IN THE MISTY SEAS

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A Story of the Sealers of Behring Strait

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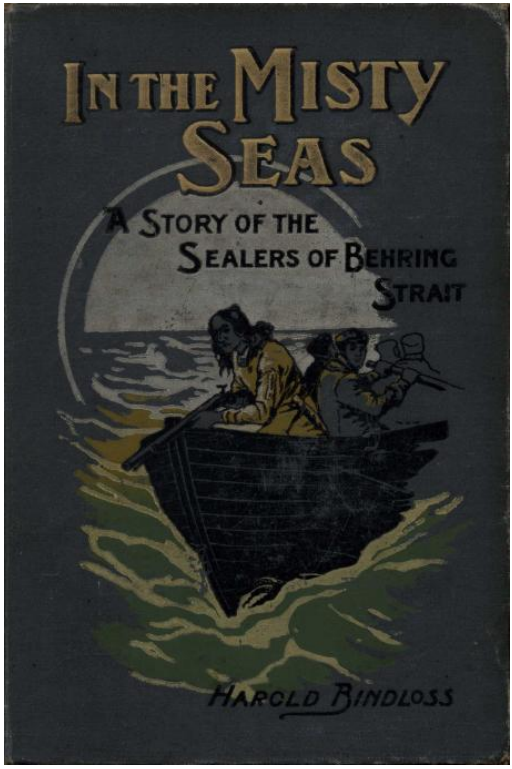
[Frontispiece: "'TELL YOUR SKIPPER THAT IF EVER I FIND HIS SCHOONER INSIDE OUR LIMITS AGAIN I'LL HAVE MUCH PLEASURE IN SINKING HER" (missing from book)]



Cover art

In the Misty Seas

A Story of the Sealers of Behring Strait

By

Harold Bindloss

Author of "True Grit," etc.

With Six Illustrations

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"'TELL YOUR SKIPPER THAT IF EVER I FIND HIS SCHOONER INSIDE OUR LIMITS AGAIN I'LL HAVE MUCH PLEASURE IN SINKING HER" (missing from book) . . . *Frontispiece*

"'CHRISS, ARE YOU HURT?'"

"'ARE YOU TWO LADS GOING OFF TO THE BARQUE OUT THERE?'"

"GLANCING OVER HIS SHOULDER, SAW THE INDIAN STILL CROUCHING MOTIONLESS, RIFLE IN HAND"

"AS HE HOPPED ABOUT THE DECK, APPLEBY LAUGHED UPROARIOUSLY"

"'I'VE COME FOR THE TWO LADS YOU PICKED UP.'"

IN THE MISTY SEAS

CHAPTER I
JIMMY'S DUCK

"The sea!" said Bluey, the Nova Scotian, sitting up on his pillow. "Oh, yes. It's kind of pretty, but the only use I've got for it is for bathing in."

There was laughter and a growl of disapproval from two beds in a corner of the dormitory, for nobody could go to sleep at nine o'clock, especially on the last night of the term, though retiring at that hour was compulsory at Sandycombe School. Pearson, the assistant master, had not, however, come round as yet to turn the lights out, and the gas-jet blinked fitfully in the big wire cage which apparently protected it from unlawful experiments. It did not, however, do so in reality, because Niven had discovered that the cage could be unscrewed, and it was not difficult to curtail the hour of preparation in the morning and evening by blowing strenuously down the pipe in turn. There were, of course, risks attached to this, but Niven had pointed out that anybody caught at the operation would suffer in a good cause, and it provided work for the Sandycombe plumber, who was voted a good fellow because he would smuggle in forbidden dainties for a consideration.

"The sea," said Appleby, "is everything that's fine. What do you know about it, Bluey?"

"Well," said the Nova Scotian in his slowest drawl, "I do know quite a little. You see, ours is a kind of hard country, and most of our folks go in sea now and then when they can't do better. Sometimes it's fishing way out on the Grand Banks where you got lost in a fog in the dory boats and starve before the schooner finds you, and if you don't it's quite likely a liner steaming twenty knots runs bang over you. Or it's carrying dried cod south in little schooners in winter time, with your long boots stuffed with straw to keep your feet from freezing, while you run for it under a trysail that's stiff with ice, with a full-size blizzard screaming behind you. No, sir. Going to sea isn't any kind of picnic, and that's why I'm sorry for Niven. The fellows who wrote those books 'bout cutting out pirates and catching slavers are dead, and it's 'bout time they were."

"Bluey's not going to stop to-night. Throw a pillow at him, somebody," said Niven, and there was a thud as the Nova Scotian's slipper, which was quicker than the pillow, alighted within an inch of the speaker's head.

Niven, however, took it good-naturedly, and he would have resented a better shot less than the remarks which had preceded it. He was going to sea, and had been describing his apprentice's uniform, and the life he fancied he was to lead on board a sailing ship, to an appreciative audience. His contentment had

only one alloy, and that was the fact that Appleby, who had read Marryat and others with him under a gorse bush on sunny afternoons when he was presumed to be playing cricket, was not coming with him too. Nobody, however, was apparently willing to pay Appleby's premium, and Niven pinned his last hope on the possibility of his comrade being able to ship on the same vessel as ordinary seaman. Appleby, whom Niven privately considered somewhat slow and overcautious, did not appear very enthusiastic about the scheme.

"To your kennels!" said somebody, and there was a footfall on the stairway, while two cots rattled as a couple of scantily-attired forms alighted upon them with a flying leap. They had been lying prone upon the floor giving a realistic representation of Niven swimming ashore with the captain in his teeth, though the lad who played the part of skipper protested vigorously that there was no necessity for his being grievously bitten.

"That was fine," said somebody. "When Pearson's gone we'll have it again. You could pour some water on to him first to make it more real."

"Then," said the skipper, "you'll get somebody else in the place of me. It was a good deal nicer the last time I was nibbled by a ferret, and I'm not going home with hydrophobia to please any of you."

After this there was silence whilst the footsteps grew nearer, and presently the assistant master came into the room.

"You are all here?" he said as he swept his glance from bed to bed.

Then he gave a little sigh of relief, for he had a good deal to do that night, and they were all there, and apparently very sleepy, while it was not his fault that he did not see that two of them wore their outdoor clothes under their night gear. Appleby and Niven had business on hand, and they had discovered that with the aid of contributions levied from their comrades it was possible to lay out a suit of clothing that sufficed to pass a hasty inspection on their chairs. Pearson, however, glanced round again, for he had been taught that there was need for greater watchfulness when his charges were unusually quiet, and then turned out the gas.

"Good-night, boys. If there is any breach of rules some of you will not go home to-morrow," he said.

Two minutes later everybody was wide awake again, and a voice was raised in a corner.

"Let's have a court-martial and try Bluey for conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman," it said. "You'll be president, Appleby, and we'll make Niven executioner."

"Sorry," said Niven, "but we can't. You see, Appleby and I have got another assize on to-night. We're going to put an *habeas corpus* on Tileworks Jimmy's duck."

"More fools you!" said Bluey. "I'm sorry, too, because I've a few fixings handy that would double the court-martial up. Anyway, you'll only catch red-hot trouble instead of Jimmy's duck."

"What's that about a duck?" asked a lad who had come up in the middle of the term, and a comrade proceeded to enlighten him.

"It is by this time ancient history, and it may have been a drake," he said. "Anyway, this is Appleby's story. He stays here in the holidays, you know, and he made a catapult thing during the last ones."

"It wasn't," said Appleby. "It was a crossbow, and Pearson thought so much of it that he took it from me."

"Well," said the other, "Appleby went out shooting, and shot a wild duck, but it was a tame one, and Tileworks Jimmy's. Now if he'd been wiser he'd have buried it, but he took it to Jimmy's house. Jimmy wasn't in, and Appleby forgot, but a few days later Jimmy came round to see the Head, and wanted ten shillings for his duck. Took an affidavit that it would have won prizes at a dog show anywhere. The Head, who should have kicked him out, gave him five shillings, and stopped it out of Appleby's pocket-money, and Appleby went back to Jimmy's to ask for his duck. Jimmy told him how nice it was, and that he'd eaten the thing to save it going bad. That, I think, is Q.E.D. Appleby."

Appleby laughed softly. "You're not very far out, but it wasn't the duck but the principle of the thing that worried me," he said. "The one I shot was a common one worth one-and-six, and I didn't even get it, though when Jimmy took the money he sold it me. Now I don't like to be cheated by anybody."

There was a little laughter, for Appleby was known to be tenacious of his rights.

"It was better than a circus when he made the Aunt Sally man fork out the cocoa-nuts he won," said somebody.

"Well," said Appleby slowly, "it was right, and sixpence has to go a long way with me. I don't get so many of them as the rest of you."

He slipped out of bed as he spoke, and there was another rustle when Niven followed him, while a lad in the cot nearest them sat up.

"You haven't told us how you're going to get the duck," he said.

"That," said Niven, "is going to be almost too easy. I throw big stones on Jimmy's roof, and when he comes out after me Appleby slips in and gets the duck. With a little brains a fellow can do anything."

Next moment they were out in the dark corridor, and Niven held his breath as they slipped past the half-open door of a lighted room where the Head of the school was busy making out the bills. The treatment at Sandycombe was at least as firm as kind, and the Head was known to have an unpleasantly heavy hand. Nobody heard them, however, and in another minute or two they were crawling

about the dark passage where Charley, the boy of all work, had laid out a long row of boots. Niven, it was characteristic, took the first pair that seemed to fit him, while Appleby went up and down the row on his hands and knees, until his comrade fancied he would never be ready. Then Niven shoved up a window.

"Get through while I hold it. There isn't any sash-weight," he said.

"Then who's going to hold it for you?" said Appleby. "There'll be no duck catching if it comes down with a bang."

Niven growled disgustedly. "Your turn! I never thought of that," he said.

"Then," said Appleby, "it's a good thing I did. Put this piece of stick under it."

It was done, and they dropped into a flower bed, slipped through the garden behind the hollies, across a quaggy field, and came out into the road just beyond the village. It was drizzling, and a bitter wind drove a thin white mist past them. Niven stood still a moment ankle-deep in mud, and glanced back towards the lights of the village blinking through the haze.

"It doesn't look quite so nice now, but we had better go on," he said.

Appleby said nothing, but laughed a little as he plodded on into the rain and mist, and, though the plan was Niven's, this was typical of him. Appleby was not very brilliant at either work or play, but he usually did what he took in hand with a slow thoroughness that occasionally carried him further than his comrade's cleverness. He was also slow to begin a friendship or make a quarrel, but those who drove him into the latter usually regretted it, and his friends were good. Nobody but Niven knew anything about his relations, while it was but once in the term, somebody sent him a few shillings for pocket money. Niven on the contrary could do almost anything he wanted well, and came back each term with several hampers and a big handful of silver in his pocket.

"It's beastly cold, and one of these boots is coming off. I'm not sure it's my own," he said. "It would be a good joke for the other fellow if I lost it."

"It wouldn't be for me," said Appleby dryly. "If I lost mine I would have to go home with you in my stockings, but we'll have to get on faster than we're doing."

They could scarcely see the hedgerows, and the mud got deeper. Now and then a half-seen tree shook big drops down on them as they went by, and there way a doleful crying of wild fowl from a marsh not far away. The drizzle also beat into their eyes, and Niven, who felt distinctly sorry he had ever heard about the duck, presently stopped altogether with his feet in a pool.

"We could still go back, Tom," he said.

"No," said Appleby dryly. "I don't think we could, though because I could manage it myself there's nothing to stop you if you wanted to."

There was not much mirth in Niven's laugh. "I'm not very anxious, if you

put it like that," he said.

They went on again, getting rapidly wetter, until Niven fell down as they clambered over a dripping stile. "We're a pair of splay-footed asses, Tom," he said.

Appleby nodded. "Still, we'd be bigger ones if we did nothing after all this. I wouldn't sit there in the mud," he said.

Niven scrambled to his feet, and presently they crawled through a hedge into a rutted lane with the lighted window of a cottage close in front of them, and the radiance shone upon them as they stopped to glance up and down. Appleby stood square and resolute with decision in his face, and he was short and thick, with long arms and broad shoulders. Niven shivered a little, and leaned forwards turning his head this way and that with quick, nervous movements. He was lithe and light, with a graceful suppleness that was not seen in his companion.

"Tom," he said softly, "there aren't any stones. Still, I could heave a lump of stiff mud through the window, and that would fetch him."

Appleby shook his head. "There are tiles yonder, and they would do as well," he said. "You see, we are entitled to the duck, but Jimmy's window is another thing. Give me a minute, and then begin."

He slipped away into the gloom of a hedge, and it was evidently high time, for a dog commenced growling. Niven felt very lonely as he stood still in the rain, but the depression only lasted a moment or two, and in another minute he had flung a big tile upon the roof. When the second went banging and rattling down the slates he raised a high-pitched howl.

"Jimmy, come out," he said. "Come out, you shuttle-toed clay stamper, and be a man."

He was not kept waiting long. The door swung open and a man stood out black against the light in the opening. He was peering into the darkness, and apparently grasped a good-sized stick, but when another tile crashed against the low roof above his head he saw the object deriding him in the mud.

"Ellen, loose the dog," he said as he sprang forward.

Niven promptly darted up the lane, but there were two things he had not counted on, and one of them was the dog, for Jimmy had not kept one when they last passed his cottage. The other was even more embarrassing, for while Niven could run tolerably well on turf in cricket shoes the deep sticky mud was different, and one of the boots which were somebody else's would slip up and down his foot. Still because Jimmy was not far behind him, he did all he could, and was disgusted to find that a tileworks labourer could run almost as well as he did. Indeed, for the first Five minutes he had a horrible suspicion that Jimmy was running better, but presently it became evident that the splashing thud of heavy boots grew no louder, and he saw that he was at least maintaining his lead. Still, he could not shake off the pursuer, and while he held on with clenched hands

and laboured breath an unfortunate thing happened. One foot sank deep in a rut, Niven staggered, blundered through another stride, and then rolled over in the grass under a tall hedge. That was bad, but it was worse to find that he had now only a stocking upon one foot. Jimmy was also unpleasantly close, and Niven, seeing he could not escape by flight, rolled a little further beneath the hedge.

Then he lay very still while the man came floundering down the road, and held his breath when he stopped as if to listen close beside him.

"The young varmint has made for the hedge gap," gasped the man. "If I cut across to the stile I might ketch him."

He went on, and when his footsteps could no longer be heard Niven crawled out and felt in the puddles for the boot. It was not to be found, and rising with a groan he worked round towards the back of the cottage. The dog was growling all the time, and he could hear a woman's voice as well as a rattle of chain, but presently he saw a dark object gliding along beneath a hedge. When he came up with it he noticed that Appleby had something in his hand.

"I've got it," he said.

Niven looked at the object he held up. "It's very quiet," he said.

"Of course!" said Appleby. "You wouldn't make much noise without your head. Killing anything is beastly, but there was a billhook handy. We've no time for talking now. It's a good big dog."

They crossed a field, and Niven's shoeless foot did not greatly embarrass him until they crawled through a hedge into recent ploughing, while as they plodded over it the growling of the dog drew nearer.

"Come on!" gasped Appleby. "She has got him loose at last."

The beast was close at hand when another hedge rose up blackly against the sky before them, and Niven swung off a little towards an oak that grew out of it.

"It's a horrible brute, but it can't climb a tree. I'm going for the oak," he said.

Appleby grasped his shoulder. "Jimmy could," he said. "Go on, and try if you can pull one of those stakes in the gap up."

In another minute Niven was tearing out a thick stake, and felt a little happier when he saw the end of it was sharpened, while Appleby had clawed up a big clod of stiff clay from the ploughing.

"He's only a cur, any way, and I think there's a stone in it," he said.

They could now dimly see the dog, and it was evident that it saw them, for it stopped, and then commenced to work round sideways in their direction, growling as though a little disconcerted by their waiting.

"It's an ugly beast," said Niven, whose heart was in his mouth. "It would get us if we ran."

"We're not going to run," said Appleby quietly, though his voice was a trifle hoarse. "Howl at him, Chriss."

Niven commenced a discordant hissing, and the dog growled more angrily. They could see it black against the ploughing, and it looked very big. Appleby was standing perfectly still with something held up above his head, and drew back a pace when the brute came creeping towards him.

"Here's something for you, Towser," he said, flinging his arm up.

Then a howl followed, and next moment Niven was tearing up the clay, and hurling it in handfuls after something that seemed fading in the dimness of the field. When he could see it no longer he stood up breathless.

"We've beaten him," he gasped. "It's about time we were going."

They went at once, and did not stop until they reached the road, where Niven leaned against a gate, and glanced down ruefully at his foot.

"It wasn't so bad on the grass, but I don't know how I'm going to get home now," he said.

"Put up your foot," said Appleby. "We'll tie our handkerchiefs round it."

He was quick with his fingers, but when they turned homewards Niven was not exactly happy. He was wet and very muddy, while, as he afterwards observed, walking a long way on one foot is not especially easy. It was also raining steadily, and a little trickle from his soaked cap ran down his shoulders, while the bare hedgerows seemed to crawl back towards them very slowly. The mud squelched and splashed underfoot, and there was only the crying of the plover in the darkness.

"I never fancied it was such a beastly long way to the tileworks," he said as he limped on painfully.

At last when the knotted handkerchief hurt his foot horribly a light or two blinked faintly through the rain, and presently they plodded into the silent village. Nobody seemed to see them, the window they had slipped out of was still open, and crawling in they went up the stairway and along the corridor on tiptoe with the water draining from them. Niven had expected to find his comrades asleep, and was too wet and dispirited to wish to waken them, but there was a murmur of sympathy when he crept in.

"I wouldn't be you," said somebody. "The Head came in to ask how many panes in the greenhouse Nettleton had broken, and he saw you were away."

"And he came back, and threatened to keep the whole of us here to-morrow, if we didn't tell him where you were," said another lad. "It was very nice of you to let us all into lumber."

"Did you tell him?" asked Appleby.

"Of course!" said a third speaker sardonically. "It's just what we would do. I'll thank you for that to-morrow, and I'd get up now only the Head would hear

us, and he's breathing slaughter."

"Tearing around," said Bluey the Nova Scotian. "Cutlasses and pistols, and the magazine open! You know the kind of thing you're fond of reading."

Niven, who was tired out, groaned. As he told his comrades afterwards he had enjoyed himself sufficiently already, and one wanted to brace up before a visit from the Head.

"What are we going to do, Tom?" he said.

Appleby laughed softly. "I'm going straight to bed," he said. "The Head's busy, and there mayn't be anything very dreadful if he sends Pearson."

He was undressed in another two minutes, and as Niven crept into bed somebody said, "Did you get the duck?"

"We did," said Niven solemnly. "And be hanged to it! That's enough for you or anybody, and don't worry me. I want to be asleep when the Head comes."

"You needn't be afraid he'll mind waking you," said another lad. "I'd rolled up my jacket, so it looked just like Appleby's big head, and when he saw it wasn't, he got speechless mad."

Ten minutes passed, and Niven was just feeling a little warm again when there were footsteps in the corridor. They drew nearer, and with a little gasp of dismay he swung himself out of and then under his bed. A swish and a rustle told him that Appleby had followed his example, and a voice from under the adjoining cot said, "He'll go away again if he doesn't find us, and we may tire him out before the morning."

Next moment the door was opened, and while a light shone in somebody said, "Asleep, of course, all of you! Have Niven and Appleby returned yet?"

Niven, glancing out from under his cot, saw a robust elderly gentleman holding a candle above him, while he swung what looked like a horse girth suggestively in his other hand, but a snore answered the master's question, and he laughed unpleasantly.

"We have had sufficient nonsense," he said. "You can either tell me at once where your comrades went, or improve your memories by writing lines the rest of the night."

Here and there a sleepy object sat up on a bed, but there was still no answer, and the head of Sandycombe School tapped his foot impatiently on the flooring.

"I'm not in a mood for trifling, boys," he said. "You have another minute to decide in, and nobody in this room will go home to-morrow if you do not tell me then."

There was for several seconds a silence that could be felt, and though all of those who heard him knew the head of the school would keep his word, nobody spoke. Then there was a rustle under a bed, and Niven caught a low murmur, "Keep still. If he get's one of us he'll forget the other."

Next moment Appleby was speaking louder. "I'm here, sir," he said.

The master lowered his candle as something wriggled out from under the cot, and then swung up the strap when Appleby stood very straight before him in his night gear.

"Where is Niven? It was you who took him away?" he said.

"Yes, sir," said Appleby. "I did, but he came back all right."

"Very good!" said the master. "You seem to be proud of it. Hold out your hand."

Appleby glanced at him, and did not move for a second or two while he thought rapidly. He did not like what he saw in his master's eyes, and now he had delivered his comrades it was time to shift for himself. He and Niven were leaving school early on the morrow, and he fancied he might escape if he could tide through the next ten minutes, because the head of the school had a good deal to attend to on the last night. The door was also open, and not far away, the candle was flickering in the draughts, and swinging suddenly round he darted for the opening. He was, however, a second too late, for the great strap came down swishing, and coiled about his shoulders, but he was in the corridor before it rose again, and making for the head of a short stairway. The master, however, seemed to be gaining on him, and Appleby fancied he heard the swish of the strap when a yard away from the first step. One taste had been sufficient, and bracing every sinew he went down in a flying leap. As he alighted there was a thud and a crash, and the candle suddenly went out. Still, nobody fell down the stairway, and surmising that the pursuer missing him with the strap had driven the candle against the wall, Appleby did not wait for a recall but went on, and into the great, dark schoolroom underneath. There he listened until heavy footsteps overhead seemed to indicate that the master had gone back to his room, when creeping up another stairway, he regained the opposite end of the corridor through a classroom. In another few minutes he had crawled back into his bed.

"Does it hurt, Tom?" said Niven sympathetically. "I'm owing you a good deal for this, but I know you don't like that kind of talk—and did you forget the duck?"

Appleby laughed softly, partly to check the groan, for there was a horrible tingling round his shoulders.

"I've had a lighter tap, but I've got the duck. It's here under the bed," he

said.

CHAPTER II
OUT OF DOCK

Appleby went home with Niven next morning, as he had done once or twice before, for he had no home to go to, or relations who seemed anxious to invite him anywhere. Mr. Niven was a prosperous Liverpool merchant who had, however, made his own way in the world, and he and his wife had taken a liking to the quiet, friendless lad. Chriss Niven also wrote to his mother every week, and, though Appleby did not know this, had mentioned more than one difficulty out of which his comrade had pulled him.

It was a week later when Appleby, who had slipped away from the rest, sat somewhat moodily in a corner of a little ante-room opening out of a large one that was brilliantly lighted. The chords of a piano rang through the swish of dresses, patter of feet, and light-hearted laughter, for it was Mrs. Niven's birthday, and she had invited her son's and daughter's friends to assist in its celebration. Appleby was fond of music, and he drummed with his fingers on the arm of his chair, and now and then glanced wistfully towards the doorway.

Under the glances of bright eyes that seemed to find his clumsiness amusing, and amidst the dainty dresses, he had grown horribly conscious that his clothes were old and somewhat shabby. The fact had not troubled him before, but he had never been brought into contact with pretty girls of his own age hitherto.

Niven, however, always looked well, and Appleby sighed once or twice as he watched him, and found it hard not to envy him. Chriss could do everything well, and he was to sail south in a great iron merchant ship by and by. Appleby had lived beside the warm tropic sea in his childhood and had loved it ever since, but now, when the sight of the blue uniform of his friend stirred up the old longing so that his eyes grew almost dim, he knew that he was to begin a life of distasteful drudgery in an office. Presently Mr. Niven, who had a lean face and keen dark eyes, came in.

"All alone, Tom. Have the girls frightened you?" he said with a smile.

"Well, sir," said Appleby quietly, "you see, when I tried to turn over the music for Miss Lester I couldn't quite guess the right time and it only worried

her, while it didn't seem much use to stand about in everybody's way. I'm going back when they start a game."

Mr. Niven nodded, for the unembarrassed gravity of the answer pleased him. "That's right. There's very little use in pretending one can do things when one can't," he said. "And you are going into business, eh! I fancy, however, that Chriss told me you wanted to go to sea."

"Yes," said Appleby with a reluctance that did not escape the listener. "Still, it seems all the owners ask a good big premium, and of course there is nobody to lend me the money. The little my father left was spent on my education, and my guardian writes me that he has heard of an office where I could earn enough to keep me."

"How did you know they wanted a premium?" asked Mr. Niven.

"Because I went round all the shipowners' offices I could find in the directory, sir," said Appleby.

The merchant nodded gravely to hide his astonishment. "Your father died abroad, and your mother too?" he said.

"Yes, sir," said Appleby quietly. "At Singapore. I can only just remember them. I was sent back to England when I was very young—and never saw either of them again."

Mr. Niven noticed the self-control in the lad's face as well as the slight tremble in his voice which would not be hidden. It was also if somewhat impassive a brave young face, and there was a steadiness that pleased him in the grave, grey eyes, he wished his own son looked as capable of facing the world alone.

"And you would still like to go to sea? It is a very hard life," he said.

Appleby smiled. "Isn't everything a little hard, sir, when you have no friends or money?"

