

# SIX BELLS AND ALL'S WELL HEART STAKES AND A SLIPPERY DECK

By Morgan Robertson

Illustrations by A.E. Orr



AT SOME TIME in my boyhood I had read — where, or by whom written, I never could remember — an article containing the assertion that at two o'clock in the morning every living thing — human, brute, insect, fish, fowl or reptile — awakened, or partly awakened, if only, as in the case of a sleeping person, to roll over on the other side. The article offered testimony from cowboys on the range, who had seen cattle stand up and lie down again at this hour; from policemen, guards and sentries in charge of sleeping prisoners, who had heard them mutter incoherently and drop off to sleep; from doctors and nurses caring for the sick, who had noticed the uneasiness of patients at this hour; from flare-light fishermen, who had waited until two o'clock for the fish to waken and bite — in short, from night workers of all kind, whose powers of observation had enabled them to cognize the fact that sleeping creatures awoke, moved, muttered, or showed some return to consciousness at two hours past midnight.

I was in the formative stage, not having reached the critical and skeptical. I believed all that I read or listened to. Soon, I found myself waking at two in the morning; but, believing it due to a natural law, thought little of it, and would immediately go to sleep again. I had never been troubled with insomnia, but this trick became a habit, as much a part of my mental state as any congenital attribute.

I had it proved to my own satisfaction by several incidents of my boyhood. Once I awoke at two in the morning just in time to save my mother's canary from a stray cat that had entered the house. It did not occur to me that the bird might have got abroad first and aroused me by its fluttering. Again, I sat up just as a masked face peered into the opened window, and my movement frightened the burglar away. On another occasion I awoke, smelled smoke,

and put out a threatening fire. Still again I turned off a half-opened gas jet, and possibly saved myself, as well as others of the family, from asphyxiation. Thus conditioned, and half educated, I went to sea at twenty, and regularly awoke in time to hear four bells struck in the middle watch, not knowing for years that all sailors, from habit of mind, even when on shore, will awaken at twelve and four when the watches are changed at sea, and often at ten, two and six o'clock, when the wheel is relieved. My mental alarm clock was adjusted for two in the morning, and the more I proved it to myself the more fixed became the adjustment.

IT was old Bill Hayward, his second mate and his daughter who re-adjusted me, and also themselves — not to their advantage, perhaps, but certainly to my own; and that is what this story is about. Hayward was skipper of the first ship in which I signed first mate, and a bigger blackguard never bullied the man-at-the-wheel. Yet I noticed before many days that his billingsgate ceased whenever his daughter appeared on deck. I could easily understand that he respected and stood in awe of her, as well as loved her as his child; but I could not understand how the Fates had given such a daughter to such a father. She had a soft, musical voice, soft brown eyes, soft brown hair, and emanated a faint fragrance — as I sensed while passing to leeward of her — either from her hair, breath or clothing, like that of a flower-garden after the rain. But, after our first introductory greetings, she ignored my presence on board as completely as she did that of the pig on the fore hatch, and I ascribed it to the fact that, though I was young, healthy, clean-built and clean-featured, I had never been a favorite with the other sex. Yet, though I outdid her father in the matter of nicety of speech, and suppressed all profanity from the second mate and crew, whether she was on deck or below, I grew to dislike this fine girl. For even a good dog becomes savage unless occasionally noticed. I was noticed, of course, by the second mate and crew, in the way I demanded; and by the skipper in the way of criticism — which possibly I deserved — but never a glance or a word did I receive from Florence Hayward. On the whole I was not happy, though my youth, health, cleanliness of life and instinctive admiration for and devotion to beauty and goodness in women seemed to justify some response — and happiness. So, I disliked a girl I admired, and never addressed myself to her, until the time came when it was mutual, intuitive, and necessary.

It happened after we had crossed the Line and were creeping on through calm and catspaw toward the trade-winds; after I had silenced the captain's criticism by strict attention to duty; and

after I had noticed the growing friendship between Miss Florence and Mr. Taynter, the second mate. He devoted every minute he could spare from work and sleep to her society; and she would smile graciously on him, call to him from window or companion, and sit up late into the night when he had the first watch on deck.



"God love you, little girl," I said, as I kissed the fading color back to her cheeks



He gathered himself for a spring. I aimed for his face, pinning him in a half-crouched position

JEALOUS? No. For having received nothing I missed nothing. Nor was I surprised in the least at her liking him; for he was superior to me as she was to him, or I to her piggish old father. What did surprise me, however, was that he should allow a high-strung, nervous, sensitive and impressionable girl of twenty to flirt and frolic until midnight with a man equally impressionable, but neither nervous, high-strung nor sensitive. Taynter was about twenty-eight (two years older than myself); also he was taller, broader, heavier and stronger. Added thereto he was better educated, better and more widely informed, and had sailed several voyages as first mate — his reversion to second mate being due to the fact that he was out of money and that I had secured the only first mate's berth in port. Had he appeared with me before Captain Hayward he surely would have been chosen as chief officer, while I would, perforce, have signed on as second. As it was, Taynter, well-versed in the etiquette of the sea, dropped into his place as though fitted for nothing higher; he took my orders and suggestions without comment, occasionally offered reasonable suggestions of his own, and even assisted me in suppressing pro- (Continued on Page 8)