impressed.

I had a full navigating outfit—charts, books, sextant and chronometer—and when clear of the Islands I took a departure and the voyage began, Edwards taking my courses and directions, and standing one watch while I and the cat stood the other. But the cat remained my watchmate only for a time. For when it had smelled at and become acquainted with every part and person of the old craft it manifested the feline disposition to do nothing that it did not want to do, and, not caring to waste sleep and dignity in chasing it to its watch below, I often left it on deck. Yet no harm came to Tom; he grew fat and sleek and handsome under the influence of the fresh trade wind air and the diet of rice and fish, which I could hardly eat.

However, I needed no such sedative. The bottle of rum still remained in the swinging tray, and, resentful at the quality of food Edwards was serving, I never scrupled to take a drink every time I went down to turn in; and even though I noticed that the liquor—a particularly vile grade of fire water—always remained at about the same level in the bottle, I merely concluded that Edwards, in spite of his preachments, was also drinking it, and occasionally replenishing it. I might have found a different meaning to it had I not been thrown off my guard by Edwards' scrupulous civility, his occasional petting of the cat, and his stern orders to the crew, in my hearing, to let the animal alone.

AND so, having for the first time in my life free access to liquor—unrebuked by Edwards, whom I assumed was drinking his share—I gradually increased my sleeping draught until it was twice the size of an ordinary drink, though I was religiously careful not to touch the stuff as an "eye-opener" on turning out for my watch on deck. Thus, it merely gave me sound sleep, producing no other effects upon me than a continuance of the illogical mind state I have spoken of. But the time came—about half way across—when the trades gave way to calms, head winds, snow squalls and gales of wind that racked and ripped our old gear and canvas—I suffered so from worry and fatigue that I took a drink whenever I was near enough to the bottle. Still it did not affect my efficiency when on deck; I navigated, kept the log, oversaw the crew in patching and repairing, but would go soundly asleep the minute after stretching out—often while automatically stroking the cat.

But Tom, with the ingratitude of cats, deserted me soon, and I often saw him asleep in Edwards's berth, which possibly was softer than mine. As long as he was being kindly treated it did not matter, and, indeed, I now had serious troubles; I dropped my sextant, smashing the horizon glass, and unable to take sights of the sun, was compelled to rely upon dead reckoning alone. This involved my being on deck a great deal in my watch below, keeping track of the course, speed and drift of the old craft, for plotting down on the chart. Edwards, too, had trouble on his mind, and, while he did not confide in me, it was plain that he was worrying about his expiring insurance: the month was nearly gone.

However, a fair wind came at last, and before it we scudded due west, while it rose to a gale that demanded the shortening of sail, and then to a



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