"Well," said Mr. Niven dryly, "it not infrequently is, and I found it out at your age, though not many youngsters do. Who taught it you?"

Appleby looked a trifle confused. "I," he said slowly, "don't quite know—but it seems to make things a little easier now. Of course I did want to go to sea, but I know it's out of the question."

The merchant looked at him curiously. "You will probably be very thankful by and by, but hadn't you better go back to the others? We'll have a talk again."

Appleby went out to take part in a game, and Mr. Niven sat looking straight before him thoughtfully until his wife came in.

"They are getting on excellently, and I am glad the affair is a success, because it is difficult to please young people now-a-days, and I want Chriss to have only pleasant memories to carry away with him," she said.

She glanced towards the doorway with a little wistfulness in her eyes as Chriss passed by holding himself very erect while a laughing girl glanced up at

him, and Mr. Niven guessed her thoughts.

"It will be his own fault if he hasn't," he said with a smile. "It was, however, the other lad I was thinking of."

Mrs. Niven sat down and gazed at the fire for almost a minute reflectively. "You have had an answer from that relative of his?"

The merchant nodded. "To-day," he said. "He is evidently not disposed to do much for the lad, and has found him an opening in the office of a very third-rate firm. Appleby does not like the prospect, and from what I know of his employers I can sympathize with him."

"He has no other friends. I asked him," said Mrs. Niven. "Jack, I can't help thinking we owe a good deal to that lad, and you know I am fond of him. He has always taken Chriss's part at Sandycombe, and you will remember he thrashed one of the bigger boys who had been systematically ill-using him. Then there was another little affair the night before they left the school. Chriss told Millicent, though he didn't mention it to me."

"Nor to me," said Mr. Niven. "A new, senseless trick, presumably?"

The lady smiled a little as she told the story of Jimmy's duck. "The point is that the plan was Chriss's, but when they were found out Appleby took the punishment," she said. "Now I scarcely fancy every lad would have done that, or have been sufficiently calm just then to remember that the master, who it seems was very busy, would probably be content when he had laid his hands on one of them. It was also a really cruel blow he got."

"Did he tell you?" said Mr. Niven dryly.

"No," said the lady. "That was what pleased me, because though I tried to draw him out about it he would tell me nothing, but a night or two ago I remembered there were some of his things that wanted mending. The lad has very few clothes, but he is shy and proud, and I fancied I could take what I wanted away and replace it without him noticing. Well, he was fast asleep, and I couldn't resist the temptation of stooping over him. His pyjama jacket was open, and I could see the big, purple weal that ran right up to his neck."

"If he knew, he would never forgive you," said Mr. Niven with a little laugh. "But what did they do with the duck? Chriss would certainly have forgotten it."

"Appleby brought it away, and gave it to some poor body in Chester," said Mrs. Niven.

"That was the one sensible part of the whole affair, but I want to know why you told me."

"Well," said the lady slowly, "you know he wants to go to sea, and I feel sure his relative would be only too glad to get rid of him. Now it wouldn't be very difficult for you to get him a ship almost without a premium."

"A ship?" said Mr. Niven with a little smile.

"Yes," said the lady. "Chriss's ship. Chriss is—well, you know he is just a trifle thoughtless."

"I fancy you mean spoiled," said her husband. "Still, as usual, you are right. It is quite probable that Chriss will want somebody with a little sense behind him. Going to sea in a merchant ship is a very different kind of thing from what he believes it is."

Mrs. Niven sighed. "Of course. Still, about Appleby?"

"Well," said her husband smiling, "I think I could tell you more when I have had a talk with the owners to-morrow."

He nodded as he went away, and it was next afternoon when he sat talking with an elderly gentleman in a city office.

"We would of course be willing to take a lad you recommended," said the latter. "Still, I was not altogether pleased to hear that my partner had promised to put your son into the *Aldebaran*."

"No?" said Mr. Niven with a twinkle in his eyes. "Now I fancied you would have been glad of the opportunity of obliging me."

The other man looked thoughtful. "To be frank, I would sooner have had the son of somebody we carried less goods for," said he. "With the steamers beating us everywhere we have to run our ships economically, and get the most out of our men, and I accordingly fancy that while it would not have made him as good a seaman, your son would have been a good deal more comfortable as one of the new cadet apprentices on board a steamer."

Mr. Niven smiled dryly. "I have no great wish to make my lad a seaman. The fact is, there's a tolerably prosperous business waiting for him, but in the meanwhile he will go to sea, and it seems to me that the best thing I can do is to let him. He will probably be quite willing to listen to what I have to tell him after a trip or two, and find out things I could never teach him on board your vessel."

"Well," said the shipowner with a little laugh, "it is often an effective cure as well as a rough one."

Mr. Niven left the office with a document in his pocket, and on Christmas morning Appleby found a big, blue envelope upon his breakfast plate.

"I wonder what is inside it," said Mrs. Niven.

Appleby sighed. "It has a business appearance," he said. "It will be to tell me when I'm to go to the office."

"Hadn't you better open it?" said Mrs. Niven with a glance at her husband, and there was silence while Appleby tore open the envelope. Then the colour crept into his face, and his fingers trembled as he took out a document.

"I can't understand it," he said. "This seems to be an apprentice's commission—indentures—for me. The ship is the *Aldebaran*."

There was a howl of delight from Chriss, and a rattle as he knocked over

his coffee, but Appleby sat still, staring at the paper, while belief slowly replaced the wonder in his eyes. Then he rose up, and his voice was not even as he said, "It is real. I am to go in the *Aldebaran.* I have to thank you, sir, for this?"

Mr. Niven laughed. "No, my lad," he said. "It was my wife's doing, and if you are sorry by and by you will have her to blame."

Appleby turned to the lady, and his eyes were shining. "It's almost too much," he said. "Chriss and I are going together. It is everything I could have hoped for."

Mrs. Niven smiled, though there was a little flush in her face. "Sit down and get your breakfast before Chriss goes wild and destroys all the crockery," she said.

Chriss laughed uproariously. "Crockery!" he said. "If we'd been at Sandycombe we'd have smashed every pane in the Head's conservatory. Tom, it's—oh, it's jim-bang, blazing, glorious!"

That was the happiest Christmas Appleby had ever spent, and he remembered it many a time afterwards when he kept his lonely watch peering into the bitter night from plunging forecastle and spray-swept bridge, or while he clung to the slanted topsail yard clawing at the canvas that banged above him in the whirling snow.

Then, when he knew the reality, he could smile a little at his boyish dream, but that day he only felt his blood tingle and every fibre in him thrill in answer to the calling of the sea. He was English, and the spirit which had from the beginning of his nation's history driven out hero and patriot, as well as cutthroat slaver and privateer, to scorch, and freeze, and suffer, do brave things, and some that were shameful, too, and with it all keep the red flag flaunting high in symbol of sovereignty, was in him also. All that day shield-ringed galley, caravel, towering three-decker, steel-sheathed warship, and ugly cargo tramp sailed through his visions, and they had for a background palms and coral beaches, mountains rolled in snow cloud, and the blink of frozen seas. They and their crews' story were a part of his inheritance, because, although the times have changed and canvas is giving place to steam, English lads have not forgotten, and the sea is still the same.

Appleby, however, had commenced to realize that going to sea is not all luxury when he stood on the *Aldebaran's* sloppy deck one bleak morning in February. It was drizzling, and the light was dimmed by a smoky haze, while the ship was foul all over with black grime from the coaling staithes and the dust that had blown across her from a big elevator hurling up Indian wheat. It was also very raw, and Niven's face was almost purple with the cold, while the moisture glistened on his new uniform. A few bedraggled women and a cluster of dripping men stood on the dock wall above them. Other men tumbled dejectedly about the

forecastle, falling over the great wet hawsers, while one or two who had crawled out of the mate's sight lay rather more than half-asleep in the shadow beneath it.

A grey-haired man with a sour face paced up and down the poop, raising one hand now and then when a dock official shouted, while Appleby sprang aside when another man he spoke to came down the poop-ladder and along the deck in long, angry strides. He wore a woolly cloth cap, knee-boots, and a very old pilot-coat, and he had a big, coarse face, with heavy jawbone and cruel eyes. Still, the very way he put his feet down denoted strength, and Appleby noticed the depth of his chest and the spread of his shoulders. Niven, who had not seen him, did not move in time, and the man flung him backwards.

"Out of the way!" he said.

Niven's face was flushed when he recovered his balance, and there was an angry flash in his eyes as he watched the man plunge into the shadow below the forecastle. In another moment several figures came scrambling out of it, and went up the ladder as for their lives, with the man in the pilot-coat close behind.

"If that's the new mate he looks more like a prize-fighter than a sailor," said Niven. "How does he strike you, Tom?"

"I think he's a brute," said Appleby quietly.

They said nothing further, for that was their first acquaintance with the under-side of life at sea, and their thoughts were busy, while in another minute the mate looking in their direction signed to them, and it did not appear advisable to keep a man of his kind waiting.

"Give these beasts a hand," he said when they stood among the seamen on the sloppy forecastle. "You can't be more useless than they are, anyway."

Niven stooped, and clawed disgustedly at the great wet hawser behind the swaying men, and one of them, who was dark-haired and sallow, glanced over his shoulder when the mate swung away.

"Ah, *cochon*!" he said.

Another, who had tow-hair, stood up and stretched his stalwart limbs. "Der peeg! Oh, yes. Dot vas goot," he said. "I tink der vas some troubles mit dot man soon."

A little man with high cheek bones and curious half-closed eyes loosed his grasp upon the rope and laughed softly. He also said something to himself, but as it was Finnish neither Appleby nor Niven were much the wiser.

It, however, occurred to them that the language they had listened to was not quite what one would have expected to hear on board an English ship. There were a few Englishmen on board her, but they did not talk, and for the most part leaned up against anything handy, or slouched aimlessly about looking very unfit for work, which was not altogether astonishing considering the fashion in which they had spent the previous night.

Still the hawser was paid out at last, and Appleby stood up breathless, smeared with slime and coal-dust when the ropes astern fell with a splash, and there was a hoot from the bustling little tug. Somebody roared out orders on the quay above, paddles splashed, and the lad felt his heart give a curious little throb as the *Aldebaran* slowly commenced to move. She was a big iron barque loaded until her scuppers amidships were apparently only a foot or two from the scum of the dock.

He stood forward behind the maze of wire rope about the jibboom, which was not yet run out, on the forecastle, but just below him this broke off, and the deck ran aft sunk almost a man's height between the iron bulwarks to the raised poop at the opposite end of the ship. Half-way between stood a little iron house, and down the middle of the deck rose the three great masts, the last and smallest of them, springing from the poop. Behind it a man in shining oilskins was spinning the wheel. The deck looked very long and filthy, for the wheat-dust and the coal-dust were over everything, and bales, and boxes, and cases strewn amidst the straggling lengths of rope.

Then he heard a fresh shouting, and saw that the bowsprit was already raking through the open gate of the dock, and there were faces smiling down on him from the wall above.

"Chriss," he said, "look up."

Niven did, and Appleby swung his cap off when a hoarse and somewhat spiritless cheer went up. Mr. Niven was shouting something he could not catch, Mrs. Niven was smiling down at them with misty eyes, and the very pretty girl at her side waving a handkerchief.

Appleby glanced at his comrade out of the corner of his eyes and saw that Chriss's face had grown unusually red. Still, he was shouting lustily, and swinging his cap, while in the silence that followed the cheer a hoarse voice rose up—

Blow the men down,
Blow the men down,
Oh, give us time
To blow the men down.

There was another scream from the whistle, and a roar from the mate, and

while the last ropes were cast off the two lads ran aft along the deck. Paddles splashed, ropes slid through the water, and while the red ensign thrice swung up and sank above their heads the *Aldebaran* slid out into the Mersey. Once more the voices rang out hoarsely in farewell, and then while the groups on the quay grew blurred and dim they were sliding away with the ebb-tide into the haze and

rain. Niven looked astern until the speck of waving handkerchief was lost to him, and then turned to Appleby with a little gulp.

"That's the last of them!" he said. "They're going back to dinner, and we—now I wonder what we're going to out there."

He pointed vaguely with a hand that shook a little across the dismal slate-grey waters beyond the bows, but Appleby understood him, for it was the unknown that was filled as yet with great and alluring possibilities the jibboom pointed to. Yet deep down within him he felt as Niven did, a regret and a yearning after the things he had left behind. It was very cold and wet on the *Aldebaran's* deck.

CHAPTER III
DOWN CHANNEL

The first day at sea is seldom very pleasant to anybody, especially on board a sailing ship, and the one the lads had looked forward with bright hopes to, dragged by dismally. For an hour or two painted buoy and rolling red lightship came crawling back towards them out of the rain, and then when the last of the Lancashire sandhills had faded over their starboard hand, there was only smoky cloud before them and a grey sea, across which little white ripples splashed.

Still, the tug was powerful and hauled them steadily along with a rhythmical splash and tinkle at the bows that rose and fell a little, and a muddy wake streaked with froth astern. Once or twice they caught a blink of the hills of Wales, but the vapours that unrolled a trifle closed in again, and the lads were glad they had not much opportunity for looking about them. There were huge ropes to be coiled up and stowed away, bales and cases to be put below, the jibboom to be rigged out, decks washed and everything cleaned down, and while the drizzle blew about them they stumbled amidst the litter and got in everybody's way. Now and then a seaman laughed at them or another growled. One or two they offered to assist shoved them aside, and it commenced to dawn upon Chriss Niven for the first time that he was of very little use in the busy world. The knowledge was not pleasant, but it was probably good for him.

Then the daylight died out, and while now and then coloured lights crept up ahead and grew dim again behind, one after another long streamers of brilliance whirled up across the sea. They, too, grew brighter, flashed, and blinked, and

flickered, and faded away, and Appleby grew more chilly when he could find nothing more to do, until at last he sighed with contentment when somebody told him to go into the deckhouse if he wanted any tea.

When he entered it he saw a lamp that smoked a good deal swinging from a blackened iron beam, and two lads a little older than himself sitting on their sea-chests with enamelled plates on their knees, and a great can of steaming tea before them. They were just out of port, and having brought their own things they feasted for once royally on fresh bread and butter, sardines and marmalade. One of them who had a pleasant face filled up Niven's pannikin, and pointed to the bread.

"Wire in. You'll not have the chance very long," he said. "It's your job to go to the galley and bring the senna in, but we have let you off this time. I'd take those things you're wearing off, if I was you. We don't dress like gunboat commanders on board the *Aldebaran*."

"You brought this grub yourselves. They don't feed you very well," said Appleby, and the others laughed.

"No," said one. "None of the *Aldebarans* would get a prize at a cattle show, and you'd be glad to steal the dog's dinner in a week or two, only we haven't got one. You see a dog can't live on nothing as we're almost expected to do, and the old man's too mean to waste food on anything that can't handle sail."

"What's he like apart from his stinginess?" asked Niven.

"Well," said one of the others, "I have sailed with worse—a little—but the old man don't count for very much, anyway, because it's the mate who runs the ship, and the one we've got now's a terror."

"He's a pig-faced Geordie with a tiger's heart. I'd sooner live with a shark," said a lad who sat in a corner. "Hadn't been out two hours when he pitched one of the fellows forward down the hold. Of course it was tolerably full, and he didn't fall very far."

"What did the man do?" asked Appleby.

"Crawled away out of sight, and went to sleep—of course," said the first speaker; "none of them will be much good until to-morrow, but there'll be a circus or two on board this packet before we fetch Vancouver."

It was not very encouraging, but it was evident that they must make the best of it, and Appleby solaced himself with a long draught from his pannikin. The tea was hot and sweet at least, though there was very little else to recommend it, and it and the crumbly bread that tore beneath the knife put a little warmth and vigour into him. There was very little of the loaf left when all were contented, and following the example of the others, he and Niven crawled into their shelf-like bunks. Appleby flung off his jacket only because Lawson the eldest lad warned him that he might be wanted at any moment, but though his clothes were wet and

his straw mattress might have been more cosy, he was glad to feel the warmth begin to creep back into his chilled limbs. The lamp creaked dolefully above him as it swung to and fro, casting a brightness that flickered and vanished on the brass of the ports. Moisture stood beaded on the iron beams, and the wooden floor was wet, while now and then one of the big sea-chests groaned as it moved a little. Nothing was quite what Appleby had expected, but he did not think there was anything to be gained by mentioning it, and his eyes were growing dim when a shout roused him. Lawson was out of his berth in a moment and struggling into a black oilskin.

"You should have had yours handy, but you'll have to turn out without it. They're getting sail on to her," hee said.

It seemed very black and cold when Appleby went out into the rain again. The wind had evidently freshened, and sang through the maze of cordage above him with a doleful wailing, while as he peered into the darkness a burst of bitter spray beat into his eyes. It was almost a minute before he could see again, and then he made out the reeling lights of the tug with a row of paler ones behind them, and not far away a great whirling blaze.

"That's the Skerries," said Lawson, who appeared at his elbow. "Yonder's Holyhead. Wind's freshening out of the south-east, and she'll about fetch Tuskar on a close jam down channel."

Appleby did not understand very much of this, but he had little time to wonder as to its meaning, for the mate went by just then, and Lawson vanished into the darkness when his voice rang out, "Fore and main topsails. Forward there, loose the jibs."

Dark objects went by at a floundering run, and Appleby followed some of them to the foremost shrouds which ran spreading out with the rattlings across them from the lower mast-head to the rail. He had swung himself up on to it, and was glancing down at the leaping foam below, when somebody grabbed him by the arm, and next moment he was staggering across the deck.

"You'll go up there when you're told," the mate's voice said. "We want a good deal more work out of you before you're drowned."

"He's a pig," said Niven, appearing close by, and then sank back into the shadow when a big hand reached out in his direction, while presently the two found themselves pulling and hauling amidst a group of swaying figures about the foot of the foremast. It ran up into the darkness black and shadowy, and dark figures were crawling out on the long yard above them that stretched out into the night, while there was a groaning and rattling that drowned the wailing of the wind.

"Gantlines!" said somebody. "A pull on the lee-sheet. Overhaul your clew," and black folds of canvas blew out and banged noisily above them. Then while the

men chanted something as they rose and fell, the flapping folds slowly straightened out, and Niven looking up saw the topsail stretch into a great shadowy oblong. Then the men upon its yard seemed to claw at the next one, and there was more banging and thrashing as it rose, while the tug's whistle hooted, and hoarse shouts fell from the darkness and mingled with those from the poop.

"Forward," roared somebody. "Get the jibs on to her."

Neither Niven nor Appleby knew whether this referred to them or what they were expected to do, but there was nobody to tell them, so they followed two men forward, and stood panting a moment on the forecastle. It was rising and falling sharply now, for a long swell was running up channel, and they could dimly see a man crawling out upon the jibboom. This time they did not attempt to follow him, and when somebody drove them down the ladder a figure in oilskins thrust a rope into their hands.

"Hang on while I sweat it up," it said.

Appleby did not understand the manoeuvre, but when the man caught the rope beneath a pin and they took up the slack he gave them at every backward swing, a long triangular strip of canvas ceased banging, and the lads felt they were doing something useful when presently a second one rose into the blackness. Then they stood gasping, and watched the lights of the tug slide by. They could see the white froth from her paddles and the rise and fall of the black hull, while the voice of her skipper came ringing across the water.

"Good voyage!" he said. "You'll fetch Tuskar without breaking tack."

The tug went by, and Niven set his lips when with a farewell hoot of her whistle she vanished into the blackness astern. She was going back to Liverpool, and would be there before the morrow, while when another day crept out of the rain he would be only so much farther from home. He was not exactly sorry he had come, but by no means so sure that the sea was the only calling for Englishmen as he had been. Then the bulwarks they leaned upon lurched beneath them, and he was sensible that Appleby was speaking.

"She's starting now. Look at her. This is good, after all," he said.

Niven looked, and saw that black tiers of canvas had clothed the masts, though their upper portions still projected above it. They were also slanting, and the deck commenced to slope beneath him, while the long iron hull took on life and motion. There was a roar beneath the bows which rose and fell with a leisurely regularity, a swing and dip of the sloppy deck, and the spray began to blow in little stinging clouds over the forecastle. The wind also grew sharper, and at last Niven laughed excitedly as he felt the *Aldebaran* sweep away faster and faster into the night.

"Oh, yes," he said. "Now one can forget the other things."

"She's lying up close," said Lawson, who came by. "Still, I'm glad the old

man doesn't want the topgallants on her yet. Those are the next higher sails, and she's a very wet ship when you drive her. Look out. She's beginning her capers now."

As he spoke the bows dipped sharply, and from the weather side of the forecastle a cloud of spray whirled up. It blew in long wisps to leeward, struck with a patter along the rail, and before Niven, whose face was streaming, could shake himself, a rush of very cold water sluiced past him ankle-deep. Then the long hull heaved beneath him, and lurched forward faster still.

"I'm wetter than I was when we found Jimmy's duck, but this is great. She's just tearing through it," he said.

As he spoke a sing-song cry came out of the spray that whirled about the dipping forecastle, "Steamer's masthead light to starboard, sir."

Appleby, glancing over his right hand, saw a blink of yellow radiance beyond the swelling curves of the jibs. It was rising higher rapidly, and while he watched it, a speck of green flickered out beneath. Then a deep, organ-toned booming broke through the humming of the wind, and he saw a dark figure which he fancied was the mate swing up and down the poop, and another behind it stand rigid at the wheel.

"One of the Liverpool mailboats doing twenty knots, and it isn't any wonder their skippers are nervous when they meet a sailing-ship coming down channel," said Lawson at his side.

Then somebody gave an order on the *Aldebaran's* poop, and though it was not the usual one, any English sailor would have understood it. As it happened, however, the man who held the wheel was not a Briton, and next moment Appleby felt the ship swing round a trifle.

"Jimminy!" gasped Lawson. "The Dutchman's going to ram us right across her."

Next moment there was a bewildering roar from the whistle, and ringed about with lights the great bulk of the liner sprang out of the night. Towering high with her long rows of deckhouses punctured with specks of brilliancy and her two great funnels black against the sky, she was apparently heading straight for them.

Appleby saw all this in a second while he held his breath, and then there was a scuffle on the *Aldebaran's* poop. Somebody sprang towards the wheel, there was a thud, and a man reeled away from it, while high up in the darkness, canvas banged as the *Aldebaran* once more swerved a trifle. As she did so a man came staggering down the poop ladder, and with the white froth seething about her the liner swept by. Appleby gasped, and felt that he was shaking, while he saw that Lawson's face was a trifle white by the yellow glow that came out of one of the poop windows.

Then there was a roaring of orders, rattle of blocks, and hauling at ropes, and a curious silence by contrast when the *Aldebaran* swung forward with a springy lurch again, and Appleby saw the man who had come down the ladder, sitting apparently half-dazed upon the deck. His face was bleeding.

"Der port und der starboard I know. Also der loof, and keep her away, but der pinch her up I know not, und now I am very seeck," he said.

"I shouldn't wonder if he was," said Lawson dryly. "Still, though that's how accidents happen, it wasn't the stupid beggar's fault he didn't understand pinch her up. The old man wanted him to screw her a little nearer the wind, and luff, or a little higher would have been the usual thing."

"Pinch!" said the seaman. "I not know him, but oop I hear, und I oop mit him."

"And he'd have slung us across the liner's bows if the mate hadn't been too quick for him," said Lawson. "The fellow's head must be made of iron or that smack would have killed him. Well, these things will happen when you're fresh from port."

Appleby and Niven were glad to crawl into their berths again when the watch was over, and neither of them said anything, though that was not because they were not thinking. It was evident that going to sea was not quite all they had fancied it would be, and they had an unpleasant recollection of the Dutchman's bleeding face, and other tokens of the mate's temper. Still, they were tired and drowsy, and in another few minutes Appleby was sleeping too soundly even to dream of slavers and pirates as he had not infrequently done at Sandycombe. Niven, however, tossed and groaned, for his head was hot, and everything seemed to be spinning round, but at last the blinking light faded, and slumber banished the distressful nausea that tormented him.

There was a greyness low down to the eastwards when, swathed in streaming oilskins now, they stood where there was a little shelter beneath the weather-rail next morning. It was raining heavily, but the sky was no longer covered by the smoky haze, and here and there a patch of pale indigo showed between the streaks of driving cloud. The lads could see the white-flecked sea tops heave against it, and the rows of straining staysails, and great oblongs of the topsails across the masts, sharp and black above them as if cut out of ebony. They were not, however, especially interested in anything just then, for the *Aldebaran* was pitching close-hauled into a short head sea, and Appleby felt unpleasantly dizzy. Niven also clung very tightly to the rail, and his face, so far as it could be seen, was of a curious greyish-green, while he gasped each time the barque dipped her nose viciously and sent a cloud of spray blowing all over her.

Then for some ten minutes there was a deluge which blotted everything out, and they could only hear the roar of the rain. It ceased suddenly, and was

followed by a great whirling of cloud, while the streaks of blue grew larger, and the topsails became grey instead of black as the light came through. The wind had also almost gone, but Appleby could see the figure of a man upon the poop with his head turned aft as though looking for something. In another minute he stood at the top of the ladder shouting orders, and the deck was suddenly dotted with scrambling men. They gathered in little groups about the feet of the masts and along the rail, and became busy flinging down coils of rope. Somebody shoved one into Niven's hands, and he and Appleby hauled among the rest as the long yards swung round until they were square across the vessel, and then pointed a trifle towards the other side of her. There was a banging and rattling overhead as the staysails came down, and a man laughed when the *Aldebaran* lay rolling in a momentary calm.

