

of the 'midship house the last night before we made Liverpool. And when we got ashore an' paid off, I caught the first mate in an alley in sailortown. They carried what was left of him to hospital. He was never the same man again. A broken wreck, madam! His sea days was over, and he was shipped to 'Snug Harbor.'"

Captain Decker detected a shudder on Mrs. Gifford's part.

"And proud of it, madam!" he thundered. "Proud of it!"

"But what is the joke, Captain Decker?" Patty asked.

"It ain't a joke. It's facts. I first opened my eyes in this world in the fore's'le of the *Ermyntrude*, eighteen years ago. That's how old I am—eighteen years. And I fought my way up. When I was one year old, I was bosun. Before I was two, I was second mate. By the time I was three, I was mate, an' a proper bucko at that—"

He broke off abruptly. His seaman's eye, mechanically roving the sea-rim, had lighted upon something.

"Snail ho!" he cried. "Where's that lookout?—Two points on the weather bow, there!—I'll attend to his case.—Flat-Nose, you! Take the glasses up to the cross-trees and see what you can make of it."

VII

AFTER dinner, the same day, the survivors of the *Mingalia* were not permitted to come on deck. They remained in the cabin through long, stifling hours, while they listened to boats coming alongside, to strange voices on deck, and to the varied noises that carried the tale of cargo being broken out and hoisted over-side. The opium was being transhipped. Willie, who had been released from his paint-scrubbing and sent below, reported no less than four small schooners and sloops which he had seen bearing down on the *Susan Drew*.

No meal was served that evening, and the prisoners panted and went hungry in the narrow cabin. By eleven o'clock the transfer of the opium was completed, and they could hear Captain Decker roaring out his orders as he put sail on his vessel. Then he came below, poured himself half a tumbler of Scotch, and drank it neat.

"It's all right now," he said. "You can go on deck if you want. The cook is making coffee, and the cabin-boy will set a cold snack of canned goods."

"Where are you taking us to now?" Mrs. Gifford demanded.

Captain Decker divided a pondering gaze between her and the bottle of Scotch; then, silently repented his half-tumbler dose. Never was his voice more like a coffee grinder:

"I don't know, madam. I'm runnin' westward across the Pacific, and I'll drop you somewhere. You see, there's too many of you to swear to any secret. You've got to stay with me, till all the opium is distributed and safe. I'm not stuck on your company. I run to blonds, as I told you before. But it's business. That cargo's got to be made safe. Now, if you was a blond—"

He ceased speaking and stared at Mrs. Gifford steadily and long, to that lady's great discomfort. His expression was trance-like, and he seemed dreaming far dreams. A curious light began to glow in his eyes; while a grin, unthinkable significant to them, curled across his mouth. Still in his seeming trance, he reached forth his dirty hand and in playful fashion touched her on the shoulder.

"I got you," he said. "Tag! You're it."

He returned to himself with startling suddenness, and recoiled from her.

"Why, damn it all! You ain't a blond, are you?" A step brought him to a chair, into which he sank, burying his face in his hands and moaning: "Oh dear, oh dear!"

"Fangh!" Mrs. Gifford enunciated in disgust, not unmixed with trepidation.

"The brute is drunk," Temple Harrison explained to Patty.

VIII

IN THE days that followed, while the *Susan Drew* ran before the Northeast Trades, Captain Decker's ways did not mend. His hands and nails were grimed

with tar and paint, ground in by his inveterate pull and haul on sheet and halyard. He devoured prunes in the same magnificent manner, interrupted conversations, bullied Flat-Nose, rope's-ended Willie, and drank his half-tumblers of Scotch. With each drink, the vastness and voluminousness of his bulk increased. His trance-like gazes at Mrs. Gifford continued. His protestations of dislike for brunettes did not diminish. And often he would bury his face in his hands and moan: "Oh dear, oh dear!"

Worst of all was his persecution of Mrs. Gifford. He seemed drawn to her continually, and continually he recoiled from her. Patty was tearfully apprehensive. Temple Harrison consoled her. And Sedley Brown grew more than mildly jealous. They were in 18° North and 166° West, and Captain Decker was talking of running them to the south and west and landing them at some outlying trading station of New Britain or New Ireland, when occurred a strange and incomprehensible happening that gave them all pause for thought.

It was at dinner. The conversation had been upon occult matters, and a general disbelief had been expressed concerning such phenomena as telepathy and clairvoyance.

"The content of consciousness is experience," Temple Harrison was saying. "There is no discussion about the existence of the subconscious mind. But it has never been demonstrated that the subconscious mind has known anything outside experience—outside the content of consciousness, I mean, which is experience. Therefore, it is impossible—"

He ceased, for he had lost the attention of his listeners. Captain Decker had begun to eat prunes, and they were watching him with the old, never-failing fascination. He had received an unusually large serving, and was heroically emptying the saucer. His cheeks bulged more and more with the pouched pits, while his jaws chewed, and the spoon moved back and forth. Also, he was thinking; and, further, he desired to speak. His eyes were rolling, and his ears seemed trying to wiggle, so strong was his desire. At last came the supreme moment. He bowed his head over the saucer and spat out a mighty mouthful of prune-pits, then glared savagely at Temple Harrison.

"Talky-talky, talky-talky!—that's all you know about it," were the skipper's opening words. "You don't know. But I do know, I can deliver the goods. I know things outside my experience—things I don't know; but I know 'em."

"A miracle is no miracle at second hand," Temple Harrison retorted patronizingly. "The drunkard's snakes are real only to the drunkard. We know they are not snakes. The dreamer's dream is real—to the dreamer, while he dreams."

"Talky-talky, talky-talky! Too much talky along you," Captain Decker went on explosively. "I know real things that I don't know, I tell you."

"An instance, please," said Sedley Brown.

"All right. The skipper turned his eyes on Mrs. Gifford. "Madam, I know things about you that I have no right to know—that I don't know. But I know 'em. Do you dare me to tell 'em?"

Mrs. Gifford's head was poised very haughtily, as she replied: "I am very sure you know nothing about me that I am ashamed to have told."

"Very well, madam," Captain Decker's gaze burned upon her until it seemed he must be looking right through her. "Under your left shoulder-blade, midway between it and the hip, is a mole—ha!"

His exclamation was of triumph, caused by Patty's instant cry of alarm, and by the tell-tale blood mounting in Mrs. Gifford's cheeks.

"Now, that mole's outside my experience," he continued. "I never saw it. I leave it to you. Yet, I know it."

"Nevertheless, the existence of the mole is not proved," Sedley Brown observed drily.

"Madam, have you that mole?" the skipper demanded.

Mrs. Gifford disdained reply.

"Very well, then. I'll tell you some more. You have a corn on the inside of

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