"It's not easy to pull a Geordie's tail when he's asleep," he said. "And you'd better go round the other road if he has a fancy you've got a bone."

Niven understood the speech was a compliment to the mate's watchfulness. "What is he making us do this for?" he asked.

"Well," said the seaman good-humouredly, "you'll find out these things by and by. Now we were working down channel close-hauled with the wind south-east over our port bow, but it has dropped away with the rain. The mate doesn't wait to see if another one will catch us with topsails aback, because he smells it coming, and it will be screaming behind us out of the north-west presently."

As he spoke one of the topsails swelled out, flapped and banged, then other great oblongs of canvas ceased their rustling too, and a flash of brilliant green swept athwart the sea. A patch of brass blinked in the sudden brightness, the rigging commenced to hum, and the *Aldebaran* moved, while once more the hoarse voice rose from the poop.

"Topgallants," it said, and then after a string of words Niven could not catch, "Main royal."

Instantly there was a bustle. Men went up the shrouds, swung high on the yards, letting little coils of rope run down, and a third big tier of sailcloth swelled out on either mast. Chain rattled, running wire screamed, the *Aldebaran* ceased rolling, and Appleby could see the sea smitten into white smoke rush past while he endeavoured to shake the kinks out of very hard and swollen rope. In the meanwhile the voice rose from the poop again, and when he had time to look about him two great pyramids of sail with a third of different shape behind covered the *Aldebaran* from the last feet of her mastheads to her spray-swept rail.

Then Appleby drew in his breath with a little gasp of wonder and delight. The towering tiers of canvas that gleamed a silvery grey now were rushing as fast as the clouds that followed them across blue lakes of sky. The great iron hull had become an animate thing, for there was life in every swift upward lurch and

easy swing, and when he saw the foam that roared away in ample folds about the bows unite again astern and swirl straight back athwart the flashing green towards the horizon he realized for a few moments all the exhilaration of swift motion.

Presently, however, he was sensible of a horrible qualm under his belt, and looked at his hands with a little groan—one of them was bleeding from the rasp of the ropes, and the other swollen and more painful than if it had been beaten. He stood still for another second or two endeavouring to convince himself that there was nothing unusual going on inside him, and then staggered dizzily to the leeward rail. He found Niven there already, and for the next few minutes two very unhappy lads gazed down at the foam that whirled and roared beneath them as the *Aldebaran* swept out from the narrow seas before the brave north-wester.

CHAPTER IV
A LESSON IN SEAMANSHIP

It was a fine Sunday, and the *Aldebaran* rolling southwards lazily over a dazzling sea when Niven and Appleby lay on the warm deck with their shoulders against the house listening to Lawson who sat in the doorway reading. Pleasant draughts flickered about them as the warm wind flowed under the great arch of the mainsail's foot, and above it the sunlit canvas climbed, tier on tier, to the little royals swaying slowly athwart the blue. The barque was sliding forward on an even keel, but now and then she lifted her weather side with a gentle roll, and a brighter glare was flung up by the shining brine. Behind them the blue smoke of the galley whirled in little puffs, and glancing aft Appleby was almost dazzled by a flash from the twinkling brass boss of the wheel. Then when the poop went down he could see the figure of the helmsman forced up against the iridescent blueness of the sea.

Appleby wore a thin singlet and slippers, duck trousers and a jacket of the same material that had once been white and was a nice grey now. Niven's things were cleaner, but one rent trouser leg had been inartistically sewn up with seaming twine, and neither of them looked very like the somewhat fastidious youngsters who had once found fault with their rations in Sandycombe School. Their faces were bronzed from their foreheads to their throats, their hands were ingrained as a navvy's, and almost as hard, and they could by this time have eaten

anything there was nourishment in.

"There's no use reading that stuff to us. We can't take it in," said Niven.

Lawson grinned at Appleby. "A little thick in the head?" he said.

"No," said Niven. "My head's as good as those most people have, anyway. I was top of the list almost every term when I was at school."

Lawson's smile grew broader. "That's a bad sign," he said. "Now I never knew how much I didn't know until I came to sea, and you don't seem to have got that far yet. You see, there's a good deal you want to forget."

"Well," said Niven, "forgetting's generally easy. What would you teach a fellow who wanted to go to sea?"

Lawson rubbed his head. "How to get fat on bread and water would come in useful for one thing," he said. "Then it would be handy to know just when to say nothing when you're kicked, and when it would be better to put your foot down and answer with your fist. You see, if you do either of them at the wrong time you're apt to be sorry."

"Appleby knows that already," said Niven, whose eyes twinkled as he glanced at his friend.

Appleby made a grimace, and Lawson laughed.

"Then it's a good deal more than you do, though I expect the mate will teach you the first of it," he said.

"Now, when Cally put soft-soap in your singlet and sewed your trousers up you should have laughed fit to split yourself, as Appleby did. Cally tarred his hair for him, and there's some in yet, but any one would have fancied that he liked it."

Niven wriggled a little. "Oh, shut up! That's not what we want to know," he said.

"No?" said Lawson. "Then we'll get on to the healthful art and practice of seamanship. Am I to commence at the end, or half-way through? The beginning will not be much use to you."

"I'll climb down," said Niven. "Made an ass of myself, as usual. Now, do you want me to lick your boots for you? Begin at the beginning, and make it simple."

Lawson chuckled. "You'll get on while you're in that frame of mind, my son," he said. "Well, now, there are, generally speaking, two kinds of sailing ships—first the fore-and-afters, examples, cutter, ketch, and schooner, with their canvas on one side only of the mast. They're to be described as tricky, especially when you jibe them going free, but when you jam them on the wind they'll beat anything."

"Jam them on the wind?" said Appleby.

Lawson nodded. "Close-hauled sailing. That's what I'm coming to," he said.

"In the meanwhile there's the other kind, the one the Britisher holds to, while the Yankee who knows how to run cheap ships smiles, the square-riggers, examples, the ship and brig. Their sails are bent to yards which cross the masts, and, as you have found out, you've got to go aloft in all weathers to handle them, which is not one of their advantages. Then we come to the modifications or crosses between them, the barque, two masts square-rigged, fore-and-aft on mizzen, of which the *Aldebaran* is a tolerably poor example, topsail schooner, brigantine, which has yards on her foremast and fore-and-aft main, and barquentine with foremast square-rigged and two mainmasts carrying fore-and-aft canvas, though they call the last of them the mizzen. The other kind I didn't mention is the one that makes the money, and sails with a screw. Got that into you?"

"Oh, yes," said Niven, yawning. "Can't you get on? I knew it all years ago."

Lawson grinned. "Of course!" he said. "Well, I'll leave the mate to talk to you."

He went into the deckhouse, and returned with a sheet of paper and a little, beautifully-constructed model of a full-rigged ship. "I made it last trip to work out questions for my examination with," he said, but the deprecation in his bronzed face betrayed his pride, and Appleby, who saw how tenderly he handled the model, understood. "Now we come to the one and universal practice of sailing. I make this ring on the paper, and you can consider it the compass, or, and it's the same thing, one-half the globe. Here I draw two lines across it crossing each other, and we'll mark the ends of them North, South, East, and West. That divides the circle into four quarters, and the corners where the lines intersect are right angles, each containing ninety degrees, or eight points of the compass which has thirty-two in all."

He laid the paper on the deck, and when he had turned it so that the first line run from North to South, placed the model at the upper end of it, and twisted the yards and sails, which moved, square across the hull. "The wind's blowing from Greenland to the South pole, and she's going before it," he said. "Anything would sail that way—it's called running—even a haystack, and you trim the vessel's sails whether she's fore-and-aft or square-rigged at right angles to a line drawn down the middle of her hull. Well, we've reached the south end of the line—we'll say it's the south pole, and want to get back north again, but the wind is right against us now."

He picked up the model, and twisted the yards again so that they slanted sharply across the hull, making a small angle with its middle line. "Now she's braced sharp up, or close hauled—every sheet's hauled in—on the wind, and we'll start her heading north-east on the port tack. That is, the wind's on the port side of her, though we could have started on the opposite one heading north-west, if we had liked. Run that line along, and you'll find it makes an angle of four points

of the compass, or forty-five degrees, with the wind, which makes it evident that by and by you come to the edge of the first quarter of the circle at east. Then, if we put the ship round with the wind on her opposite side, and sail at the same angle as far again, we come back to north, where the wind is blowing from, and when you grasp that you've got the principle of the whole thing. With the wind behind you all sails flowing, when you're working up against it, everything's flattened in, but you have to remember that all vessels don't sail equally close to the wind, and while a racing cutter will lie very close indeed, a shallow full-bowed hooker must have it almost on her side to keep her going. That's why I took four points as a handy example, because two tacks of forty-five degrees would bring us back again."

"But why doesn't the wind shove her away sideways when she's close-hauled?" asked Appleby.

Lawson nodded approval. "That shows you're following, it does," he said. "Still it don't amount to very much if the vessel's deep, because all of her that's in the water offers resistance to it. They all slide off a little, and that's the leeway."

"Well," said Niven, "when the wind's so to speak almost against her, what makes her go ahead at all?"

Lawson grinned. "What makes a kite go up against the wind? You see the sails of a close-hauled ship make about the same angle to it as a kite does. They didn't teach you that at school?"

"I think they did," said Appleby. "There's something very like it in the parallelogram of forces."

"The biscuit's yours," said Lawson. "Get that into you, and you know all the whys of sailing."

He yawned and bent over his book, repeating snatches of curious ditties about green to green and red to red, and steamers crossing, but Appleby remembered what he had heard, which was fortunate, because it was the only instruction that anybody ever gave him on board the *Aldebaran*. Then the cook banged on something in his galley, and Niven, who got up and stretched himself, went along to bring in the tea. He came back with a big steaming can and grinned at Appleby.

"They'll be getting very different tucker at home," he said. "Still, it will be beastly cold and wet up there just now."

His merriment was evidently a trifle forced, and another lad who lay poring over a book in a corner raised his head.

"Oh, shut up!" he said. "We've heard all that before, and you don't do it very well. If I could get back into the shop the governor found me I'd like to catch myself going to sea. Oh, great handspikes! Just listen to the brute."

A storm of venomous language came forward from the poop, and through

the drowsy flap of canvas and stillness of the dazzling ocean there rang the strident voice of the mate. Lawson slowly shook his head.

"She was scarcely steering, and Biddulph has let her fall off," he said. "They've stood a good deal forward, but that mate of ours is pushing them too far."

Then there was silence that seemed deepened by the light flap and rustle of sailcloth and gurgle of shining brine, but the peace of the day had gone, and the shadow which crept into the four young faces was that which has darkened so many lives at sea. They had all been used to discipline, and did not resent it, while it had been made evident to two of them of late that on board a sailing ship toil that is brutal as well as perilous is often a necessity. They would also have undertaken it more or less cheerfully, but there had been added to it a ruthless tyranny, and Appleby's little sigh seemed to ask the question that downtrodden men have asked from the beginning—why such things must be? And, for he was young, he could not find an answer.

A little breeze sprang up after sunset, and the ship was sliding faster through a sea that blazed about her with lights of green and gold when Appleby hung about the deck, held still and silent by something in the harmonies of the night. There was no moon, but there was also no cloud in the sky, and the great stars the mast-heads swayed across hung set far back one behind the other in the blue, while the spires of canvas towered black and sharp under their cold light. Not a cloth rustled, but there came down from the gossamer tracery of rigging a little musical humming that suggested the chanting of an invisible choir.

Forward a black figure was visible on the forecastle. Here and there another showed along the dusky line of bulwarks, and now and then Appleby could see the dark shape of the mate standing high upon the poop. This, however, was not often, because he preferred to keep the great shadowy mainsail between himself and it. Night and sea were still and peaceful, and that sinister figure alone jarred upon their serenity.

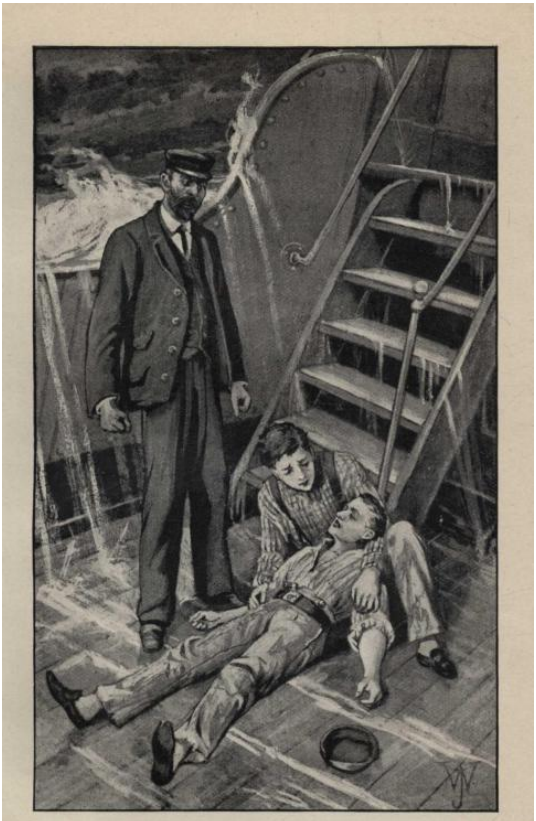
Suddenly the harsh voice he feared broke the silence, and Appleby instinctively set his lips when he saw his comrade cross the deck. It was noticeable that Niven went at a trot, and if he had been told that one side of the poop is usually sacred to the officer of the watch knowing that haste was advisable he forgot. A moment or two later he stood panting at the head of the ladder, which rose about six feet from the deck, and the mate strode towards him with arm drawn back. Possibly something had ruffled his temper, which was at the best a bad one, that night.

"There are two ladders to this poop, and this will teach you which is yours," he said.

Then before Niven could speak the arm shot out, and the breathless lad

reeled backwards with head swimming and a tingling face. The blow had possibly not been a very cruel one, but the *Aldebaran* swung her stern up just then, and the opening in the rails was close behind him. He went out through it backwards, caught his foot on the rung of the ladder, and pitching over came down with a sickening thud on deck. Appleby, who had seen it all, ran aft and knelt down beside him.

"Chriss, are you hurt?" he gasped.



"'CHRISS, ARE YOU HURT?'" [p. 62.

"'CHRISS, ARE YOU HURT?'"

There was no answer, and hearing a rattle on the ladder the lad looked up, and saw the mate standing close by. He had his hands in his pockets, but there

was an unpleasant look in his face.

"Shamming. Take him forward," he said, and stooped as though about to shake the lad who still lay motionless.

He, however, straightened himself as Appleby rose up, and stood before him, quivering, with hand clenched and a blaze in his eyes.

"Get back! You have done enough," he said, and if Niven could have heard it he would scarcely have recognized his comrade's voice.

"Hello!" the mate said sharply. "Were you talking to me?"

"Yes," said Appleby hoarsely, but very quietly. "And I have a little more to tell you. You can't do these things with impunity, and we'll have you kicked out of the Company for this."

It was not, of course, a judicious speech, but Appleby was scarcely in a state to decide what was most fitting then. The mate moved a pace nearer him, and his hands were out of his pockets now, but he stopped close by Appleby, for the lad stood stiffly upright, his face grey with passion.

"I'll make you sorry. Get him out of this," he said.

Then Niven raised himself a little, and blinked dizzily at both of them. "I think I could get up if you helped me, Tom," he said.

Appleby shivered a little as he saw the red smear on the back of his head, but before he moved an elderly man with a sour face and grizzled hair came down the ladder and stopped in front of them. He glanced at Niven and then at Appleby, but it is probable that a scene of the kind was not quite new to him, and his face was expressionless.

"Well, what's it all about?" he said.

Appleby had but once or twice spoken to the captain, who was a grim, silent man, and not seen very often in fine weather. Whether he was contented with the mate's conduct was not apparent, but as usual it was the latter who handled the ship's company.

"You had better ask the mate, sir," said Appleby. "He knocked him down the ladder."

The skipper turned towards the other man, and the mate laughed a little.

"That's not quite right, sir," he said. "The lad can't take telling, and he came up the wrong ladder when I sang out for him. I guessed it was done out of impudence, and let him have it so it wouldn't hurt him much with the flat of my hand. She gave a lurch just then that threw him off his feet and down he went. Then this one began a rumpus, and told me he'll have me run out of the service."

The skipper stooped over Niven. "Head's cut—at the back," he said in an expressionless voice. "Get up, and go aft, my lad. I'll fix it for you."

Niven rose shakily, and obeying the skipper's pointing hand walked towards the poop with uneven steps. Then the latter looked at Appleby.

"What did he mean by that?" he said quietly.

Appleby understood the question, and though he fancied he was doing wisely made a blunder. "I think I can do all I told him, sir," he said. "You see, this ship is carrying Mr. Niven's goods, and one could fancy the Company is glad to get them."

"Niven?" said the skipper, more to himself than the others. "Most of the freight belongs to Clarke and Hall."

"They're dead," said Appleby, who had been told this. "There's only Mr. Niven in the business now."

The skipper looked thoughtful. "Now I remember," he said as he turned towards the mate, and stopped. "Well, this is my affair, Appleby, and I'm the only man who can question what the mate does on board this ship. If you do it again it will be the worse for you. Remember that."

Appleby touched his cap and moved away, and presently Niven came forward from the poop with his head tied up. He was still pale, and moved slowly, while he had little to tell his comrade.

"He put some stuff that smarted on the cut, but didn't ask any questions, and told me to lie down," he said. "I'm going to do it because I'm not myself yet. My head's all humming, and I don't seem to want to talk."

Appleby helped him into his bunk, and then went back to his watch, while he told Lawson all that had passed when he next had an opportunity. The elder lad listened gravely.

"You fancy the old man believed you?" he said.

"Yes," said Appleby. "It isn't my fault if he didn't. I did my best to make him."

Lawson shook his head. "Then I'm afraid you made a mess of things," he said. "You see, if the old man believed you the mate would."

"Of course!" said Appleby. "That was what I wanted."

"Well," said Lawson, "it's unfortunate that you did. Now the old man's tolerably tough, but he's not a fool, and, to give him his due, is content with getting two men's work out of every one of the crew. He knows the men who fill the ships up can make things nasty for the captain, and it's quite likely he'll talk straight to the mate, though he wouldn't to you, and that's not going to make the mate any fonder of you and Niven."

"I was hoping it would keep him quiet," said Appleby.

"It wouldn't," said Lawson. "All that Niven's father could do would be to get him turned out, and if the mate thought that likely he'd make it warm for you before he went, you see. If you've any pull on the owners it's not, as a rule, advisable to mention it at sea. It doesn't make anybody think the better of you."

Appleby groaned. "I've been an ass again," he said. "Still, I fancied he had

killed Niven—and I had to do something."

Lawson smiled dryly. "There's only one thing anybody can do at sea, and that's to keep his mouth shut and out of the way of trouble," he said. "When you can't help things there's no use in kicking."

Appleby made no answer. It was a somewhat grim lesson, but it was one that sooner or later every lad must learn, and the result of it is the capacity for endurance which is not infrequently worth a good deal more than courage in action.

CHAPTER V
UNDER TOPSAILS

Appleby was not long in discovering that Lawson was right. Hitherto the mate had only stormed at him and his comrade as he did at the rest of the vessel's company, but now he seemed to single them out for abuse whenever he had an opportunity, and he managed to find a good many. It was true that he attempted no further violence, but they could have borne that better than the relentless petty persecution, for there was scarcely a difficult or unpleasant task within their strength that the lads were not set to do. Unpleasant duties are also by no means uncommon on board a sailing ship.

Still, Appleby had seen that to protest was useless and likely to make things worse, while because the mate was cunning as well as cruel it would have been difficult to make a definite complaint even if there had been anybody to listen to him, which, however, was not the case. So he set his lips and bore it, and so as he could endeavoured to restrain Niven, who would now and then break out into fits of impotent anger or lie silent in his bunk after some fresh indignity. Had the work been always necessary Appleby would have endeavoured to do it willingly, though it was now and then almost disgusting, but the mate probably knew this, and arranged things so that he should feel he was doing most of it only to please his enemy. Grown men have been driven to self-destruction or murderous retaliation by treatment of this kind, and after a few weeks of it both lads felt they could endure no more.

Meanwhile the weather grew colder and the work harder. That was not the worst time of the year for rounding Cape Horn, but they found it bad enough, for the *Aldebaran* met wild weather and she was loaded heavily, while on the after-

noon she lay rather more than a hundred miles to the eastwards of the dreaded cape her crew were almost too worn out for duty. She was then heading about south-west upon the starboard tack, thrashing very slowly to windward under topsails, and flooding her decks with icy water each time she poked her nose into the seas, and she did it tolerably often, for the seas were very big. They came rolling down to meet her out of the south-west, blue-black in the hollows, which were streaked with foam and frothing on their crests, and Appleby would hold his breath when one larger than its fellows rose high above the starboard bow. Most often the *Aldebaran* would swing up her head in time and climb over the big wall of water with a swooping lurch, while the spray that whirled up from her bows rattled like grapeshot into her foretopsails and blew out in showers between the masts. Now and then, however, she went through, and then there was a thud and roar and her forecastle was lost from sight. It seemed a long while before she hove it up again streaming, and every man held on to what was handiest when the long deck was swept by torrents of icy brine. Then while frothy wisps blew away from the forecastle and every scupper on one side spouted she would stagger on again for perhaps ten minutes more dryly, because the long ocean seas are by no means all equally steep and high.

Appleby and Niven were holding on, shivering with cold and wet through in spite of their oilskins, by a pin on the weather rail, for the deck slanted sharply and the water was washing everywhere. Glancing forward they could see nothing but spray, and every now and then the frothing top of a larger sea hove up against a vivid glare of green. When they looked up, which it was not often advisable to do, they could see the mastheads raking across a patch of hard deep blue, athwart which clouds with torn edges whirled. There was little canvas on the slanted spars, two jibs that ran water above the bowsprit, two topsails on either mast, a staysail or two between them, and half the spanker on the mizzen. The sails did not look as if they were made of flexible canvas but cast in rigid metal.

Presently a wet man came clawing his way along, and stopped when Niven called to him.

"Did you hear what we had made?" he said.

The man nodded, and growled at the spray which beat into his face. "The stooard he heard the old man and the mate a-fixing it," he said. "She's worked off about another twenty miles since noon yestidday."

Niven groaned. "Only twenty miles!" he said. "That's another week before we can square away."

"Well," said the man with a little grim laugh, "I'd give her another fortnight when I was at it. She'll take all that to fetch round with this wind, any way."

The two lads looked at each other, and neither of them said anything when

in a lull between two plunges the man lurched away, but that was because they fancied he was right and both were unwilling to admit all that they were feeling.

They knew a good deal about close-hauled sailing now, for during four long weeks the *Aldebaran* had been thrashing her way to windward in the face of stinging gales. Sometimes when the sea was a trifle smoother she would gain a little on every tack, and then a fresh storm would come roaring down, and when they had furled the higher sails with half-frozen hands she would do little more than hold the wind upon her side and of course make nothing at all in the required direction. Also they had often to heave her to under little rags of sail with the sea upon her bow while she blew away to leeward and lost in a few hours all they had won the preceding day.

Always the decks were flooded, and the men wet to the skin. The galley fire was frequently washed out, and they got cold provisions, often so soaked with salt water that they could scarcely eat them, while when sleep was possible they lay down as they were, all dripping, too worn out to strip off their clothes. It would not have been advisable to take them off in any case, for they might be turned out at any moment to furl upper topsails or haul down staysails in a sudden freshening of the gale. Canvas was furled and hoisted continually, because a ship will not sail to windward through a heavy sea unless she is sternly pressed, while her crew fight for every yard she makes.

Appleby even in his oilskins looked very gaunt and thin. His face was hollow and bronzed by exposure to bitter wind and stinging brine, while Niven, like many of the others, was troubled with painful sores from sleeping in salt-stiffened clothes. Their hands were stiffened and clawlike, their knuckles bleeding, and from the ceaseless rasp of ropes the undersides of their fingers were very like grain-leather. Worn out utterly and half-fed they were just holding out with the rest of the *Aldebaran's* company until they could thrash her far enough to the westwards to square away and run north into better weather on the other side of Cape Horn.

"Hallo!" said Niven presently. "That's a nasty cloud. I wonder what fresh beastliness it's bringing us."

Appleby, glancing to windward, saw that the glaring green beyond the seatops had faded out, and the horizon was smeared with grey. It also seemed to be closing in upon them rapidly, and overhead a black cloud with torn edges was swallowing up the strip of blue.

"More wind, any way. She'll scarcely bear upper topsails now," he said with a little groan. "Still, the old man's tolerably stubborn at carrying on."

Niven, glancing aft, could see the skipper's gaunt figure swung high upon the poop against a frothing sea as he too glanced to windward. He was probably as anxious as any one to get round Cape Horn, but it was only by carrying sail

to the last moment and making the most of every lull he could hope to do it. Even as he gazed ragged ice fell pattering along the decks, and the daylight died out leaving a grey dimness behind it. Then for a few minutes sea and ship were hidden by the flying hail. It cut the lads' raw knuckles until they could have cried out in agony, thrashed their wet faces and rattled on their oilskins, while the rigging roared above them, and twice in succession the *Aldebaran* put her whole forecastle in. Then a great sea foamed in almost solid over her weather rail, and through all the uproar rang a high-pitched cry. The words were indistinguishable as they would have been a yard away, but the lads recognized it as the summons to shorten sail. For a minute or two they were busy about the deck, and then while the ship swayed over further the mate lurched by and grabbed the Dutchman, who was working awkwardly with one hand, by the shoulder.

"Lay aloft, and give them a hand up there, you skulking hog," he said.

"Mine arm," said the seaman, "der right one, she is nod of good to me."

Appleby remembered that the fellow had badly hurt his arm, and scarcely wondered at his reluctance to go aloft with only one hand to trust to as he glanced above. The upper topsail had been partly lowered down, but the loose canvas was thrashing between the yards, and these sloped down towards the whitened sea apparently as steeply as the roof of a house. Still, it was evident that every man was needed, for there were other sails to be handled and the *Aldebaran* was apparently going bodily over. She hove her nose up for an instant, and Appleby had a momentary glimpse of a jib that had burst its sheet thrashing itself to pieces above the bowsprit. Then sight and hearing was lost in a cloud of flying brine.

When he could open his eyes again he saw the mate lift his fist, and the Dutchman glance deprecatingly at the arm that hung at his side.

"Lay aloft," said the former, "before you get a damaged head as well as an arm."

The Dutchman shuffled towards the shrouds, and just then a half-heard shout came down from one of the black figures on the inclined yard. "We're beat. Send us another hand."

It was already evident to Niven that as the yard was higher than it should have been something was foul, and he could see that unless the men had help they would be hurled off it or the sail blown away. It was not his especial duty, but it was no time to be particular when the *Aldebaran* lay swept from end to end at the mercy of the squall, and he swung himself up into the shrouds close behind the Dutchman with Appleby following. The wind flattened them against the rattlings as they fought their way up, and then almost choked and blinded them as with the swinging foot-rope against their heel and stiffened hands on the slippery spar they crept outwards from the mast along the yard. They were not of very much use there, indeed, most often they were in the way, but they did

what they could while the hail lashed their faces and the drenched and stiffened canvas banged about them so that to hear anything else was almost impossible. At times somebody shouted, but the words were blown to leeward and quite incomprehensible.

It was their business to roll up the great flapping sail, and lash it to the yard, but parts of it tore away from them, and blew out with a bang like a rifle-shot every now and then, while the long wet spar they leaned across increased the steepness of its slant. Niven glancing down a moment fancied that the *Aldebaran's* leeward rail was in the sea, and saw the rigid figure on the weather side of the poop waving a hand to them. He could, of course, hear no voice at all, but surmised the gestures meant it was high time their work was finished. Then the *Aldebaran* dipped her nose into a sea, and the cloud of spray she flung up hid everything, while in another moment a more furious gust shrieked about them. The yard slanted still further, and he fancied it was impossible the ship could recover.

His hands were stiffened and almost useless, his fingers were bleeding, and his breath was spent, while as he held on helpless for a moment there was a sound like thunder, and as a strip of canvas rent itself from the grasp of those about him he saw the Dutchman clawing desperately at the yard. The man slipped along it a foot or two, and Niven, seeing his fingers sliding, remembered he had an injured arm. He had also evidently lost his footing, for one leg was dangling, and the lad instinctively seized his shoulder. That left him one hand to hold on by, and he gasped with horror as he felt his fingers slipping from the yard and saw a great sea burst into a tumultuous frothing beneath him.

He was too cold and dazed to wonder if any of the others saw what was happening, and could remember only that if he loosed his hold the man he clutched would go whirling down to strike the iron bulwarks or plunge into the sea. So he set his lips, and while his arms seemed to be coming away from their sockets held on for a moment or two.

Then the hand he grasped the yard with slipped a trifle further, and with a sickening horror he felt his clawlike fingers yield, but dazed, half-blinded, and too overwrought with the struggle to think, he still clutched the Dutchman. In another moment the hand came away altogether, and man and boy went down.

Now a second or two earlier Appleby had noticed their peril, but could do nothing because there was a man between them and him. He smote the fellow's shoulder and shouted, but his words were blown away, and no one else had eyes for anything but the banging sail. It was too late before he could shout again, for with a little gasp he saw the two figures whirl downwards beneath him, until, because the *Aldebaran* lurched a trifle just then, the smaller of them struck a big wire stay with folds of loose canvas about it where it joined the mast, and lay for

a second or two across it. The other fell on the top of the deckhouse, and then, while Appleby shivered, rolled off it and down on to the deck below. Almost as this happened Niven slipped from the hauled-down staysail and fell upon the house too, but apparently upon feet and hands together.

Then as Appleby endeavoured to get back to the mast so that he could descend, the man nearest it grasped him and he could not pass. The lad could not hear what he said, but he guessed its purport, and grew sick with horror as he saw that the man was right. There were others below to pick up the fallen if there was any life in them, and with the ship in peril every hand was needed on the yards. Also, while that fact might not have stopped him, he could not pass the man, who barred his way to the mast.

So he stayed, and did what little he could among the rest, until at last they had stowed the sail, and then went down in frantic haste, only to be driven forward by the second mate. The latter was a kindly man, but there are times when the injured or dying must take care of themselves at sea, and there was still strenuous work to do. Thus at least half-an-hour had passed, and the *Aldebaran* was blowing sideways about as fast as she forged ahead under lower topsails when Appleby reached the deckhouse breathless and dripping. It was almost dark inside it, for driving cloud had blotted the daylight out, but the swinging lamp diffused a sickly radiance which fell on his comrade as Appleby bent over his dripping bunk. Everything in the deckhouse was wet, as was Niven's face, but though it was drawn and white his eyes were open.

"Not quite all smashed up yet," he said with a little smile.

Appleby felt almost dizzy with relief, and his voice shook a trifle as he said, "But you are hurt, Chriss?"

"Well," said Niven feebly, though there was a little twinkle in his eyes, "it wouldn't be astonishing if I was, but I think a good lie down will put me right again. There was a big lump of the staysail under me, and I fetched the top of the house on my hands and toes. Couldn't get up just now, however, if I wanted to."

Appleby could think of nothing fitting to say, and patted his comrade's shoulder while he turned his head away. His eyes were a trifle hazy, and he felt that there are a good many things one cannot express in speech.

"The Dutchman?" he said presently.

Niven seemed to shiver, and shook his head. "I don't know. Couldn't take much notice of anything because I felt all in pieces myself just then, but I saw him come down," he said. "He just seemed to crunch up—as if he was an egg."

Lawson, who was sitting on his chest, made a gesture of impatience. "Now you shut up and lie still," he said. "Any one would fancy you had done enough to take a rest." Then he nodded to Appleby. "Get out. It's quietness he wants, and it's not going to make anything any better to remember what happened to the

other fellow. I'll keep an eye on him, and you needn't worry."

Appleby, who knew Lawson could be trusted to do this, went out, and it was an hour or two later when he and the rest sat in the house again over a big can of tea which the cook had by some means contrived to supply them with. They still wore streaming oilskins, and the lamp that swung above them cast flickers of smoky radiance across their wet faces, while from outside came a muffled roar of wind and the crash of falling water as the *Aldebaran* lurched over the great smoking seas. Niven was evidently a little better, and smiled, though his face was awry with pain, when Appleby lifted his shoulders a little and handed him a biscuit soaked in tea.

"It's nice yellow jellies and grapes I'd be eating if I was laid up at home," said he.

"If you don't stop we'll make you," said one of the other lads. "Who has got any business to talk of those things at sea? What did the old man do to you?"

Niven grinned in a sickly fashion. "He asked me where I felt bad, and I told him everywhere," he said. "Then he and the steward pulled the clothes off me and prodded me with their fists. They didn't seem to find anything broken, but I was sore all over, and I'd sooner be whacked with a horse-girth than go through that again."

"Smacked with a horse-girth!" said Lawson, reflectively. "Now I've been kicked—with sea boots—a good many times, but that would be a new sensation. What does it feel like?"

"If you want to know you can ask Appleby," said Niven. "I fancy he could tell you."

Appleby laughed, for he saw his comrade was recovering. "But what about the Dutchman?" he said.

Lawson shook his head. "I only know the old man went forward to look at him, and he's tolerably bad. He came down bang on his shoulder, you see. Did the mate know he had only one arm that was any good to him, Appleby?"

"Yes," said Appleby slowly. "He was there when the man hurt it, and just before he went up I heard him tell him. I saw the mate double up his fist too—and the Dutchman had to go."

There was silence for a moment or two, intensified by the roar of wind, and the lads looked at one another with a curious grimness which seemed out of place there in their young faces.

"If he doesn't get better it's manslaughter, any way," said somebody. "Now we've had almost enough of this. What's to be done, Lawson?"

Lawson stared at the lamp for almost a minute before he answered. "If the man comes round we can't do anything," he said. "Of course we and the men could make a declaration about ill-usage at Vancouver, but the old man would

back the mate up and we'd only be quietly sat upon. If the Dutchman dies it would be a little easier. The old man would have to put down all about it in the log, but he'd fix it the nicest way and then get two witnesses—the mate and the second mate—to sign it."

"Would the second mate do it?" said Appleby.

"I think he would have to," said Lawson dryly.

"Well," said one of the other lads, "where do we come in?"

"You," said Lawson, with a little, mirthless laugh, "don't come in at all, but there's one chance yet. When the men are paid off the old man's account of any death on board is read over, and they're asked if it's all correct and if the man was ill-used at all. If they could only stick to one story they'd get a hearing, and the Government would go into the thing."

"That doesn't sound difficult," said Appleby.

Lawson shook his head. "I'm afraid it's more than they could do," he said. "Every man would tell a different tale and get arguing with the rest until nobody could make head or tail of it, and the skipper who says nothing that isn't dragged out of him would come up on top again. Still, of course, there is just a chance of them being listened to, and that's going to make the mate a good deal nastier in the meanwhile."

Niven, who had lain silent, looked over his bunk. "He will not be nasty to me very long. I've had enough of the brute already. One could get ashore at Vancouver."

Lawson glanced at him impatiently. "Better shut up before you're sorry," he said. "There's only one thing to do, and that's to leave the old man to run the mate out quietly. He's a tolerably tough old nigger himself, but I fancy this kind of thing is a little too much for him. As I've told you before, there's very little use kicking about anything when you go to sea."

Then there was once more silence as the unpleasant veracity was borne in upon the rest. Nobody, it seemed, cared very much what became of them, and there was no one they could appeal to. They must take what came, and grin and bear it, however irksome it might be. The knowledge was especially bitter to Niven, who had possibly been made too much of at home, but Appleby had already a vague suspicion that in any walk of life it would be much the same. Every man had rights, he knew, but he had discovered that it is very little use to make speeches about them when they are unobtainable, and generally wiser to wait in silence for an opportunity and then stretch out a firm hand and take them. Some lads find this out early, though there are men who never discover it

at all, and these are not infrequently a nuisance to everybody.

CHAPTER VI
A FAIR WIND

Niven, though severely bruised and shaken, recovered rapidly, and one morning a fortnight after his injury sat under the partial shelter of the weather-rail rubbing tar into a long strip of worn-out canvas with his hands. He had more than a suspicion that the canvas would never be used, and sitting still in a bitter wind while he dabbled his stiffened fingers in the sticky mess was far from pleasant, but the mate frequently found him work of that kind to do, and Niven knew that when he gave an order it was not advisable to argue.

Appleby was sitting close beside him similarly occupied, and every now and then a cloud of spray which swept the rail stung their faces and rattled upon their oilskins. Icy water came on board, too, but because they sat well aft they escaped the frothing deluges which poured over the weather bow and sluiced down the slanted deck to lee. Here and there a dripping man scrambled out of the way of them or clung fast to something in the wilder lurches, for the *Aldebaran* was still hammering to windward under scanty sail.

There was, however, clear, cold sunlight, and the wet canvas swayed across a patch of blue, while the lads could see the froth of the rollers shine incandescent against the flashing green over the weather-rail. The *Aldebaran* was shouldering her way through them with heavy plunges that buried her forecastle at times. Then she would swing it up, streaming, high above the sea, and there was a general scramble clear of the water which came splashing everywhere. The sunlight showed that the men's faces were gaunt and worn. They had for more than a month held out stubbornly, living for the most part on uncooked and soaked provisions, toiling the watch through at shifting sail, and then flinging themselves down in their drenched clothing only to be turned out half-dazed by the sleep for which brain and body craved as the screaming gale freshened again. Now they had, thanks to what the steward had gleaned in the cabin and told the cook, reason to believe that if the *Aldebaran* could make a few more leagues to windward the next day would see them round Cape Horn.

Still, they had been almost as near before only to be driven back to the east again, and haggard faces were turned expectantly towards the hard blue-

ness athwart which the seatops heaved over the weather-rail. Presently Appleby glanced up sharply as the shadow of a sail fell upon him.

"Hallo!" he said, and there was a curious eagerness in his voice. "The topsail leach has come between us and the sun."

"I don't see why that should please you," said Niven. "It only makes it colder, and it's bad enough already, especially when you've had nothing worth mentioning to eat for weeks."

"No?" said Appleby. "Well, if I'm right it means warm weather, dry clothes, sound sleep when your watch is done, and the galley fire lit all day."

Niven looked up. "Oh," he said with a little gasp. "The wind is backing round—or is he only screwing her up a little?"

Both of them glanced from the straining canvas to the figure at the wheel, and the eyes of all on deck were turned in the same direction, for it was evident that only two things could have happened. Either the helmsman was jamming the ship half-a-point closer to the wind, which was unlikely, because the mate would have seen he sailed her as close as possible before; or the wind was going round. As they watched, the canvas swung further athwart the sun, and their hearts throbbed faster because they knew it was the latter. In place of thrashing to windward tack and tack, and frequently losing on one all they had made upon the other, they were now sailing almost in the direction they desired to go.

"I wish I could see the compass," said Niven. "Still, the wind must be backing southerly by the bearing of the sun. Why doesn't the old man let her go while he can?"

It is probable that every man on deck was asking the same question, for the heads of all were turned towards the poop, and nothing would have induced one of them to speak when the skipper appeared out of the companion. He stood quite still for several minutes, and then nodded to the officer of the watch as though contented, but no one moved on deck when he went below, and the attitude of the men suggested what they felt. They were, it seemed, not round Cape Horn yet, and the *Aldebaran* still held on plunging through the white-topped rollers close-hauled. Hour after hour dragged by, and all on board bore them in tense expectancy, until at last, when the watch was changed again, the skipper came forward to the edge of the poop with a little sour smile on his face. He spoke ostensibly to the mate close by him, but it is possible he meant his voice to carry further.

"Get a pull on the weather-braces, and the topgallants loosed. We'll make a fair wind of it," he said.

The mate came forward shouting, and for once he was very willingly obeyed. Both watches were on deck, for the one relieved had not left it yet, and the men fell over each other in their eagerness to get at the ropes, while Appleby

felt his pulses throbbing and the blood surge to his face, as he watched the figure aft pulling at the wheel.

Round went the long, slanting yards, stopped, swung further, and stopped again, while the *Aldebaran* hove herself more upright and shook the salt wash from her as she brought the wind upon her quarter. Then there was a scurrying of agile figures, stripped of their oilskins now, for the high top-gallant yards, and when the loose canvas blew away from them, wet and weary men broke into a breathless song as they swung and fell about the feet of the masts. They had hoarse voices, and the lips of some were rent and cracked. Their bodies were raw from the constant lash of brine, but there was a light in their gaunt faces and the ring of triumph in their song. Its words were senseless rubbish, but through them the spirit of those who sang was clear, and it was the pride that comes of a hardly-won victory. They had borne almost all that flesh and blood could bear, and now they had won the gale they had defied and beaten was their ally. The *Aldebaran* seemed to know it, and swept north-west faster at every roll, hurling off vast folds of froth from her hove-up bows, while the foam seethed and flashed past, lapping in places almost to her rail. Still, for a ship will carry more canvas going free than she will close-hauled, her crew were not contented, and while they coiled the ropes away still watched the motionless figure on the poop expectantly.

Once more he raised a hand, and there was another scramble, more eager than before, and a rush towards the weather-shrouds, while presently great folds of canvas came dropping from the long lower yards. They spread out in a vast curve from rail to rail, and the *Aldebaran*, quivering to the drag of them, sped on faster than ever, with a wake that swirled and seethed far back across the long seas that now came rolling up behind her.

Then a Breton Frenchman solemnly danced upon the deck, and a little Italian cackled with shrill laughter, while a half-articulate growl of victory that was not a cheer went up from the British sailormen. They were flying faster than any but a very fast steamer, away from cold and wet and hunger, northwards towards the sun again.

For two days the *Aldebaran* drove along, swept by spray, at a pace which occasionally exceeded twelve miles an hour, and then, though her decks dried up and the foam sank lower beneath her rail, the pace did not diminish appreciably, for as the wind fell lighter there was a crowding on of sail. The royals were shaken out in turn, stay-sails in rows swelled between the masts, and while the long heave that was smoother now and dazzlingly blue came rolling up on her beam, she swung along, three towering spires of canvas above a froth-licked hull, with her jibboom pointing to the midday sun. It grew warmer every day, oilskins, pilot-coats and long boots were flung aside, wet berths and saturated

bedding dried, and there was no more dining on pulpy biscuit because a sea had washed out the galley as well as the fire.

Then there might have been peace and contentment on board the *Aldebaran* had not the mate's temper apparently grown worse as the weather grew finer, until the half-cowed, sullen crew were glad to crawl away below out of the reach of his beady eyes when the watch was done. They were kept hard at work at something all day long, chipping iron, painting, scraping spars down, and the man who had only a bitter jibe for the most willing and scurrilous abuse for the tired generally contrived when nothing more unpleasant suggested itself that Niven or Appleby should carry the tar pot, while the blood would surge to their faces at the words which followed, if at any time they let fall one splash of it where it was not wanted.

The work began as soon as there was light enough to see by, and was never done. A good deal of it was brutal and much unnecessary, and it went on without intermission under the scorching sun of the equator, and was apparently no nearer finished when reaching in close-hauled one day they had their first glimpse of the great, snow-crested mountains that rise above the forests of Washington. Then the apprentices envied the men who had only signed on to Vancouver, because they at least would soon be free of the ceaseless small-persecution and hateful tyranny.

At last as they worked into the Straits of San Juan the pines of Vancouver Island lifted themselves above the horizon, and a day or two later the *Aldebaran* came to an anchor off Port Parry, which is where the warships lie and close to Victoria City. Vancouver, where she was to unload, stands on the Canadian coast about a day's sail with a fair wind further east, but the straits are sprinkled with islands and swept by tides, and because the wind was easterly and the sky dimmed by smoke, the skipper had gone ashore that morning to send off telegrams and if possible engage a tug. He did not return all day, and when evening was closing in Appleby and Niven sat outside the deckhouse, while the mate stood up on the poop apparently to see if there was any signal from the shore.

The evening was chilly, and a fresh breeze streaked the waters with a haze of smoke from some great forest fire which drove in thin wisps across the rising moon and now and then growing thicker blotted out the dark pines ashore. The lads had been working hard helping to send down the lighter canvas all day, and now they were aching in every limb. They were also moody, for do what they would the mate's bitter tongue had not spared them. Somebody was singing forward in the forecastle, and now and then a burst of hoarse laughter came aft, for the men there would be leaving the *Aldebaran* in a day or two. Niven sighed a little as he listened.

"Those fellows are well off. It's no wonder they're singing," he said. "Things

are getting worse every day, and I'm very sick of it, Tom."

Appleby laughed, but there was not much merriment in his face. "Of the sea?"

"Well," said Niven slowly, "the sea is different from what I expected it would be, but that's not what I mean."

"The mate then?"

Niven nodded. "Of course," he said. "Now, he stops with the ship, and we don't know where we're going to from Vancouver. Lawson was telling me the Company's ships are away sometimes four years together. Four years of that mate, Tom. Just fancy it!"

Appleby's face grew a trifle grim. It was not an encouraging prospect, and he could see no way of avoiding it.

"It does not sound nice," he said.

"No," said Niven savagely. "If there's no improvement—and I don't expect there will be—I'm not going to put up with it." Then he glanced at his companion. "Tom, you'll stand in with me?"

Appleby looked grave. "Don't be an ass, Chriss. Wait and see what can be done when you go home."

Niven sat silent for almost a minute, and when he spoke his young face was very determined. "The point is, when are we going home? If we sail from here for England I'll try to put up with him, but if there's to be two or three more years of it I'm going to make for the bush before she leaves Vancouver. There's no use talking. I'm quite decided, and the only question is whether you will come with me!"

Appleby, glancing at his comrade, saw that no arguments could persuade him. Niven could be very obstinate, and Appleby had reasons for believing that the other apprentices also intended slipping away.

"If you go I'll go too, but I don't want to," he said quietly. "You see, there are good mates as well as brutes like this one, while I may never get another chance if I throw away the one your father has given me. I don't like the *Aldebaran*, but I still like the sea."

"The pater would find you a dozen better ones," said Niven eagerly, but Appleby shook his head.

"I couldn't take another favour from him if I made a bad use of this one."

Niven rose and moved once or twice wearily across the deck. "I'd get him to make you. Then you're not coming?"

"Yes," said Appleby gravely. "Whatever you decide on I shall do, but that will separate us very soon, because I will not ask your father to find me another opportunity."

Niven stopped and stood still with indecision in his face, while his voice

was a trifle hoarse as he said, "Tom, you're a good fellow, and ever since I knew you have done your best for me, but now—oh, it's just because you're so decent you're stopping me putting an end to this misery."

"I'm not sorry," said Appleby dryly. "If you go, I'm coming too. Only when your father sends for you I shall stay out here and do anything I can or go on board another ship as seaman."

Niven saw he was beaten, and sat down wearily. "Very well!" he said with a little groan. "Perhaps something will happen, and I don't care what it is. Anything would be better than—this—and I simply can't bear it very much longer. Now the Dutchman's coming round the mate will be more brutal than ever."

He said nothing further, and while he sat still with a hopeless face in black dejection, the mate, who did not know all that he was doing, took his affairs in hand. Coming forward along the deck he stopped before them with a packet in his hand.

"Take the gig ashore, and put these letters in the post," he said. "Wait for half-an-hour, and then if you see no sign of the skipper, come off again. You can take Cally with you."

The lads were almost desperate, or they would not have done a foolish thing, for Appleby did not stand up.

"It's not our watch, sir," he said.

The mate swung round and looked at him with a little glint in his eyes. "You're talking again," he said. "If you're not on board the gig inside five minutes, I'll have my answer ready for you."

Appleby rose up and touched his cap sardonically, but Niven was sullen. "Very well, sir, but the gig's too big for us, and I don't know that we can pull her back against the breeze," he said.

The mate moved a little nearer with an unpleasant smile in his face. "The stream will sweep you off the land unless you do, and it should help you to pull if you remember it," he said. "That reminds me, I want Cally for something else."

Appleby saw that he had made a mistake again. Since he had spoken to the skipper their persecutor had avoided violence and harassed them with a vindictive cunning which left no room for any objection that would not put them in the wrong. So far speech had only lost them the help of a third hand who could have taken his turn at an oar and steered for them, and he grasped Niven fiercely by the shoulder lest he should answer as he turned away. The gig lay astern, and in another minute or two they had climbed down into her, and casting off stepped the mast and ran up the little sail. The wind would carry them ashore, but the gig though light was nearly twenty feet long, and, while they could row tolerably well, both knew it would cost them a strenuous effort to pull her off again.

"He's a pig and a beast!" said Niven, hoarse with rage, as he sat aft with the

tiller in his hand while the boat swung over the little splashing sea. "She's not going to fetch the ship under sail coming back, and it will be no end of a fag to pull her, while I'm about done with handling those staysails all day already."

Appleby said nothing, but his face was very sombre as he slacked the sheet a little when a puff of spray flew over the weather gunwale, and the brine lapped perilously near the opposite one. He saw that the breeze was freshening, as an easterly wind often does at nightfall, and did not anticipate any pleasure in rowing back again.

CHAPTER VII
ADRIFT

When Appleby and Niven came clattering down the beach it was growing very cold and night was closing in. They had not found the skipper, and a man had told them that the little tramway between Port Parry and Victoria had stopped running. The lads had also been working hard in the sunshine all day, and because the mate had given them no time to change the light clothes they stood in they shivered a little in the chilly breeze. It came down moaning across the dark pines, crisping the land-locked harbour where two big warships lay, and when they stood on the pebbles there was a clear ringing of bugles.

"Half-an-hour, to the minute," said Appleby. "There's a tolerably stiff breeze."

"You timed us?" said Niven. "Of course, you would. Now, I could never have remembered it."

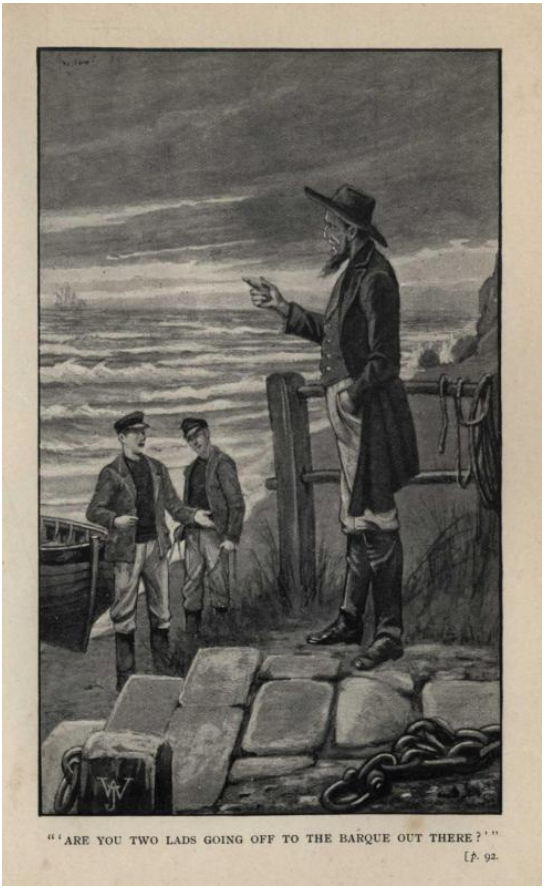
Appleby laughed a trifle grimly. "Yes," he said. "You see, I didn't want to stay here any longer than was necessary with the wind freshening. It's going to be quite hard enough work to get back as it is."

Niven groaned a little as he helped to thrust off the boat, for he was very tired, and his limbs had stiffened with the cold, while as he was about to step on board a Canadian came sauntering down the beach.

"Are you two lads going off to the barque out there?" he asked.

Appleby nodded, and the man glanced towards the swaying trees and the little streaks of froth that showed white against the dimness out at sea. "It's a tolerably big contract," he said reflectively. "You've got to go?"

"Yes," said Appleby. "If you knew what our mate was like you wouldn't ask



"'ARE YOU TWO LADS GOING OFF TO THE BARQUE OUT THERE?'"
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"'ARE YOU TWO LADS GOING OFF TO THE BARQUE OUT THERE?'"

that question."

The Canadian laughed. "I figure I can guess," he said. "Well, now, you pull up well to windward along the shore where you'll get less breeze and smoother water, and when it strikes you you're far enough to head her across pull fit to split your boots—but don't miss her."

Appleby saw it was good advice, and did his best to follow it, but his back was aching and his arms were stiff; while when Niven missed a stroke, which he did not infrequently, the wind drove them a trifle further off shore before they could pull the gig's head round again. She had been built for four men to row, and while they would have no difficulty in propelling her in smooth water it was different when with the wind against them every little lurch checked her speed. Still, they toiled for half-an-hour or so, making no great progress that Appleby who watched the trees ashore could see, until Niven groaned.

"I'm almost done," he said. "If you don't head across soon I'll double up before we fetch the *Aldebaran*."

Appleby glanced at the shore, and then at the barque's riding light blinking fitfully half-a-mile away.

It was no great distance, but the breeze that blew slantwise off the shore would be on their side while they headed for her, and if the boat made much leeway they could not reach her. Nor did he fancy they would have the strength to drive the gig back to windward if they once drifted astern of her.

"Shake yourself together, Chriss, and we'll make a shot at it," he said.

Niven said nothing, but he bent his back, and for ten minutes they strained every sinew while the boat lurched and plunged on the little splashing sea as they drew out from the land. Cold as it was the perspiration dripped from them, and the oars slipped in their greasy palms, while both were gasping when a haze of smoke that blotted out everything drove down upon them.

"Head her up a little," said Appleby when the blinking light faded. "Put all you're good for into it, and row. There's nothing but the Pacific before us if we miss the *Aldebaran*."

For another five minutes Niven rowed desperately, his heart thumping and his breath coming in half-stifled gasps, while the boat plunged more viciously with the sea upon her bow. Then he missed his stroke as the moon came through, and Appleby could not check a little groan of dismay. They were close to the *Aldebaran* and could see her plainly as a cold blast drove the haze away, but she was well up on their weather instead of under their lee, and he knew it was beyond the power of any two worn-out lads to reach her against the wind.

"It's no use," said Niven hoarsely. "I can't do any more. Shout if you can, though we'd be out of sight before they could get the other boat over."

They made the most noise they could, but it is difficult to shout when ex-

hausted by a strenuous effort, and it is more than possible that the splash of the sea and sighing of the wind drowned their strained voices. Nor is the low dusky shape of a boat easy to discern from a ship's deck on a hazy night. In any case, there was no answer, and for a minute the lads watched the three tall spars and strip of hull that rose black against the moon slide away from them—and that was the last they ever saw of the *Aldebaran.* Then another gust brought down the haze again, and while the smoky greyness drifted past them they were alone.

"I can scarcely pull," said Niven. "Do you think we could fetch ashore?"

"I don't," said Appleby with grim directness. "Still, we can try, and it's the only thing we can do."

They rowed for about twenty minutes, the splashing strokes growing slower while the plunging grew sharper, and then stopped again as the haze thinned a little. The blink of the barque's riding light was no longer perceptible, nor could they see anything of the shore.

"Well?" said Niven dejectedly.

Appleby laughed, though his voice was not mirthful and there was a curious tremor in it. "You wanted to leave the *Aldebaran*—and I fancy you've got your wish," he said. "We're blowing out from land, and there's quite a sea getting up."

"Yes," groaned Niven. "That's plain enough. What are we going to do?"

"I don't know," said Appleby. "It's not blowing much, and the proper thing would be to keep her lying head to with the oars until the morning. Then we'd see the land. If we kept pulling easy she wouldn't drift very much. The difficulty is that we're not fit to do it."

"No," said Niven decisively. "No more rowing for me. That's not going to work, anyway. What's the next best thing?"

"Make a sea anchor with the mast and sail and a piece of iron hanging from it, and lie to it with a long cable," said Appleby who had been reading some of Lawson's books.

"Rot again!" said Niven. "We haven't got any iron, and the few yards of rope forward wouldn't be half enough."

"Then," said Appleby with a little hollow laugh, "we can only let her drift, unless the sea gets too big for it. I don't feel like rowing any more myself."

They threw the oars in, and sat down out of the wind on the floorings, feeling very lonely, for an hour or so. The gig was long and narrow with only a few inches of her bottom in the water, and the wind did what it would with her. Now it drove her sideways, now it whirled her round, and all the while the dark slopes of water rose higher and the night grew colder. At last when a little splash of brine fell on Appleby's face he rose to his knees and saw a yellow flicker with a green blink beneath it swinging towards them through the haze.

"Get your oar out—quick! There's a steamer coming up," he said.

Niven obeyed him, but it was another thing to pull the oar. Their tired arms had stiffened, and it is somewhat difficult to row in tumbling water. The wind would also blow the gig's head round in spite of them, and little frothy splashes came in over the bow, but the lights were growing brighter, and when at last they stopped rowing a big, shadowy bow was forging through the water close in front of them.

Twice they sent up a breathless shout, while the bow drew out into a length of dusky hull. They could see the double row of deckhouses showing dimly white, and the big, black funnel high above them, but only the thumping of engines answered their cry, and in another moment the boat reeled and plunged as the steamer's stern went by. Then a little seething rush of foam lapped in over the gunwale, and Niven groaned.

"The brutes—they could have heard us if they had wanted to," he said with hoarse unevenness, and Appleby saw what was going to happen by the way his comrade flung in his oar.

"Hold up!" he said sternly. "Shake it off, and stiffen your back, Chriss. If you're going to give up we can't do anything."

"It can't make any difference," said Niven with hopeless apathy. "You know as well as I do that we can do nothing now."

It was not astonishing that his courage should desert him. He was worn out, and already the gig was taking more than splashes in over her gunwale, for they had blown well out from land and the freshening breeze had raised a little frothing sea in the more open water. It appeared very possible that the craft would roll over presently. Appleby, however, though very near it, was not quite beaten yet.

"That's where you're wrong," said he. "We can get a little sail on her and keep her running. There's not sea enough to hurt her when she's going before it, and we're tolerably sure to pick up a ship or see the land to-morrow."

It was a relief to have something to do, and Niven felt a very little easier in mind when they had stepped the mast, half-hoisted the sail and baled the boat dry. She ran well as long, flat-floored boats do, and, though there was usually a sea that looked unpleasantly big following close behind her, no more water came on board. Niven lay on the floorings by his comrade's feet where the stern kept the wind and spray off him, and Appleby sat at the tiller doing his best to keep the boat before the sea, and watching the froth swirl past her. It raced forward faster than they were travelling, rose above the gunwale on either hand, and then surged on into the darkness and was lost again. He had only this and the chill of the wind that swept over his shoulder to guide him, and by and by, when the gig swerved a little, in place of seething past, the foam lapped into her. Then Niven

would stir himself and bale to free the boat of the water before more came on board her. He had, however, no great difficulty in doing it, because a buoyant craft of that kind will, so long as one can keep her straight, run before a tolerably nasty sea without shipping much water, but both lads knew they were driving four or five miles further from the land every hour.

They saw no more steamers, and very little of anything beyond the streaks of froth that went hissing by. Sometimes for a few minutes the moon shone through, but the silvery radiance was promptly blotted out by the haze again, and Appleby grew steadily colder and stiffer at the tiller. He was also getting drowsy, though he knew that if he relaxed his vigilance for a moment and let the gig swerve as she lurched forward with a sea the next would fill her to the gunwales or roll her over. At last when his head would droop a little in spite of his efforts, Niven, who was looking aft just then, rose half-upright.

"Hallo!" he said excitedly. "There's something coming up astern."

Appleby, with every nerve quivering, glanced over his shoulder, which was not wise of him, and saw a tall, dusky shape rush out of the darkness. Then the boat shot up to windward a little, and her weather gunwale was lost in a rush of foam.

"Bale!" he shouted, as he felt the chilly water splash about his ankles.

Niven grasped the baler, for there was evidently no time to lose, but as he did so a banging and rattling came out of the darkness, and a hoarse cry reached them.

"Down sail, and pull her up to us!"

Appleby let the sheet fly, and scrambled forward, and in another moment the flapping sail fell into the boat.

Then while the gig lurched perilously and they struggled to get the oars out a shadowy blur of thrashing canvas swept past them and stopped close ahead. After that he only remembered rowing savagely until a low dark hull that plunged and rolled swayed down upon the boat and smote her heavily. A man sprang down apparently with a rope, another leaning over the bulwarks clutched Niven and dragged him up, and Appleby, who did not quite know how he got there, found himself standing on a little schooner's deck. Somebody was speaking close beside him.

"She's twenty feet, anyway, and there's nowhere we could stow her."

"Then you can let her go," said another man. "Box her round with the staysail, Donegal. She'll fall off now. Let draw, and out with the main-boom again!"

There was no sharpness in the man's voice, and he spoke with a drawl, but Appleby had never seen sail handled as quickly on board the *Aldebaran*. Here and there a dark object hauled on a rope, and then with a swing to leeward and

a swift upward lurch the schooner was on her way again. He did not fancy the vessel was a trader, because she seemed too fast and small for that, and while he wondered what her business might be the man who had spoken touched him.

"Come right along, and we'll have a look at you," he said.

Appleby and Niven followed him into the little house under the mainboom, the floor of which was below the level of the deck, and stood still with the water trickling from them while a lamp swung above them. A little stove burned in one corner, the place seemed very hot, while a curious odour pervaded it. Then Appleby's eyes rested on the man who sat down at one end of the little swing table. He was tall and lanky, and his face was lean, while his skin was the colour of new leather, and a ponderous hand rested on the table in front of him. His hair was slightly grizzled, and there was something that suggested resolution in the set of his lips and the shape of his chin. There was, however, a little smile in his eyes, which were very keen.

"Sit you down," he said. "Kind of cold night for a picnic, and you were making good time for Yokohama when we saw you first."

The lads obeyed him, and the man thumped upon the beam above him when Niven sank huddled into a corner and closed his eyes. Then there was a cold draught as a skylight opened and a man looked in. "Wanting anything?" he said.

"Tell Brulée to worry round and raise a pint or two of coffee—hot," said the man at the table, who glanced at Appleby. "Your partner's played out, but we'll fix him in a minute."

"Are you the skipper of this schooner, sir?" asked Appleby.

The man nodded. "That's just what I am—Ned Jordan of Vancouver, British Columbia, though I kind of figure it's me that's conducting this meeting. It was about the picnic you were going to tell me."

Appleby felt reassured, for the man's voice was good-humoured, though he fancied it would not be advisable to trifle with him.

"There wasn't any picnic, sir," he said. "We didn't come out for pleasure."

"No," said Jordan dryly. "I didn't figure there was. Those things you've got on don't look quite like a city lad's outfit. Still, I was wondering if you were going to put it that way."

Appleby flushed a trifle, for he guessed the man's thoughts. "What do you fancy we are?" said he.

Jordan smiled dryly. "It's me that's asking the questions, but I'm quite open to tell you. You're two English lads from the big barque off Port Parry, and I figure you got tired of her."

"We didn't run away from her," said Appleby.

"Well," said Jordan with a trace of grimness, "whether you did or didn't

don't count for much with me, but I've no use for crooked talking on board this packet. Better tell me what started you off for Japan, and put it as straight as you can."

Appleby told his story, and Jordan glanced at Niven, who had opened his eyes again. "You would tell it the same way, too?"

"Of course," said Niven angrily. "Still, I'm not going to do it since you don't believe him."

There was a little gleam in Jordan's eyes, and, as he looked at them in turn, they found his gaze somewhat embarrassing. "Still, you're not worrying because you can't get back?" he said.

"No," said Appleby. "I'm uncommonly glad I can't."

Jordan nodded. "Not much to eat, and plenty kicks?" he said, as a man came in. "Well, here's the coffee, and I figure you could worry through a little grub as well. Whatever they fed you with on board the barque, they didn't make you fat."

He laid a fresh loaf, butter, and a can of meat upon the table, and the lads did not wait for a second invitation, while it was a good many minutes later when Appleby laid his knife down with a little sigh of content.

"We have got to thank you, sir, but it's time we asked where the schooner's going to, and when you can put us ashore?" he said.

Jordan nodded, and pointed to the northern half of the compass fixed in the skylight above him. "That's where she's going—up there into the ice and fog where the fur seals live," he said. "As to the other question, we could land you in Vancouver when the season's over. We're away five or six months as the usual thing."

"But that would never do for us," said Niven with dismay.

"No?" said Jordan dryly. "Well, you see, I wasn't thinking of you very much. I didn't ask you to come here, and there are a few other men as well as myself I've got to suit on board this packet."

Appleby stared at him in silence for a space. "But you can't take us away north unless we are willing to go," said he. "You could haul her on a wind, and put us ashore on the west coast of Vancouver Island to-morrow. My friend's father would pay you well for doing it."

Again the expression Appleby had noticed crept into Jordan's eyes. "Well," he said with a little laugh, "I figure I can, and if I put you ashore on the beach you'd starve in the bush. Now, I don't quite like the way you're talking, because while there's no kicking on board the *Champlain*, we've no use for more than one skipper—and that's me. When you've got that into your head we'll go on a little. Says you, 'The other lad's father will pay you.' Well, I don't know him, and he's living six thousand miles away, while if he'd sense enough to raise dollars he could heave away, he'd never have sent his son to sea. That's quite plain to

me."

"My father is a rich merchant, and a clever one," said Niven indignantly. "The value of a good many schooners like this one wouldn't be much to him."

"Then," said Jordan with a grim smile, "it's quite clear you don't take after him. Folks of that kind know when talking's not much use to them, but it's time we got ahead a little. We were nigh a month behind when we started from Vancouver, and with five boats way up before me, I'm not stopping one hour for anybody, and the *Champlain* is going north like a steamer while this breeze lasts. You've heard all I've got to tell you as to that. Now it might be two or three months before I could put you on board anything coming south, and in the meanwhile I've got to give you clothes and feed you, while, as I want all the dollars I've got, to do it for nothing wouldn't be square to me. So since you came on board the *Champlain*, I'm wanting your word that you'll stay there until we get back to Vancouver. You'll get half a man's share in what we make, if we find you useful and willing, and that seems to me a square offer."

Appleby looked at Niven. "It can't be helped—and we couldn't be worse off than we were in the *Aldebaran*," he said. "There's no use in telling him any more about your father."

Niven sat silent a little, and then nodded. "We'll come, sir," he said.

"Then," said Jordan, "it's a deal. Now those things of yours aren't quite fit to go sealing in, and you can take these along. Stickine will show you how to fix them up to-morrow."

He took out several curiously smelling garments from a cupboard, and shouted, "Stickine!" and in another minute the lads went out on deck and down a hatchway with a big silent man who grinned at them reassuringly.

CHAPTER VIII

THE 'CHAMPLAIN,' SEALER

A streak of sunlight that crept warm across his face and then swung away again awakened Appleby next morning, and for a moment or two he lay still staring about him in dreamy wonder. The *Aldebaran's* deckhouse was held together by little iron beams, and in place of these great square timbers and ponderous knees ran into the vessel's framing above his head. There was something curiously unfamiliar about them. Then he saw that a long shelf, divided into wooden bunks,

extended beyond the one he lay in, and there were more of them on the opposite side of the vessel. Between lay a space of shadow save where a shaft of sunlight came down through an opening, and Appleby remembered suddenly when as he watched it swing to and fro he felt a quick rise and fall which was very different from the long upward lurch of the *Aldebaran.* Reaching over he laid his hand on Niven's shoulder.

"Turn out! It's eight bells, and they're tacking ship," he said.

Niven was out of his bunk in a moment, and a burst of hoarse laughter greeted him, when he stood swaying, half-awake, on the deck, in the scantiest of attire, with dismay in his face.

"What's—what's all this?" he said. "Wherever have I got to?"

"Well," said the man called Stickine they had seen in the cabin, "I guess it isn't the *Aldebaran.* Now, hadn't you better get some of those things on to you?"

Niven struggled into the garments the man pointed to, while Appleby sat on the edge of his bunk and grinned at him, and a group of men sitting in the shadow with plates upon their knees watched them both curiously. There were five or six of them, and all had bronzed faces that had been darkened by frost and ice blink, as well as sun and wind, and there was, he fancied, a difference between these men and any he had seen on board the *Aldebaran.* He came to know them later—as a few gentlemen who watched affairs of State in Vladivostock, Washington, and Ottawa did—as very daring seamen and fearless free lances, who now and then came home rich with fur seal pelts from the misty seas, in spite of the edicts and gunboats of three great nations. In the meanwhile he saw they were getting a much better breakfast than that usually sent forward on board the *Aldebaran*, and there was an air of good-humoured comradeship about them. Appleby had by this time got into his trousers, and one of the group stood up when he dropped to the deck.

"Clear away for firing practice with the turret gun!" he said.

Niven stared at him a moment, and then guessing what was meant laughed a little. "No," he said "you've missed it this time."

"Be easy while I try him," said another man, and then slammed his hand down on the table. "Eyes front. 'Tinshun company!"

"Wrong again!" said Appleby who, remembering the warships at Port Parry, surmised that they were taken for lads who had quitted their nation's service without permission.

"Sure, an' how was I to know, when the woods is thick with them!" said the seaman glancing round at his comrades deprecatingly. "Then 'tis watch your topsail leaches and mainsail haul, again."

"Yes," said Appleby, grinning, "now you've got it. If you'd had any sense you'd have seen we were too thin for navy lads, and too young for the marines."

There was a chuckle, and the man, who had twinkling blue eyes, stretched out an inviting arm. "Then come along, darling, and ate," he said.

They sat down on a chest, and one of the company gave each of them a can of very good coffee, and pointing to the great piece of fish in a frying-pan tossed a loaf in their direction.

"Ned Jordan will see you earn it, so you needn't be afraid," he said.

Appleby helped himself, and Niven laughed when he saw that the men were watching him admiringly. "They feed you well out here," he said. "We didn't get soft bread and halibut for breakfast on board the *Aldebaran*."

"This," said a grinning man, "is a great country. Now I'm going to raise you, Donegal. The lad's with me."

The man he spoke to turned with a sparkle in his eyes, and the sun that shone down the hatch glinting on his coppery hair.

"This," he said, "is not a country—'tis the sea, an' the place ye come from is made up of the leavings of the old one. 'Tis the dumping-ground for all them we've no use for yonder—bankrupts, suicides and green-and-red-blind sailors. When a gintleman in my country is too big a nuisance to his neighbours, the boys sind the hat round and prisint him wid a ticket for Canadaw."

He brought out the last word with the accentuation of the French Canadian; but the big, lean sailorman only grinned at him. "An'," he said, "fwhat was ut brought you here thin, Donegal?"

Donegal laughed softly. "A hare," said he. "She would come an' sit on the turf-wall winking—impudent at me, an' with one of the guns that was out in '98 in the cabin, what would anny man of intilligince do? She was a good gun if ye gave her time and had something sthrong to lean her on, but the magistrate—an' me owing him tin pound rint—did not agree with me. There was no Ground Game Act thin, an' ye tuck the chances when ye went shooting in my counthry. Would ye be finding the lads another loaf—one is no use to them—Brulée, and now Mainsail Haul, was it the mate or the skipper who did not agree with ye?"

Appleby realized that speech was direct here and he must hold his own. "I fancy you all know how I came here, by this time, as well as I do," he said, glancing towards Stickine. "That man was about the cabin when I told my story—and they bring you a joint when you're through with your second course in the old country."

"Hear him!" said Donegal. "Sure now, for a sailorman, 'tis Stickine that romances tremenjous, an' he told us the other one was an earl's son from the old country. 'Turn the *Champlain* round and put me ashore—at once. What's the value of ten schooners to the father av me?' says he."

Niven looked somewhat foolish, but Appleby laughed. "Well, there was an Emperor's relative who went to sea in a merchant ship not very long ago," he

said.

Donegal shook his head solemnly. "The man was mad. All thim royal families but our one is," he said.

"In the meanwhile I'd like to know a little more about where we're going and what we're going to do, now I'm one of you," said Niven. "You see, I couldn't ask the skipper too many questions."

"'Tis his condescending modesty," said Donegal. "'One of you,' says he! Sure, 'tis ten years it would take to make a man of ye, an' it takes ten more to make a man into a sealer. Stickine, will ye enlighten the son av the ducal earl?"

Niven fidgeted, for he realized that education is not everything, and that even in speech he had not shown himself the seaman's equal; but Stickine tapped on the table. "It works out like this," he said; "we're going to hear the bear growl, and the eagle scream, and if it's a white-flag gunboat, put a pinch of salt right on the beaver's tail."

"Russia," said Niven, "and America, the beaver's Canada, but what have the gunboats to do with the seals?"

"Sure," said Donegal, "'tis plain they did not teach ye very much at school. Now, the seal, ye will observe, lives most of his time where no man can get at him in the lonely sea, but wanst in the year he crawls out on the rocks of St. Paul and St. George, up in the Behring Sea, and when it is not convenient for ye to find him there ye may call at one or two reefs in Russian water or the Copper Islands."

"Well," said Niven, "where do the warships come in?"

"'Tis patient as well as modest ye are," said the sealer. "Now, 'tis not discreet of a youngster to hurry a grown man, an' that they would have taught ye wid the thick end of a gun whin ye were in the marines!"

"I was never in the marines," said Niven a trifle hotly, and Donegal sighed.

"Sure," he said, "'tis a pity, but I will prolong the discussion. Now, by the laws of the three nations ye may kill the seals at sea, though they will not help ye to find them, that being left—with other things—to the sealerman's devices, an' the sea, ye will remember, is not the sea until it's more than three miles from land."

"That's a little mixed," said Appleby, glancing at the rest of the company.

"No," said Donegal. "'Tis reason. When you are inside the three miles you are in Russia, America, or Canada, because that's just how far a big gun could blow the head off ye."

"There was once an American who figured it was ten," said Stickine dryly.

"Fighting Bob!" said somebody, and there was a hoarse guffaw, during which Donegal said quietly, "An' the lashings of dollars it cost him."

"Now, 'tis strictly prohibited to any one but the American company that

rints them Pribyloff islands to kill the seals on land, an' if ye come too close on others I could tell of the Russians are not kind to ye. There was wanst a fifty-year-old schooner came home manned by starving men, an' they'd ate the last tail of the rats aboard her. 'Twas that or Siberia with them, but Stickine will tell ye the tale again."

"Then where do you catch the seals?" asked Appleby.

There was a little quiet laughter, and Donegal shook his head. "Asleep anywhere eight and ten miles out at sea, as 'tis entered in the logbook," he said. "Still, ye may discover that under circumstances unconthrollable the sealerman kills the holluschackie—where he can."

Appleby, glancing at the men's bronzed faces, fancied that their merriment was a trifle grim, but a voice came down through the hatch just then—

"If you are quite through with your talking you might come up and get more sail on her."

They went up in a body, for though Appleby had noticed already that discipline was not especially evident on board the *Champlain* he was also to discover that nobody loitered when there was work on hand. The lads followed, and the first thing that occurred to them was that the schooner was ridiculously small. After the great length and height of the *Aldebaran* she seemed a toy ship with two dainty little masts. Still, Appleby saw that they were tall for her length and made of the beautiful figured redwood which affords the maximum of strength. Her bowsprit was tilted high to lift the men who crawled out on it above the icy seas, and the great boom along her mainsail's foot ran out at least a fathom beyond her stern. Then he began to notice her slenderness forward in spite of the breadth of the beam that gave her stability to carry a press of sail, and the lift of the deck towards the bows which the rail carried higher in a bold curve that would keep her dry when she thrashed to windward. Between the masts stood a nest of boats packed one inside the other with their thwarts lifted out, and Niven wondered what so small a vessel did with so many. It was evident she did not carry them as a precaution, for he could see that everything about her suggested strength and safety.

About the boats stood a few Siwash Indians, squat, broad-shouldered men dressed in jean and canvas, and looking, except for their brown colour, very much like the rest of the crew. They were, it seemed, by no means savages, but again Appleby wondered, for they were doing nothing, and the *Champlain* carried almost men enough to work an English merchant ship. Aft with half his lean height showing above the deckhouse skipper Jordan stood swaying at the wheel, and he swung one hand up when he saw the lads.

"Feeling quite pert this morning?" he said when they came aft. "Well, you can go up and loose the fore-topsail."

Though this was not the kind of order the lads had been used to they went forward, and felt that the skipper's eyes were on them when they stopped abreast of the foremast. There were no rattlings on the *Champlain's* shrouds, and Appleby was wondering how they were to get aloft when Niven pointed to the hoops the big foresail was bound to which ran like a ladder up the mast.

"I fancy those would do?" he said.

They went up, and it was an easy matter to loose the little three-cornered topsail which stretched when set from the masthead to the end of the gaff. Then they stood still a moment or two perched high on the cross-trees looking down on the slender strip of hull and the white-topped sea. The *Champlain* was swinging over it, and the foam that roared off from her bows and swept away down the white wake showed the pace at which she was travelling. Niven drew in a deep breath of contentment as he swung in a wide sweep to and fro, the blue of the sky above him and the blue and white of the sea below.

"I'm not sorry the *Aldebaran's* at Port Parry, and we're here," he said. "She's a beauty, and they feed you well, while I never fancied anything twice her size could tear along like this."

"Hallo! Going to sleep up there?" said somebody, and Appleby glancing down saw a little twinkle in the eyes of Stickine.

"Topsail's all clear for hoisting, sir," he said, and one or two of those about the big man laughed. "What's the quickest way of getting down, Chriss?"

Niven stooped and grasped a rope. "Topsail tack, I think. It should do," he said.

In another second the rope was rasping between his ankles and through his hands, then it yielded suddenly and he fell at least a fathom with Appleby's feet just above his head. It held again, however, and he slid to the deck, while the rest were setting the big maintopsail with a yard along the head of it when he went aft. The skipper glanced at him a moment, and then turned to the men.

"We'll goosewing her, boys. Get your boom foresail over," he said.

He span the wheel a trifle, the long narrow foresail lurched across, and when it swung outboard on the opposite side the *Champlain* lifted her head a little and the foam that lapped higher swept almost to her quarter-rail.

"She's flying," said Niven. "Going like a train."

Then he felt that the skipper was watching him, and wondered whether he had done anything unfitting when he saw his little, dry smile.

"It was a straight tale you told me—most of it. Stick to that kind of talk," he said.

Niven flushed a trifle, and was about to answer when Appleby kicked him, and he said, "Yes, sir," instead.

Jordan nodded. "Rich men's sons don't go to sea," he said. "Well, now,

there's a thing you can remember. Never swing yourself down by anything until you know just what it is and what it's made fast to. We've no use for show tricks on board this packet, and I figure the cook will find something you can do."

They went forward, Appleby grinning, Niven somewhat flushed, and it was that night before they quite understood the skipper's meaning. The wind had fallen and the sky was hazy when they sat talking on the forehatch. Donegal leaned upon the rail not far from them, Stickine swung black against the dimness at the wheel, and the *Champlain* was sliding slowly north, a vague moving shadow across the great emptiness. It seemed to Appleby that he could feel the sea as he had never done on board the *Aldebaran*. It was so close beneath him, and life and zest of it throbbed through everything he touched. Niven, however, was looking at the sealer.

"You were aft when the skipper spoke to us, Donegal," he said. "What did he mean by saying he knew we'd told him the right tale?"

The man turned round and regarded him gravely. "Mr. Callaghan—an' Donegal to my friends—an' for the son of a ducal earl there's a lot of things you don't know," he said.

"Then," said Niven, "how am I going to learn them if I don't ask questions?"

"Now," said Donegal dryly, "ye are showing ye have some sinse, an' if it's searching for knowledge ye are, I will enlighten ye. The moral av ut is that while ye speak the truth, the little things ye do don't stand up and conthradict ye. Now, when ye knew where the topsail was that showed ye had been to sea, but they've rattlings on the shrouds av a square-rigger, an' it was easy to see that when ye could not find them it perplexed ye. Then when ye were sleeping Ned Jordan had Stickine bring some of the things ye tuk off into the cabin, an' there was names done nice in red on wan or two of them. 'It's all quite straight but the last ov it, an' there's lads who can't help talking big. Many's the time I've tried to teach my own ones better—wid a fence rail,' says he."

Donegal looked hard at Niven, but Appleby, who laughed softly, kicked his comrade's leg.

"We'll not worry about what he told your skipper any more—but it's true," he said.

Donegal said nothing further, but his eyes twinkled curiously, and there was silence for a space until a blink of light crept out of the dimness astern. The moon had risen, but was hidden by a cloud-bank in the south-east, and there was nothing to be seen but the light that grew steadily higher and brighter. Then a red one became visible, and while a vague black shape grew into form there was a blink of green. Stickine struck the deckhouse with his foot as he pulled over the wheel, and the *Champlain* swung round a little, but still the lights seemed to follow her.

"A steamer," said Appleby. "What can they be after? Our canvas is plain enough against the sky."

Donegal grunted. "A top-heavy coal basket of a gunboat, sure!" he said. "How is it I know? Well, ye will have a better acquaintance by and by with the ships-of-war, an' any one could see the way she's rolling if he looked at her."

Appleby could see the higher light reeling to and fro, and a long smear of smoke that streaked the sea below. While he watched it the dim hull lengthened out, and he saw the white froth boil beneath the flung-up bows. They came down amidst a spray cloud, and the slanted masts swung wildly as the long roll of the Pacific lapped about the shadowy hull. The steamer was close upon the *Champlain's* quarter now.

Suddenly there was a faint twinkle of brightness on board her, and then a great shaft of light smote a glittering track across the waters and rested on the schooner's stern. Jordan's lean figure was forced up against it, and Appleby could see the little dry smile in his face as he nodded to Stickine at the wheel. He pulled it over a spoke or two, and the *Champlain* swerved a trifle, while Jordan's smile became a trifle grimmer, for the light also swinging still blazed upon her stern. Then it beat into the lad's eyes and dazzled them, swept forward and lighted all the foresail when it rested on the boats, flickered up and down the deck, forcing up every rope by its brilliancy, and vanished so suddenly that Niven afterwards said he could hear it snap. Next moment the steamer drew ahead, and the last he saw of her was her shadowy stern lifted high on the shoulder of a long smooth sea.

Jordan laughed a little as he paced up and down beside the wheel. "American," he said. "That fellow will know us if he falls in with us again."

CHAPTER IX
A TRIAL OF SPEED

It was early one morning rather more than three weeks after the lads had fallen in with the *Champlain*, and a little breeze had just sprung up with the sun when Appleby, who was scrubbing down decks just then, turned upon Niven who stood close by with a dripping bucket in his hand.

"I want the water here, and not all over me," he said, pointing with his bare toes to the sand he had sprinkled on the planking.

Niven grinned, and stooping, rolled his trousers to the knee, after which he commenced a little step-dance up and down the forehatch, and his laugh rang lightly when a drowsy growl rose from beneath.

"You want good thick clogs to do it well, but I fancy this will bring him up," he said. "Did yez sleep all day in the old country, Donegal?"

Now few men would have ventured to do what Niven was doing on board a merchant ship, where the time for sleep is scanty, but as the *Champlain* carried twice as many men as were apparently needed, they had ample space for rest. Still, as he swung round grimacing with his back to the scuttle in the hatch, a coppery head rose up from it, and a long arm reached out. Then there was a chuckle from Stickine at the wheel, and Niven turned again just in time to receive the contents of the bucket full in his face. After that there was a scurry across the deck, and he swung himself up by the mast-hoops, while a rope-end flicked about the one from which he had just whipped his naked feet, and Donegal sat down on the hatch with a placid grin.

"Ye can stop up there and cool, me son, until Ned Jordan comes up," he said.

Niven sat down on the jaws of the foresail gaff, and wiped his dripping face. "Sure, 'tis an ungrateful beast, an' me just rousing him while the morning's fresh," he said. "Tom, if I had that bucket I could drop it nicely on his head."

Donegal gazed up at the lad reflectively. "'Tis what comes of fattening ye too quick," he said. "There was no thricks of that kind about ye on board the *Aldebaran*, and ye had a distressful hungry look when we got ye."

Niven could not find a neat rejoinder, and sat still with his arm round the throat halliards high up on the gaff, while the sun that rose with a smoky glare out of the eastern haze shone into his face. It was bronzed to the colour of copper, and it is possible that his friends would at first sight have found it difficult to recognize the lad they had last seen strutting in new uniform. He now wore jean trousers and a thick canvas jacket which Jordan had given him, and while both were considerably too large there were big smears of tar on them. His hands were as hard as a navvy's, and though he had not lost the love of frolic he had found no scope for on board the *Aldebaran* there was a difference in his face.

The sea had set its stamp upon Niven, and the set of his lips had grown more resolute, while though they could still twinkle his eyes were steadier. Hardship and the need for quick decision and self-reliance had stiffened him, for Niven had been taught a good deal since he left Sandycombe School, and the knowledge that even a rich merchant's son was entitled to nothing he could not obtain by his native wit or the strength of his hand was perhaps the most useful of it all. Money, he had discovered, was not much use at sea, where nobody cared in the least who he was, and it was by the things he did he must stand or fall.

There was less change in Appleby, who had been early cast upon his own

resources, but he, who had never been boisterous, was a trifle quieter, and had already added an inch or two to the breadth of his chest. His skin also resembled half-tanned leather, and he was picturesquely arrayed in garments of patched canvas somewhat too large for him.

In the meanwhile Niven glancing aft, and wondering by what means he could avoid Donegal, who appeared disposed to sit where he was all morning, saw the crimson glare of the sunrise beat athwart the sea. It streaked the long smooth undulations that rolled up after the *Champlain* a coppery red, and the schooner swung over them lazily with half-filled mainsail banging. Under the sun there rolled a bank of smoky vapour, and just as Jordan came up from the little deckhouse, Niven saw something slide out of it. He was not altogether sorry, for although there was no abuse of the men on board the *Champlain*, he fancied the skipper's toleration had its limits, and when he looked down Donegal flicked a rope-end suggestively.

Next moment Jordan saw him. "Now, I figured you were washing decks. Anybody tell you to go up there?" he said.

Niven looked distinctly sheepish, and Donegal grinned. "Is ut telling that's any use to him, an' me inviting him to come down the last half-hour," he said. Just then the object that crept out of the haze grew clearer, and swinging himself up by the peak halliard, Niven stretched out an arm. "There's a schooner coming up astern, sir," he said. "Another just showing abeam!"

Donegal sprang into the shrouds, Jordan whipped up his glasses, and Niven, who saw they had forgotten him, slipped down. He had scarcely reached the deck when the skipper called out, and two or three men came scrambling out of the scuttle.

"Hand those topsails down, and get up the biggest yard-headers," he said.

There was no scurrying, but the men were very swift, and in a few minutes the little three-cornered topsails they had carried at night were down, and two big ones set. The *Champlain* quickened her pace a trifle, but it was evident the other schooners were coming up with her. Jordan laid down his glasses.

"The *Belle* and the *Argo*. They're bringing the breeze along with them," he said.

The sea was still only faintly rippled about them, and the smoke from the galley eddied in the hollow of the foresail, but the other vessels had grown plainer and were slanting over, while Niven, who resumed his deck scrubbing, fancied that Jordan strode up and down impatiently. Then Brulée, the French-Canadian cook, put his head out of the galley. "The breakfast is quite ready, *camarades*," he said.

The lads took their places with the rest, and when they sat down Niven glanced at the big lean-faced Stickine.

"What are we running away from those fellows for?" he said.

"Hear him!" said Donegal. "'Tis marvellous, his observation."

"Give the lad a show now and then," said the Canadian. "Well, now, when you see Ned Jordan run away you can figure there's dollars somewhere at the bottom of it, because if he didn't want to it would take quite a fleet of gunboats to put a move on him."

Brulée laughed. "You others are all lak that," he said. "*V'la la belle chose—courant en courant—la chasse de dollar.* It is so with you also in my country, the Quebec."

"Well, now," said a little man who hailed from Montreal, "there was a time when some of you made tolerably good running down there under Montcalm too. I've seen the place where that chase came off, and it's right behind the ramparts at Quebec."

"They run!" said Niven, who had read of the famous scene on the heights of Abraham, but Donegal stretched out a big hand, and he wriggled backwards with his plate.

"What come well from General Wolfe is a thrifle too big for the size av ye," he said. "They were good men, both Montcalm and him, and 'tis but the makings of one I'm after licking out of ye. Stickine, ye may purceed."

"Well," said the Canadian, "where the fur seals go to when they haul off from the Behring Sea nobody quite knows, but they're coming north, thousands of them, now, and some men can figure better than others where they'll first show up again."

"Is the skipper fortunate at finding them?" asked Appleby.

"Well, I wouldn't put it like that, just because it's tolerably plain figuring that it wants a good big head to make a lucky man," said Stickine. "It's the one who can do the most thinking comes out on top, and the things Jordan knows are the ones that work out the reckoning."

"You've hit it plump," said another man. "Ned Jordan's chased the seals that long he can tell you just what they're thinking."

Stickine nodded. "And think they can; they, and the sea otter, and the salmon they live upon. Well, now, when Ned Jordan has worried it all out for days, he has no use for a crowd of men who're too lazy to do their own thinking, hanging right on to him. No, sir. When the *Champlain* drops right down on top of the seal herd she'll be there alone."

They went up as soon as breakfast was over, and Niven saw that one of the schooners had drawn close up on the *Champlain's* quarter. The breeze had freshened, and both vessels were hurling the froth about their bows, and slanting over until the foam was near the rail. Foot by foot the stranger drew up, and Niven saw the reason as he noticed the length of her slanted masts. She sank

to her bowsprit at every dip, and the spray whirled half the height of her tall foresail, when she swung her streaming bows up again. A man stood aft with both hands gripping her wheel, and another with a broad grin on his face leaned on her rail. His voice reached them faintly.

"We've been feeling lonely for the sight of you these two weeks," he said. "Now it 'pears to me that as the *Belle* has got the speed, we're going to have your company."

Jordan smiled grimly as he glanced to weather. "Well, I don't know. There's more wind coming along," he said.

Appleby was sensible of a little thrill of pleasurable excitement, for it was evident that if Jordan desired to fall in with the seal herds alone he must sail for it, and glancing aft at the skipper's lean figure and quiet bronzed face he felt that he was not the man to be lightly beaten.

At noon there was no great distance between the vessels, though the *Belle* with her tall masts had crept forward a little upon the *Champlain's* weather-quarter, and the third one lay a quarter of a mile astern. The spray was whirling in sheets, and now and then a frothing green deluge came in, for all three were listed well down to their rails. The sea was also flecked and seamed with white, and it was evident to the lads that no skipper would have driven his vessel so hard had he not men enough to swiftly shorten sail. Then just as Brulée put his head out of the galley, the *Champlain* heeled further by a screaming blast, buried her lee bow, and when she hove her head clear again all that side of her ran water.

Jordan glanced up at his main topmast, and there was a little twinkle in his eyes as he said, "I figure nobody would blame us for not hanging on to our sail. Boys, we'll have the topsail down."

The big sail swung down below the mainsail gaff, but when Appleby would have laid his hand upon the tack to haul it lower still Stickine laughed as he stopped him. "There's two ways of winning a race," he said. "Let her lie. 'Pears to me Ned Jordan will want her up again."

Appleby did not quite understand, but he saw Jordan's pose stiffen and his face grow intent as the *Belle*, still carrying everything, forged ahead. Then her topsail also fluttered, and he swung up his hand.

"Sheets in, and stand by your peak halliard to let go with a run," he said.

Then there was a scurry along the deck, blocks groaned and rattled, and the long booms were dragged in as the skipper put down his helm. The schooner came round, and because no vessel will carry the sail on a wind that she will going free, her lee-rail was in the sea and the deck sloped like a roof. Foam and green water seethed over her weather bow, and Appleby thrilled all through as he hung on by a pin with one hand on the peak halliard ready to let the mainsail gaff swing down to ease the pressure. He understood the manoeuvre now, for

the *Champlain* was shooting up across the other schooner's stern for the berth that would give her a free hand upon her weather. It was almost too late when the skipper of the *Belle* realized this, but he put his helm down pluckily, and then the weight of his tall masts came into play. The *Belle* seemed buried in a white confusion when she came up, too, and a huddle of dripping figures appeared to wash aft together when she dipped her nose in a sea. Then there was a crash as she swung her jibs out of the foam again, and her foresail blew over to leeward banging, while the *Champlain* swept up dripping on her weather. A man sprang up in the shrouds shouting ironically, but Jordan shook his head and called him down.

"We've no use for that kind of thing here," he said.

Appleby was dripping with the spray, but his blood tingled, and his face was flushed, while Stickine, who stood close by, nodded to him approvingly.

"Neat, oh, yes. Quite neat!" he said. "Her foresail gaff's gone, and we're well up on her weather where we can do what we like with her. Still, I figure we're not going to hold on to our own sticks very long."

"Square away!" Jordan's voice rang out, and the long mainboom swung out again, while there was by contrast a curious ease of motion when the *Champlain*, rising more upright, turned her stern to the sea. It no longer thrashed in over her weather bow, but ran forward white-topped on either side of her, but the breeze was even stronger, and Appleby wondered, when the voice rose again.

"Run the gaff topsail back to the masthead, boys!"

It took several of them to do it, and more were needed before they hauled the sheet home. Then the *Belle* dropped away behind, though the other vessel stayed where she was, half-a-mile under their lee quarter, a pyramid of swaying sail.

Jordan laughed softly as he glanced towards her over his shoulder. "Old man Carter's most as stubborn as a mule," he said. "Well, we'll have more wind by and by, and I'm figuring we'll see things then. I don't know any reason you shouldn't get your dinner in the meanwhile, boys."

They trooped below, and there was no great change when they came up, except that the *Belle* was farther astern and the sea seemed to be getting steeper. They swept on before it all afternoon, and the men were a little more silent when, with a great rolling in of smoky vapours, nightfall came. It was now blowing tolerably hard, but while the seas frothed white as they surged past high above the rail, the *Champlain* still drove on under all her lower sails. She was swept by bitter spray, and the man who held her straight was panting at the wheel, but the vapours rolled down thicker and the *Belle* and the *Argo* were indistinguishable. Niven was lying in his bunk when Stickine came down, and his face was a trifle grave, while, as he flung off his dripping oilskins, there was a great thud and

gurgle forward, and something seethed across the hatch.

"Put her nose in that time," he said. "Well, we've got to shake them off, but we're taking steep chances already, and we can't press her as we're doing very long."

"Could you make the others out?" asked a man, and Stickine laughed silently.

"No," he said. "Still, we will do if the moon comes through. I know old man Carter, and he'd run her under before he'd let us beat him. It wouldn't take them long to get the spare gaff on the *Belle*."

He flung himself into his bunk as he was, and Appleby, who had heard him, asked no questions. He began to realize that these big, good-humoured sealers could on occasion be very grim, though this was not a cause of much astonishment to him, for he had seen already that it is not, as a rule, the domineering and ostentatious who take the foremost place when the real stress comes. He slept, but it was lightly, for the roar of the sea about the bows and groaning of the hard-pressed hull roused him now and then. At times he seemed to feel the great beams and knees straining above him and the tremulous quiver of the vessel's skin, while when for the fourth time he wakened suddenly a shower of brine came down with a hoarse voice through the scuttle. The light of the swinging lamp showed that Niven was sitting up wide awake, and in a few more minutes they crawled out on deck with several of the men.

A shower of stinging spray beat into their eyes, and when he could see again, Niven had a disconcerting glimpse of a big frothing comber apparently curling above the schooner's stern. The decks ran water, but when he glanced aloft every sail but the topsail was drawing still, and he clutched the rail when as they swung upwards a blink of moonlight pierced the flying vapours. To leeward of them lay a schooner, her hull just showing faintly black through the white smother that seethed about her, until she hove a breadth of it up streaming in a leeward roll. It appeared insignificant in comparison with the mass of dusky sail that swayed low again towards the rushing froth as she lurched back to weather, and then Appleby glanced aft with a little thrill to the grim set face of the man who stood panting at the *Champlain's* wheel.

The hiss of the seas that followed, the roar at the bows, the wild humming of the blast and the whirling spray stirred his blood. They were all of them tokens of what man could dare, and the strain, that human nerve could bear, for he knew that already hemp and wire and timber were being taxed to the uttermost, and that if the helmsman gave her a spoke too much or too little the next sea would curl on board or the great black mainsail jibe over and strew the *Champlain's* decks with ruin. Niven stood beside him, and Appleby saw that although his face was almost colourless in the moonlight, his eyes were shining.

"Oh, it's great!" he said. "Worth all we stood on board the *Aldebaran* to have a hand in this."

"And how many hands were ye born with when I see two av them holding ye where ye are?" said Donegal, who apparently heard him. "Is ut dollars or diversion a man goes to sea after?"

Niven laughed. "Dollars. Oh, get out! You know you feel it yourself," he said. "You've got everything just throbbing inside you as I have now."

Donegal grinned broadly. "And what if you're right?" he said. "'Tis born in the blood av the likes av me, but if I was the son av a ducal earl it's sorrow on the day would find me on the sea."

He got no further, but grabbed the lad's shoulder and held him fast as the *Champlain* swerved a little and a sea came in. It swirled about them icy cold as she rolled down to lee, and the scuppers were spouting when with a wild lurch she swung back to weather. Then Donegal thrust the pair of them aft together.

"Get a good hold an' keep it, until we have some need av ye," he said.

Then the blink of moonlight went out and the *Champlain* was alone, while the two lads shivered and dodged the spray as she swept onwards through the night, until a faint light crept out of the east across the whitened sea. The wet canvas showed black against it, there was a doleful wail of wind, and then when man's strength sinks to its lowest something happened. The *Champlain* put her bows in, and Jordan sprang suddenly up on the deckhouse gazing astern. What he said was scarcely audible, but the sealers apparently understood it, for the deck was filled with scrambling men. Down came the mainsail's peak, forward a slashing sail slid down, and the outer jib thrashed furiously above the bowsprit. Niven was clawing his way towards it when Stickine grasped his shoulder and flung him back.

"I guess this is going to be work for a man," he said.

Niven, who watched him crawl out along the bowsprit, held his breath when spar and man dipped into the sea, and then floundered aft to where the others were rolling up the foot of the half-lowered mainsail. It slatted and banged above them, and now and then the long boom beneath the foot of it that ran a fathom or more beyond the stern, swung in, for the schooner was coming up to the wind, but the rush and stress of the race had stirred his blood, and when it became evident that somebody was wanted there, he swung himself up on the foot-rope beneath its outer end as he otherwise might not have done. In another moment Appleby was up beside him, and Jordan standing at the wheel glanced dubiously at them. Then he nodded.

"You've got to begin sometime," he said.

It was not easy to keep a grip of the foot-rope, and more difficult still to roll up the sail and tie the reef points round it because both hands were needed

and to hold on they must lie across the boom. Still, they accomplished it, and Appleby felt content when Jordan made a little gesture as they sprang down. He was not a man who said more than was necessary, but it was evident that he was pleased with them. Then they hauled at the halliards with the rest, and in a few more minutes they were once more on their way under easy sail.

"She's snug for a while, but we'll have the trysail handy," said Jordan quietly. "Old man Carter was a little slow. They're catching the heft of it on board the *Argo*."

Appleby glanced down to leeward and saw the *Argo*. She was hove down with one side lifted high above the sea, and loose canvas thrashing all over her.

"I'll figure he'll just save his masts," said Stickine. "Wouldn't snug her down till we did. Well, I figure Carter couldn't help being born a mule."

Then the *Argo* grew dim behind them, and they swept on into an empty sea, for the race was over, and there was no sign of the *Belle*.

CHAPTER X
HOVE TO

At noon next day, Jordan once more brought the *Champlain's* head to wind, and they put the third reef in her mainsail, while when she swept on again the sea grew steeper behind her, until the combers that raced after her apparently hung frothing above her helmsman's head. She would fling her stern up to meet them and while the man panted over his jerking wheel her bowsprit went down and down. Then she would leisurely lift her nose and surge forward lapped in seething foam, only to sink with a smooth, swift lurch again.

It was dryest aft, though there was water splashing everywhere, and the two lads hung about the mainmast where the little deckhouse partly sheltered them, watching the helmsman's grim face as he swung with his wheel. They knew, by this time, that, while it is a somewhat difficult affair to keep a hard-pressed vessel straight before the sea, unpleasant things are apt to happen to a fore-and-aft one if it is not done.

Still, the man knew his work, and did it, and at last, towards nightfall, when the sea was all spray and foam, Jordan, who came up, stood staring astern. After a minute or two he shook his head.

"We had better round her up while we can," he said. "Get the main-gaff

down, and you'll be handy with the trysail."

They were very handy, and there was a good many of them, but Appleby held his breath when the foresail was lowered, and the mainsail peak swung down. Jordan was still looking astern, and he nodded after an especially big sea went smoking past them.

"We'll try it now," he said.

The man beside him swayed with the wheel, the *Champlain* swung round to windward, and there was a roar when a roller burst into spray upon that side of her. Then she swung further yet, and as the big mainboom came down the little three-cornered trysail went thrashing up the mast. Everybody was doing something amidst a great banging of canvas, and in another few moments there was a wonderful quietness. Appleby gasped, and Stickine who went by dripping grinned at him, while Jordan nodded to the men.

"She'll lie easy now," he said.

In place of running before it the *Champlain* lay almost head to wind, rising and falling with now and then a little lurch to leeward and a curious buoyancy. The strip of sail above her bowsprit and the trysail aft just sufficed to hold her stationary, and it was with little more than a spray wisp at her bows she bobbed in a curious cork-like fashion to the sea. Except for one or two of them the men crawled away below, and the lads, who were wet through, were glad to climb down into the stuffy warmth beneath the hatch.

It was dark down there now save for the flickering radiance of the lamp which shone upon the wet brown faces and the smears of smoke. The dusky hold reeked with the smell of steaming clothes, but the lads had grown used to odours which would have sickened them before they went to sea. Niven shook off the oilskins Jordan had given him, and as usual commenced his questions.

"The sea looked nasty before we brought her up," he said. "How was it we scarcely shipped any of it?"

"It was," said Stickine dryly. "Still, Ned Jordan knows his business, sonny."

Niven did not care for the epithet, or the grin which usually accompanied it, but he had discovered that one has to put up with a good deal that one does not like at sea.

"Of course!" he said. "But why couldn't we have gone on running?"

Montreal, the man who sat nearest the stove, laughed softly as he raised his head. "Listen to it. That's why!" he said.

There was a moment's silence, and while the *Champlain* rolled to leeward, and the floorings slanted under them until no man could have kept his footing, all could hear the scream of the rigging ring through the roar of the wind. It was a significant answer, but it left a little that was not quite plain yet, and Stickine nodded when Appleby glanced at him.

"It works out like this. A time comes when she'll run no longer—and then it's too late to heave her to," he said.

"Yes," said Appleby reflectively. "Of course if the sea was too bad to run before it would be too big to bring her up in, because while she was swinging round she'd catch it on her beam. Still, if you had run too long what could you do?"

"Just nothing," said Stickine gravely. "Wait until she ran under and took you down."

He stopped, and there was a thud that sent a little shiver through two of the listeners as the *Champlain* plunged into a sea, for they had been taught sufficient to see the picture the brief words called up. In the silence that followed Brulée leaned forward with a curious intentness in his eyes.

"*Comme ça!*" he said, swinging down a brown hand with suggestive suddenness. "I have seen it. We come down from Labrador in the *Acadie* brig, and it is blow the grand ouragan."

He drew in his breath, and gazed into the dimness as though he saw none of those about him, and then with a little shake of his shoulders stretched out a finger and pointed to Niven. "I was as young as him, and it was in the clear of the moon when the *Acadie* was hove to, one brought me to the rail to see the *Madeleine*. She was topsail schooner which load with us, and we had all the friend on board her. Whether she will not heave to, or the captain he is dare too much, I do not know, but she comes up from the spray and pass close, so close. I see the topsails black in the moon, and the jib she lift high. Then she is over run the sea, and I shut tight my eye. It is in a moment I look again—and there is no more *Madeleine*."

Again there was silence, and Donegal nodded sympathetically when the French-Canadian turned away his head. "*Ave!*" he said. "For their good rest."

It was a minute or two before Niven, who had shivered a little at the tale, spoke again. "He told us the captain dared too much," he said.

"Sure!" said Donegal. "Is that perplexing ye, an' am I to stuff ye with wisdom so ye can spill it out av ye? Still, that wan's easy. 'Tis the daring ye want at sea, but ye must dare just so far, an' when it's necessary, for the man who does not know when the conthract is too big for him is going to have it shown him what he is. Ye can follow me?"

Niven was not quite sure that he did, but Stickine smiled grimly as he nodded. "It's quite plain figuring. He's a blame fool," he said.

Appleby stared at the speaker with a faint perplexity, for while there were occasions when Donegal the sealer and his comrades talked arrant rubbish they now and then brought truths the lad had scarcely realized home to him in a fashion that carried conviction as well as astonishment with it. He wondered whether

the sea had taught them, or there was something that opened the eyes of the thoughtful in the simple life they led. It was one which at least demanded qualities that were an ornament to any man, and more often than not the primitive virtues which humanity cannot rise beyond showed through what some would have deemed his comrades' coarseness. Once or twice as he listened it was dimly borne in upon the lad that while manhood was a greater thing than culture or refinement all that was most worthy in it was founded on a few eternal verities.

Niven, however, could not be serious long, and presently he laughed at Donegal as he turned over to dry his other side before the little stove. He felt luxuriously contented to lie there in the stuffy warmth, and listen to the growling of the seas.

"There was something Stickine was to tell us—about a fifty-year-old schooner, and a crew of starving men," he said.

Donegal nodded. "That ate the rats? Get up on the hind legs av ye, now, an' talk, Stickine."

There was a little murmur from the rest, and the big, lean-faced Canadian looked uneasy. "Pshaw! You've heard that tale before," he said.

"Some av us," said Donegal. "An thim would hear it again. The others has not, and they're waiting on ye anxiously!"

The men murmured approval, and Stickine shook out his pipe with a little deprecatory gesture. "I'll make you very tired, boys, but if you will have it this is how it was," he said. "It was 'bout through with the afternoon watch when the fog shut down on the four of them in the whaler in Russian water. They heard the schooner's bell, but it's kind of difficult to fix a sound in a fog, and when it let up sudden they allowed they'd lost her."

"Sure!" said Donegal. "Mainsail Haul could tell ye that in a fog ye hear the sounds in front of ye behind ye. It is digressing ye are, Stickine, but the boys is wondhering what four sealermen were squandhering their time luxurious for in a whaler."

Appleby understood the comment, for he had seen a couple of whale boats on the beach at Port Parry, and they were costly examples of the boat-builder's skill. Stickine, however, laughed silently.

"Old man Corliss got her for nothing—and she was built for the Government with flooring gratings fore and aft, but we needn't worry 'bout how he did it now. Well, there they were, with a big lump of a sea running, shut in by the fog, and they had to keep her head-to with the oars when the wind came down."

"Fog—and a breeze!" said Niven, and Donegal shook his fist at him.

"'Tis bethraying the ignorance av ye, ye are again," he said. "Up there 'tis fog for ever except when 'tis a gale, an' before it's through with that the fog crawls in again. Ye will not heed the lad, Stickine."

"Well," said the sealer, "they held her head to wind, until just before sun up a gunboat came along, and she come that sudden they'd no time to heave the seals they'd with them over before she was going hard astern close alongside of them. The first look at her kind of sickened them. She was a Russian."

"There was fog—and they stopped there?" said Montreal.

"They did. There was quick-firer turned right down on the boat," said Stickine dryly. "Well, it was all fixed up inside five minutes. The whaler was hove up, and a guard with side-arms marched them before a Russian officer, and he was quite anxious to know where they'd last seen the schooner. Now, it was kind of curious there wasn't one of the boys could remember."

"Had they been sealing inside the limits?" asked Appleby.

"No, sir," said Stickine. "Not that time, anyway. When they last saw the land they were well off shore."

"Then the Russians had no right to seize them, and the Canadian Government could have made them pay up thousands of dollars," said Niven.

A little, grim smile crept into the faces of the men. "That," said one of them, "is where you're wrong. They had all the right they wanted when they had the men and guns, and who's going to believe a poaching sealer when an officer in kid-gloves tells quite a different story?"

"And have British subjects no redress?" asked Appleby with a little flush in his face, and Montreal grinned at him with grim approval.

"Oh, yes, when they can get it—and they do now and then, though they don't usually worry the Government folks at Ottawa," he said. "They took them to Peter Paul, Stickine?"

"They did," said Stickine. "And they kept them most of eight months there cooped up in a loghouse with a little dried fish to eat, and 'bout half enough sour black bread. They wouldn't tell the officer where that schooner was, you see, and when they're not put down on the papers men in prison get kind of forgotten in that country."

"And you believe it has happened—to Canadians?" asked Niven with a little gasp of anger.

The veins swelled up on Montreal's forehead. "Well, there are sealer's boats, British and American, that get lost, and nobody but the partners of the men who pulled in them and a woman or two away down south worries very much," he said. "I had a brother in one of them."

There was silence for almost a minute before Stickine went on again. "Two of them got very sick, and they all got thin, until when the spring came they were walked out every day with a guard to take care of them. Perhaps the officer figured it would be kind of awkward if they died on his hands and then somebody remembered them. Well, one day nigh sundown the mate and a sick man were

sitting on the beach looking at the sea, and wondering if their folks in Canada would ever hear of them again. They were to be sent away from that place in a day or two.

"Now, there was an old schooner that must have been getting shaky when the Russians seized her years before moored in front of them. The oakum was spewing from her seams, her bulwarks were worn and weather-cracked so you could put your fingers in the rents in them, and it wasn't much use telling a sealerman what kind of canvas she would have after lying there since the Russians took her in the rain and wind. Still, she looked kind of homely, and they sat there watching her until they heard the boom of gun and there was a Russian soldier signing to them. Now, some of those folks were kind enough, but this was a bad man, and when the sealer who was sick couldn't get along fast enough he kicked him hard, and where it would hurt him."

Montreal drew his breath, and a little grey patch showed in his cheeks.

"But," he said hoarsely, "he didn't do it again!"

Stickine laughed a curious little laugh. "No," he said. "He meant to, but the man who wasn't sick was too quick for him, and the soldier wasn't handy getting his side arm out. The sealer took the point in his arm, and it ripped it to the wrist, but he got his right fist on that soldier's chin, and when he went down he made no great show of getting up again. Then the other two left him, and went back to the prison where a soldier locked them in, and when the rest heard what had happened they did some talking. They didn't take long about it, for the mate had a notion the soldier looked very sick when he left him, and it was quite plain that anything they did must be put through before they were marched away from sea.

"'We've got to light out of this right now,' says one.

"'Well,' says another, 'where are we going to?'

"'That,' says the mate, 'is quite easy. There's a schooner handy and we're going straight to sea.'

"Nobody said any more for a little, and the boys looked kind of solemn. It was a long way to British Columbia, and they knew what that schooner was like because they'd see her. Then one of them gets up.

"'I'd sooner drown out yonder than work in the mines,' says he.

"In 'bout five minutes they'd fixed up the thing, and there was one of them waiting behind the door when a soldier came in. Before he got started talking the man had his arms about him. Then there was a circus that didn't last very long, and the soldier was lying tied up quite snug with his tunic round his head when they slipped out one by one. The moon was getting up, but it was hazy with a little breeze blowing out to sea when two of them lit out for the place where the schooner was lying while the rest went for the beach where it was nearest them. There was a boat or two handy, but they were big, and you can't

get a vessel that's been lying by for years off in a minute. When the two stopped abreast of her the water was very cold, and it isn't quite easy swimming in your clothes, but they knew if they took them off they would have to go home naked, and made the best of it they could, though one of them was played out when they fetched the vessel. They couldn't get a holt of her, and the tide swung them along bobbing and clawing at her side, until the mate got his fingers in a crack the sun had made. Then he got up, though he was never quite sure how it was done, and pulled the other one after him, but they fell down on deck and lay there a minute, anyway.

"After that one crawls to the foremast, and it was while he made shift to get the foresail on to her he found out what prison and hunger had done for him. It wasn't a big sail, but he sat down faint and choking when he'd got it up. Then he found where the shackle was on the chain, and smashed his fingers as he pounded it, for the pin was rusted in. He couldn't quite see straight and his hands were bleeding, but he figured they'd got to light out quick, for there was a dog howling and he could hear a boat coming. At last, when he knew another blow would knock out the pin, he let up and he and the other man tried to get the mainsail up, and stopped because they'd 'bout the strength of Mainsail Haul between them. Then while they stood there gasping a boat comes banging alongside, and the rest was crawling over the rail when the mate hears another splash of oars behind.

"'They're coming along with rifles,' says somebody.

"Well, there was nobody wanting to waste any time, and they got the mainsail up with a split you could have ridden a horse through in the middle of it, and 'bout half the staysail to swing her with. When they'd done that much they saw there wasn't much use in hoisting the rest of it, and they pulled the head right out of one of her jibs. The boat was coming up tolerably fast, and somebody hailing them, but they didn't stop to answer, and getting the staysail aback knocked out the shackle-pin. The cable ran out all right, and then they stood still, very quiet and feeling sick, for most a minute, for they could see the boat now, and the schooner wouldn't fall off handy. One or two of them will remember that minute while they live. There was so much in front of them, and, so far as they could see, more behind—and the old schooner was just hanging there with her mainsail peak swung down.

"At last she fell off slowly, but there wasn't one of them fit to howl when she started off before the wind. The mate had a kind of fancy somebody was shooting, but nobody was quite sure then or after, because they were too busy swaying the mainsail peak up and looking for a sound place to bend the halliards to the jibs. They got them up in pieces, but she was off the wind, and when the boat dropped back into the haze behind her the mate fell over on the hatch and

lay there until somebody poured water on to him. It was sun up next morning before he remembered very much more, and then that schooner scared him. You could have clawed out pieces from her masts with your nails, and there were more holes than canvas in her sails. No compass, no water, not a handful of grub, and the Pacific to cross.

"They ran down the coast that day, and came to with the kedge-anchor off a village the next one. The folks came off, and brought them dried fish and water for all the odds and ends of rope and ironwork they could spare off the schooner. Then they cleared for sea again, and hung out for two weeks starving on a handful of grub each morning for every man, with only the sun, that wasn't always there, and the stars to guide them."

Stickine stopped a moment, and his face grew very grim while there was silence in the *Champlain's* hold, and Appleby shivered as he pictured the crazy schooner crawling as it were at random across the face of the Pacific with her crew of starving men.

"It must have been horrible," he said. "Did they lose any of them?"

Stickine shook his head. "Not a man," he said. "Still, two of them were on their backs and the others just ready to lie down when a steamer came along, and they ran slap for the bows of her when they saw the flag she was flying. She stopped, and they felt kind of shaky when she lay there rolling with white men hailing them and a boat swinging out, while when a man came on board they couldn't quite talk to him sensible, and he stared at them and the masts a minute without a word. Then he sized up what they were wanting, and there was grub and coal and water in the schooner besides a compass when the steamer went on. After that it was easier. Somehow they nursed her through two gales, and drove her south-east when they could, and then one morning there was the snow shining high, up in the sky and they knew they were through with their troubles. That's 'bout all there is to it, and I've done quite enough talking!"

"Did the Government get them any compensation, and what became of the schooner?" asked Appleby.

Stickine laughed dryly. "No, sir," he said. "They didn't. Nobody asked them to, and that schooner isn't sailing now."

"But you knew the mate?" said Appleby. "Of course it was he who brought them through."

Stickine did not answer, and Donegal reached out suddenly and grabbed his arm. Taken unawares he could not extricate it, and next moment his sleeve was drawn back and the lads saw a long white scar that ran down to the wrist. Then Stickine's face flushed a trifle, and Donegal grinned. "Ye have heard where he got it—and he swum off to her that night," he said.

The flush faded from Stickine's face, which grew grim again. "I'm owing

the folks who did it more than that and the hunger," he said. "We were set down, all of us, as lost at sea, and while I was lying in that prison things had gone wrong. When I got back to Canada I knew they could never be straightened out again."

Appleby noticed how Stickine's big hands trembled, and surmised that some great sorrow he would not speak about had darkened the home-coming of the man who had risen as it were from the dead. He, however, sat still with the rest until Montreal slowly clenched a big brown fist.

"And," he said with a curious quietness, "it's a brother they're owing me."

Then there was a silence that was intensified by the roar of the sea.

CHAPTER XI
AMONG THE HOLLISCHACKIE

The bitter gale they had run before for two days had fallen suddenly, and it was a hazy afternoon when the lads saw St. George of the Pribyloffs lying a faint blur on the rim of the Behring Sea. In between swung long slopes of grey water, that flickered here and there into green, where a pale ray of sunlight shone down. They did not, however, see it long, because the sun went in, and a smear of vapour crawled up from the horizon, for where the warmer waters of the Pacific meet the icy currents from the Pole, the clammy fog follows close upon the gale.

They had still short sail upon the schooner, and she rolled distressfully with a great rattle of blocks and banging of booms, but Jordan stood poised on the house with glasses levelled, and white men and Indians clustered aft and beneath him.

"No smoke anywhere, but we'll have the wind back before night," he said. "How far do you make us off the land?"

"Six miles, anyway," said Stickine, and Jordan nodded.

"I'd have put another half-mile on to that," he said. "Well, you can get the boats over and look for the holluschackie."

Stickine raised his hand, and the men fell to work. He scarcely gave an order, and there was no shouting or confusion, for every one knew what to do and did it with a silent swiftness which the lads had never seen on board the *Aldebaran*. The hurrying figures seemed everywhere at once, and before Appleby could decide whom to help, the first boat was swinging from a tackle between the masts. Then there was a splash, and when he gained the bulwarks, a copper-

faced Indian was crouching in the bows and the oars were out. It was quick work. Boat after boat was hove up, thwarts fitted, rifles put on board, and while the *Champlain* rolled so that no landsman could have kept his footing, swung into the sea.

Finally when the deck was almost empty Stickine glanced at Jordan. The skipper said nothing for a minute, but once more swept his glasses round the horizon, and his face was a trifle dubious when at last he laid them down.

"You can take Donovitch and Donegal and try what the lads can do," he said. "That leaves two of us to work the schooner, but I don't figure we'll have any wind to speak of for an hour or two."

Stickine nodded as he moved forward, and thrust a rope into Appleby's hands. "Lay hold and heave," he said. "You're not going to be quite so keen on sealing by the time you pull her back again."

The lads gasped and panted as they hauled upon the tackle, but the boat was swung high before they had lifted her stern a foot, and they began to understand that even in such an apparently simple thing it would take them years to attain the dexterity of the men who had preceded them.

Still, they did what they could, while their faces grew red and the veins on their foreheads swelled, and at last the boat fell almost level, when at a sign from Stickine they let her go with a run. Then they dropped from the rail, and, though Niven fell over Appleby, got the oars out and the boat away before the *Champlain* rolled down on that side heavily. Appleby had lost his cap and his face was flushed, but he kept stroke with Donegal, who pulled on the thwart in front of him, and saw a little twinkle in the eyes of the skipper who looked down from the rail.

"I'd remember the kind of crew you've got, Stickine, though I've seen raw hands make a worse show," he said.

They were well clear of the schooner when Donegal spoke. "'Twas a compliment Ned Jordan paid ye, an' it he had the thraining av ye for ten years I'd have some hopes av ye."

"Ten years!" said Niven with a little laugh that hid the pride he felt. "Well, I fancy I'd have been made into a merchant in less than that time if I'd stayed at home."

"An' who would be afther throwing the likes av you away on a merchant's business?" said Donegal dryly.

Niven said nothing further, and they had pulled for another half-hour when Appleby asked, "Why was the skipper looking for smoke?"

Donegal laughed. "'Tis a diction'ry wid pictures in it to tell ye the meaning av all things ye want to know. Sure now, but what would be afther making a smoke?"

"A gunboat," said Appleby. "But we're a good deal more than three miles off the land."

"An' what av it?" said Donegal. "'Tis not easy to fix your distance at sea without a four point bearing, an' when 'tis a matter of opinion 'tis not the pelagic sealerman that folks will listen to, or where would be the use av the men in uniform who're a credit to their nation an' the prothectors of the American company?"

"Well, now, I've known quite a few sealers who couldn't tell the difference between one mile and three," said Stickine dryly.

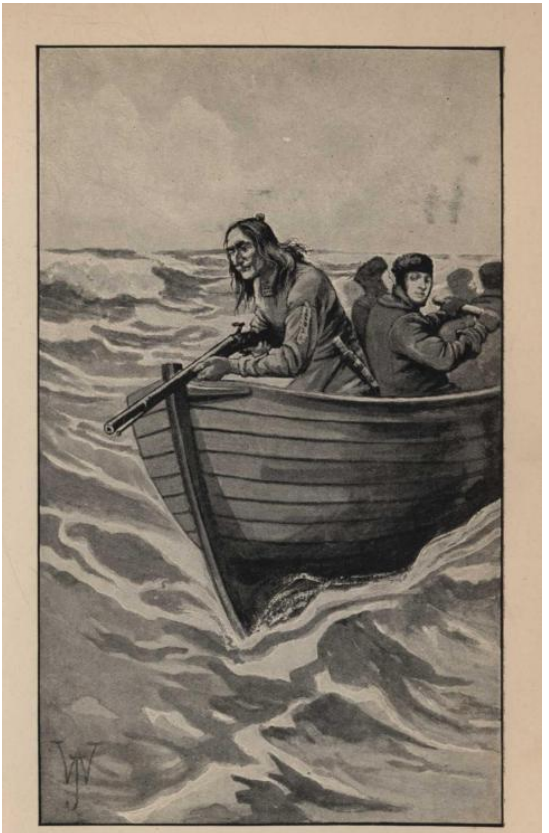
As he spoke the Indian grunted in the bows, and Stickine, who bade them stop pulling, stood up for a few minutes while the lads gathered breath and looked about them. When the boat swung upwards they could see the schooner roll with slanted spars down the side of the sea about two miles away. Then they saw nothing but a dark slope of water, until they rose again, and a few little dots that swung into sight and sank became visible scattered here and there along the horizon. A puff of whiteness curled about one of them, and that was all which served to show they were boats sealing. St. George had faded into a bank of vapour, and when the boat was hove aloft again Appleby noticed that the horizon was closer in upon them. Then as a filmy streak of whiteness slid across the sea a few hundred yards away, she seemed to become suddenly very small, and the cold grey water very near them. Stickine did not apparently notice it, and Appleby, glancing over his shoulder, saw the Indian still crouching motionless, rifle in hand, in the bow.

Suddenly he spoke, and Stickine moved his oar. "Pull," he said quietly. "Steady and easy."

Appleby had seen nothing move on the long slope of sea, but he felt his heart beat, and his blood pulse faster as he dipped his oar; for the crouching figure in the bows had risen a trifle and the rifle was pitched forward now.

Then he looked aft again watching Stickine, who stood up, swaying with the boat, but otherwise very still, with his eyes fixed forward and a little glint in them. Presently he moved his head, Donegal stopped rowing, and while the lads rested on their oars there was a bang, and a wisp of acrid smoke curled about them.

"All you're worth!" said Stickine sharply, swaying with his oar, and the lads bent their backs with a will. The boat seemed to lift with every stroke, Donegal made a little hissing with his breath, and Niven gasped from strenuous effort and excitement as he heard the swish of water that swirled past them, and strove to keep stroke. He felt that another minute or two would see him beaten, when Stickine flung up one hand, and there was a curious quietness, until something brushed softly against the sliding boat.



"GLANCING OVER HIS SHOULDER, SAW THE INDIAN STILL CROUCHING MOTIONLESS, RIFLE IN HAND." [*p.* 161.

"GLANCING OVER HIS SHOULDER, SAW THE INDIAN STILL CROUCHING MOTIONLESS, RIFLE IN HAND."

"Get hold!" said Donegal, leaning over, and a clumsy, almost shapeless, object came in with a roll.

It was not what they expected, but both Niven and Appleby long remembered the killing of their first seal, and while they sat flushed and breathless, with the salt brine trickling from their oars, the surroundings were of a kind likely to impress themselves on any lad's memory.

In front of them a long slope of grey water rolled up against the hazy sky, and another big undulation that shut out the schooner hove itself high behind. A little, thin, blue smoke still curled from the muzzle of the Indian's rifle as he stood up in the bows with his impassive bronze face cut sharp against the sea, and Stickine was stooping over the hump-shouldered object that lay quivering on the floorings astern, in a fashion that suggested a shaken jelly. It was a dingy grey colour, and covered with long, coarse hair which did not bear the slightest resemblance to the beautiful glossy fur they had been accustomed to in England, and the lads' hands were sticky with the grease of it.

"And that's a seal!" said Niven, glancing disgustedly at his fingers. "I'd sooner claw a dog that hadn't been washed for years. They make ladies' jackets out of that beastly stuff?"

Stickine nodded, and touched the object, which quivered again, with his foot. "Oh, yes," he said, with a little laugh. "That's just a holluschack. The underhair's quite fine enough, and—you see him shaking—he's got two or three inches of blubber under that."

"What's a holluschack?" asked Appleby.

"Riches," said Donegal. "If ye can catch wan often enough, and, by the token, the Americans who leased those islands yonder made more out av them than their Government paid the Russians for them and the whole of Alaska. How many years was they doing it, Stickine?"

"'Bout two years," said the Canadian. "There was more seals crawling round there then, but they got kind of tired of being clubbed and shot at."

"We don't know what a holluschack is yet," said Appleby.

"Well," said Stickine, "it's just a bachelor seal, so young that the bulls don't have no use for it hanging around, and that's why you find the holluschackie by themselves, which is fortunate, anyway, because it's only them one wants to catch. The cows go free—that is, mostly—and the bulls are that chewed up they're not worth killing."

"What with?" asked Appleby.

"Fighting," said Stickine. "The bull he comes up first and crawls out on St. George there, to look for a nice place for his cows to lie down in. Just as soon as he finds it another bull comes along and wants to take it from him. If he's got grit enough he hangs on to it, and when the cows crawl out of the sea the circus

begins. Every bull has to fight for those that belong to him, and for six weeks anyway you can hear them roaring."

"I can't fancy that thing roaring," said Niven, pointing to the holluschack.

Stickine laughed softly.

"Well," he said, "when the bull stiffens up he can do most anything but sing, and you can hear him quite as far as a steamer's whistle. Time we were getting a move on, Donovitch."

The Indian said something the lads did not understand in the Chinook idiom, and they clipped the oars again. For an hour they pulled shorewards, and now and then the sound of a rifle reached them faintly, but the boats were seldom visible, for a filmy greyness was crawling across the sea. Once Appleby had a momentary glimpse of the schooner, a blur of slanted canvas against a patch of hazy sky, but she faded next moment and was not seen again.

Then the Indian spoke softly, and when they stopped pulling at a sign from Stickine, Appleby, twisting himself round, saw something that was a little darker than the water swing with a grey slope of sea. The Indian was now lying huddled in the bows, and the rifle-barrel poked forward over them, while the copper cheek was down on the stock of it. It, however, seemed almost impossible that, as the boat swung up and down, any man could hit the dim moving thing which showed above the water with a single bullet, but while Appleby waited breathless the muzzle jerked upwards, and there was a thin flash. Then stinging smoke curled about him, and the jar of the report was flung back by the heaving slopes of sea. The Indian grunted as the cartridge rattled at his feet, and Stickine grabbed his oar.

"I'm not sure he got him, and a wounded seal generally goes right down," he said. "Still, he might give us another show, and we'll pull ahead somewhat, my lads."

They rowed for what seemed to the lads, who could see nothing but water, a considerable time, twisting now and then to left and right, until the rifle flashed again, and Stickine roared at them. Then for three or four minutes they pulled breathlessly, until there was another shout, and they flung the oars in and grabbed at something that slid past them. It took the whole of them to roll it in, and then there was a little laugh from Donegal, while Stickine stood looking down on the victim disgustedly. It was nearly twice the size of the other, but its fur was loose and thin, and there were big patches where it had been apparently torn away and had not grown again.

"It would take any man all his time to find a dollar's worth of sound hide on him," said Donegal, with a chuckle. "'Tis spectacles ye and Donovitch are wanting, Stickine."

"Well," said Stickine dryly, "a dollar's a kind of handy thing, but we needn't

have pulled so far to leeward after a blame old bull."

None of them had apparently had much thought of the weather during the past half-hour, but now when they sat breathless resting on the dripping oars a cold wind chilled their flushed faces, and they saw that there was sliding vapour everywhere.

"She was lying 'bout south and dodging with staysail to windward when we had the last sight av her," said Donegal. "Is it any way likely Ned Jordan would get way on her?"

Stickine shook his head. "If it was clear he might have done, but once the haze shut down he'd stop right where he was so the boys would know where to look for him. We'll try south, anyway."

They bent their backs, for Stickine took his place again, but as they swung up with a sea Appleby wondered how any one could tell where the south might be.

There was no sign of either boat or schooner, only a heaving stretch of water across which the fleecy vapours rolled more thickly. They had pulled for about twenty minutes when it seemed to the lads that the splashes at the bows grew louder and the work harder, while there was no doubt at all that the wind was colder. Then little puffs of spray commenced to fly over their shoulders, and at times there was a white splash on the top of a sea. Appleby could hear Niven panting, and began to envy Donegal, who swung back and forwards with tireless regularity. His own oar was getting unpleasantly heavy.

"Stiffen up," said Stickine. "We've got to get there quick. Wind's coming along right now."

He had scarcely spoken when the splash from Niven's oar blew over Appleby's shoulder and wetted his face, while the slope of the next sea was lined with ripples curiously. Then one frothed angrily on its top, and when the boat plunged over the next one a cloud of spray whirled up. She seemed to stop a trifle, while as the oars went down again Appleby gasped, for Donegal and Stickine were swinging a trifle faster, and he found it almost impossible to keep stroke. He had also a shrewd suspicion that they could, if it was necessary, row as they were doing all through the night, while it was evident that another half-hour would exhaust the last of his strength. Still, he set his lips and tugged at his oar, while as the lurches grew sharper it became more difficult to keep the blade out of the water.

At last when the bows were flung high he missed his stroke and fell backwards upon Niven, while as he scrambled to his feet again Stickine stopped rowing, and twisting round, looked at them over his shoulder. It is more than possible he saw distress in the young faces, for that was a bigger and heavier boat than those generally used for sealing, and Appleby noticed that he shook his head as

he glanced at Donegal.

"The schooner's 'bout a mile to windward still," he said. "You've got to wake right up and pull."

His voice was sterner than usual, and the lads, who recognized the difference, shook themselves together and fell to again. They were very tired, but they had discovered on board the *Aldebaran* that there are times when the overtaxed body must be kept to its task by sheer force of mind, and that worn out, ill or well, men must work at sea. Still, Stickine's stroke was a trifle slower when they went on again, and gasping and panting, while their arms grew powerless and their temples throbbed, they kept time to it. The spray was flying freely, and there was nothing to be seen but dim slopes of water tipped with froth, for the right was smothered in the fog and the dusk which replaces night at that season closing in. Niven was groaning audibly now and then, and Appleby pulled in torment with a horrible pain in his side, when at last the crash of a gun came out of the dimness.

"Over our starboard bow!" said Donegal; and as he swung into faster stroke, the task became grimmer yet.

Now, Niven had been one of the best hares the Sandycombe Harriers had ever known, and Appleby had brought the school boat home first in the local regatta, but they had never taxed their uttermost endurance of mind and body as they did in the wild ten minutes that followed. It was one thing to race for honour or a silver cup, and a very different one to row for their lives, as they felt unpleasantly certain they were doing now. All round them seatops came frothing whitely out of the darkness, but the sound they made was lost in the scream of wind.

At last, however, and with relief unspeakable, Appleby saw the schooner's canvas grow out of the mist. They were close upon her before they could see her hull, and then it was only the dripping bows swung high with a jib hauled to windward above them. She crawled out of the vapour, rolling to leeward, with the streaky backwash streaming down her sides, and while Niven wondered whether it would by any means be possible to get on board her, the boat slid in under her bulwarks as they came swinging down, and Stickine clutched the rope that was flung him.

Niven did not know whether he crawled up or Stickine pulled him, but in another moment he was on board the *Champlain* with Appleby beside him and a row of men floundering aft along the deck. Then the boat swung in between the masts, and when she dropped upon the hatch he saw that Jordan was talking to Stickine a yard or two away.

"One good one," said the latter. "And a bull. We'll do if we get two dollars for him. Two of the boats away yet?"

"Charley's," said Jordan with a little laugh. "No need to worry over him. He'd fetch her through a gale of wind when he got hungry, but I'm kind of anxious about Montreal and the other one. You and the lads had to row?"

"They're played out, but they pulled quite handy," said Stickine.

Jordan swung round and glanced at Appleby, who leaned against the mast with flushed face and heaving chest, while Niven sat close by on the hatch still gasping heavily.

"I don't know that we've any use for you just now," he said. "You can get your tea from Brulée and crawl down below."

The lads did not want telling twice, and when they sat down with a steaming can of tea before them in the stuffy, curiously-smelling hold Appleby's face relaxed and Niven laughed.

"I'd never have believed I could be glad to get back to a place like this once, but I am," he said. "In fact, I scarcely fancy I was ever so glad to see anything in my life as I was when we got the first glimpse of the *Champlain*."

Appleby nodded with his mouth full. "I wasn't sorry myself," he said. "Now, it seems to me it isn't the ship but the men you sail with that makes all the difference when you go to sea."

He turned and saw Donegal grinning at him. "An' that's thrue," said he. "Ye will not as a rule make men glad to work for ye by kicking them."

CHAPTER XII
PICKING UP THE BOATS

Warm and snug as it was in the *Champlain's* hold neither of the lads cared to stay below. They could tell it was blowing hard by the humming of the rigging and the way the deck sloped under them, and their thoughts were with the two boats still out in the fog. The cold struck through them when they crawled out on deck, and little showers of brine blew in from the rail shining in the light that blinked forward through the filmy whiteness. Somebody beneath it was ringing a bell, and its dismal jangle seemed to intensify the doleful wail of wind. Now and then they caught a pale glimmer as a white-topped sea went by, and then for a space there was only a blank wall of sliding fog, until finding the desolation of it all creep in upon them they went aft along the sloppy deck.

A silent man stood almost motionless at the wheel, for the *Champlain* was

lying to under her trysail and jib, making no way through the water, but bobbing with her bow to the sea. Jordan paced up and down behind the house, stopping now and then to gaze into the fog, and the rest were clustered under the lee of it. A lantern flickered above them, and they had evidently been busy over something, for two of them were wiping their knives and there was a horrible sickly smell. Then a man went by carrying a bundle of furs which reeked with the same odour, and Stickine, who saw them, called to the lads.

"Get the bucket and swab up," he said.

It was not easy to fill the bucket, and when at last Niven stood swaying with most of the contents splashing about him he sniffed disgustedly as he glanced at the deck, which was slippery with grease and blood.

"Essence of roses is nothing to this. What is it?" he said.

"Holluschackie blubber," said a grinning man. "You'd have smelt stronger than a scent store if we'd waited until you came up to heave the corpuses over. Hadn't you better start in before you sit down in it?"

Niven swilled on water, Appleby plied the swab, but though they got the deck clean the smell would not wash out, and when they crawled under the shelter of the deckhouse among the rest, Appleby gasped as he flung away his swab. "Does it always smell like that?" he said.

Jordan looked down from the house. "It generally does, but dollars don't lie around in the Vancouver streets," he said. "Dry that swab right out now and hang it up."

"Yes, sir," said Appleby, but his face was a trifle pale in the light from the lantern when he came back. "It about turned me sick—and it's going to take some time to get used to this," he said.

"Well," said a man, glancing at Niven, "it's the more smell the bigger profits when you go sealing. It's different from the things you were taught to do in the old country?"

Niven laughed a little, for the man's tone was ironical, and he had discovered that the less he talked about what he had been used to in England the better it was for him. "We don't have any seals to catch over there," he said. "Still, however do they clean up those things and make them into ladies' jackets? They have to get the smell off them."

"It's done back there in your country, in London," said another man. "Most beasts have two coats on them, anyway, and somebody once told me they pulled the outside half off with little pincers. Then I guess they shave them down and dye them. They're smart people there in London, and they don't let up when the holluschackie can't be had. No, sir. They'll make you a seal-skin jacket out of most anything. It's all in the dressing."

"But do the Americans send their seals to London?" asked Niven.

"Yes," said Stickine. "That's just what they do. Bring them back again dressed, paying a heavy duty, too, and one way or other those seals fetch the States a tolerable big revenue. That's why it galls them to see any other folk catching them."

Just then Jordan sprang up on the house with a flare in his hand, and the lurid wind-blown blaze that streamed above them showed the same look in the faces of the men. It suggested confidence in their skipper and their comrades out at sea, and yet grimly-suppressed expectancy. Then the darkness was intensified as the light went out.

"It's 'bout time you fired the gun again," he said.

A man floundered forward, and presently a long red flash blazed out over the rail, but the thud of the report was probably plainer a mile to leeward than it was on the deck of the *Champlain.* Then for five minutes nobody spoke and the bell tinkled dolefully, but no answer came out of the sliding fog.

"Thicker than ever!" said Jordan. "Try her again."

Three times at five minutes' intervals the red flash blazed out, and then while they listened a man sprang into the shrouds. "Here's one of them!" he said.

There followed a few moments of tense expectancy until a roar of voices went up as a faint cry came out of the fog. Then there was another silence, even worse to bear, until the man in the shrouds swung up an arm.

"Stand by," he shouted. "Here they come!"

Appleby running forward saw a dim black shape hove up on a sea that swept past the bows, and for a moment the light from the forestay shone down upon the boat. She was lapped about in foam, and while the men, with wet, grim faces, bent their backs as the oars swung through it, a dark ridge with froth about its top rolled up out of the night behind her. Then all was dark again, for she swept in beneath the bulwarks and the schooner rolled viciously. Out of the darkness came a thud and a shouting, black figures fell in over the rail, and while blocks rattled the boat swung dripping high above the bulwarks, until they dropped her neatly inside the other ones. Appleby surmised that the operation would have been almost impossible on board the *Aldebaran*, and he had heard that it not infrequently takes an hour to get a boat out on board a steamer. Then the men came aft with the water running from them, and Jordan, who once more paced up and down, stopped a moment.

"Where's Montreal?" he asked.

The foremost sealer turned and pointed to the sliding whiteness over the rail. "I don't know," he said. "One couldn't make out much of anything in that."

Jordan nodded. "What have you got?"

"Three holluschackie," said the sealer. "I guess we'll get the boat cleaned up and the hides off them."

Jordan said nothing but paced up and down again, and while a few dark objects moved about the boat the men floundered back into the partial shelter of the house. They did not express their fears in speech, but all of them knew the chances were against Montreal and his crew finding the schooner. If he failed the prospect of his boat living through the gale that was evidently rising appeared very small. To leeward lay St. Paul and St. George, but the sea foams and seethes about them, and any sealer who might make a landing in the dark, which very few men could do, would in all probability find himself a prisoner. Still the men of the *Champlain* faced such risks almost daily in the misty seas, and when the boat was stripped they and the Indians quietly set about flaying the seals. The fog whirled past them, their knives twinkled in the flickering lantern light, and now and then a brighter beam fell on their impassive brown faces and blubber-smeared hands. Then it would swing away as the schooner rolled, and the lads who stood about with swab and bucket could only see them dimly until it blinked into brilliancy again. The rigging screamed, the bell jangled on, and now and then through the confused sounds rose the thud of the gun.

How long they worked Appleby did not know, but he forgot the smell of the blubber and the horrible sliminess of the swab as he pictured the worn-out men grimly swinging the oars in the fog. Each time the schooner swung her bows aloft the black shape of a man crouching forward in the spray became visible, and now and then Jordan tramped along the deck to speak to him. The lads could guess what his question was, but there was no answer to either bell or gun, until at last the skipper stood still suddenly, and every man who saw him turned and stared across the rail. For a minute nobody moved or spoke, and there was nothing to hear but the wail of the wind in the rigging.

Then Jordan swung himself into the shrouds, and the men went forward with a rush. Clinging to the rail Appleby looked down, and as the flicker of the light fell upon the sea something went by, and he had a glimpse of part of a dripping boat with two men whose faces showed white and set straining at the oars. One of the others had apparently fallen forward, and a fourth was standing erect astern. The attitude of all of them expressed exhaustion. Then as the boat swung round a trifle a sea that rolled up caught her on the bow and the men at the oars made a last effort as she swept astern. Next moment she had passed out of the light, and there was only foam beneath him.

"We've lost them. They'll never pull her up," he gasped.

Jordan sprang down from the shrouds, and his voice rang out, "Down trysail. Sheet your staysail to weather and run it up."

He said nothing to Stickine, who now held the wheel, but Appleby saw him bending over it, and there was a banging and thrashing of canvas as the staysail went up and the trysail came down. Then the schooner slowly swung round,

until a shout rose again, "Let draw, and sing out forward if we're running over them!"

The *Champlain* had her stern to the wind now, and was running before it after the boat which had blown away to lee, while the men stood silent here and there along her rail, until one of them forward shouted, and as Stickine swung with the wheel something half-seen went by. It was lost in a moment as the schooner drove ahead, and Appleby recognized the horror he felt in Niven's voice.

"He can't be going to leave them!" he said.

Donegal, who was standing close by, dropped a heavy hand on his shoulder and held it in a painful grip. "Is it a head or a shroud deadeye ye have that ye do not know Ned Jordan yet?" he said. "Away with ye to the trysail halliards. They'll be wanted presently."

For about a minute the *Champlain* lurched on before the seas, and then from where Jordan stood in the shrouds a great blue blaze flared out and Stickine pulled round the wheel. Men whose faces showed intent in the streaming radiance floundered towards the mast, and as the *Champlain* came round the trysail went up. In another moment or two Appleby and Niven were hauling at its sheet among the rest, and presently the schooner lay rolling almost head to the sea. Then there was a brief space of breathless waiting while every man stared over the rail, and Appleby knew that the schooner would lie there scarcely moving through the water until the boat came up with her. He could feel his heart beating as he strained his ears and eyes.

"Here they come!" shouted somebody, and while the blue radiance streamed out across the waters the boat swung into sight.

It was evident that the worn-out men knew they could take no chance of driving down to lee this time, and the lads held their breath as they saw the boat whirl towards them on the top of a sea. One could almost have fancied she would be flung on board over the rail.

"Down helm!" said Jordan. "Luff, if you can. Handy with the tackles there. Make sure of them."

The schooner swung round a trifle, the boat slewed, there was a crash, and she was lost in the shadow below the rail, while black darkness followed as the light went out. Hoarse shouts came out of it, men scurried here and there, and fell from the rail, then there was a rattle of blocks, and Appleby found himself floundering along the deck with panting men behind him and a rope in his hand. The boat they hove up was dropped into her nest, a seal or two flung out, and Jordan, who came forward with a lantern, shook his head as he glanced at her.

"Coming alongside that way is kind of expensive, but I guess you hadn't much choice just then," he said.

"No," said a man who stood, gasping still, with half-closed eyes in the lantern light. "We just had to fetch you the best way we could, and we'd have missed you sure while we tried to round her up to lee. She was 'bout half-swamped and all of us used up considerable."

In another few minutes the lads and most of the others went back into the hold and sat watching the last comers, who wasted no time in talking as they attacked the meal Brulée set before them. One of them, however, sat somewhat limply, and his face, which was tinged with grey, seemed drawn together. He ate nothing and only drank a little tea. Then as the others stretched out their long limbs towards the stove Donegal looked at Montreal.

"And what was it kept ye so long?" he said.

Montreal laughed softly, though the stamp of exhaustion was on his face. "Just the wind!" he said. "We was well away to leeward, and when we'd pulled 'bout a mile Tom there got a kind of kink inside him and had to let up. Then Siwash Bob sprung his oar, and we lost all we'd made the last hour while Tom got his wind again and I was fixing it. After that the boat began to take it in heavy and we had to stop to bale. There wasn't much left in us, and Tom was groaning awful when we heard the gun."

Niven stared at the speaker with a little wonder, and Appleby smiled, for the story was a singularly unimpressive narration of what they knew had been a grim struggle for life. Then Niven saw that Donegal was watching him, and became sensible of a faint embarrassment, for the sealer had an unpleasant habit of guessing what he was thinking.

"You and me could have told it better, Mainsail Haul," said he.

Niven flushed a trifle. He knew he could have made the story a good deal more effective, for there had been times when he had held the dormitory silent and expectant as he narrated some small feat of his at Sandycombe, but he had an unpleasant suspicion that this gift was apt to win its possessor derision rather than respect at sea, where the men who did things that would have formed a theme for an epic poem seemed reluctant to talk about them. Montreal, the sealer who under Providence owed his life to his splendid strength and valour, said nothing about the effort and almost superhuman strain, but only mentioned that they had sprung an oar and his comrade suffered from what he termed a kink inside him.

"Well," said Niven awkwardly, "it's a good while now since I told you anything at all."

"Sure," said Donegal, grinning. "'Tis since I've had the teaching av ye. But ye do not seem quite easy, Tom. Sit up while me and Mainsail Haul pull the clothes off ye."

The man grumbled and protested that there was nothing wrong with him,

but Donegal worked on unheeding and shoved him by main force into his bunk.

"Now, you lie right there till I get something from Jordan that will fix you," said Stickine. "If he tries to get up, boys, one of you will sit on him!"

He came back presently with something in a can, and the man, who gulped down the contents, grinned.

"I guess it would take a kink with considerable grit in it to face another dose of that," he said, and turned his face, which was beaded with the damp of pain, from the light.

The others, however, seemed to know what he was suffering from and went on with their talk, while presently Appleby asked a question.

"What would have happened if we'd been blown ashore?" he said.

Stickine laughed a little. "Well," he said, "I don't quite know, but it's kind of likely the Indians would have taken their clubs to us. Anyway, it would have been a long while before we did any more sealing."

It took Appleby several more questions before he elicited much information, and what he got was not very plain to him. It, however, appeared that the seals which bred on the lonely beaches of the misty seas had been growing scarcer, and that one or two of the commanders of the gunboats sent to watch them had now and then exceeded their rights. Three miles to sea is the limit placed to a nation's authority, but it seemed from stories told in the *Champlain's* hold, boats had been chased when farther than that from land. The men were not very explicit, but Appleby surmised that reprisals were made now and then when a schooner's crew landed on forbidden beaches.

"Still," he said, "if you lose a day or two's sealing when a gunboat's about it means a good many dollars."

A little twinkle crept into Montreal's eyes. "It don't always," said he. "Here you are with the boats all out raking in the holluschackie, and a gunboat comes along. 'Clear out of this or I'll make you,' says her skipper. 'All right,' says you. It's so many seals he's doing me out of now, when he has no right to, and I'm going in to get them where it's easiest when he steams away."

Niven seemed a trifle astonished. "That's here," he said. "Do they do things the same way everywhere?"

There was a little grim laughter, and Montreal pointed towards the west. "No, sir," he said. "When you go where the Russian seals live there's no use for talking of any kind, because you can't understand each other, and you use the clubs. There's men I know have seen other things come in quite handy too. Now old man Harper of the Golden Horn——"

Donegal stopped him. "'Tis talking too much ye are, and, as everybody knows, Ned Jordan is a quiet man," he said. "'Tis curious tales Mainsail Haul will be telling the earl about us when he goes home."

"Let up!" said Niven. "I'm a sealer now, and I only want to know if any one tried to arrest the skipper wrongfully, what would he do?"

Donegal's eyes twinkled. "He would run away like a sensible man, or hide in the fog," he said.

"But if he couldn't, or there wasn't any fog?"

Donegal shook his head. "'Tis persistent ye are," he said. "Peace is a thing Ned Jordan's fond of, but if folks will not let him have it his fist is as big as most."

Nobody said anything further, but there was a curious little smile in the men's bronzed faces, and while Appleby endeavoured to kick his comrade in warning that it would not be desirable to ask any more questions there was a crash above.

"There," said Donegal, grabbing Brulée's shoulder. "'Tis your galley tore up by the roots."

"No," said Stickine. "I figure it's the water tank got adrift. We want a lashing on her before she goes right out through the bulwarks, boys."

They were out of the scuttle in another minute, and when he got on deck Appleby saw a big, black object drive against the mast. Before any one could seize it it had rolled aside again, and in another few moments struck the bulwarks with a heavy thud, for the *Champlain* was still lying hove to and lurching wildly. How they at last secured it the lads could not quite make out, for the big tank would have crushed the man who got between it and anything, but it was done, and as they were relashing it Jordan came up with a lantern.

"Heave her over, boys. She has started the rivets, and that's going to make trouble for us," he said.

They hove the tank the other side up, and Appleby saw that the skipper's face was grave as he lifted the cover off, but there was apparently no more to be done, and he went below with the other men.

"What did Jordan mean?" he said to one of them. "Of course it would be awkward to run short of water if we were far from land, but there is plenty within a few miles of us."

"Oh, yes," said the man dryly. "But it wouldn't be much use telling the folks ashore you'd only come for water and didn't want no seals. They'd be quite glad to get their hands on us, whatever brought us there!"

"But we can't do without it," said Niven.

"No," said the sealer. "Still, I wouldn't worry. When Ned Jordan's short of

water it's quite likely he'll get it if there's any handy."

CHAPTER XIII
ON THE BEACH

It blew hard that night, and seeing there was no hope of sealing next day Jordan beat the *Champlain* slowly out to sea. He said nothing to any one until when noon came he called the men together.

"We want water, and there's plenty yonder," he said, pointing vaguely across the sea-tops that swung up under the rain. "Still, I don't know that we mightn't have some trouble getting it."

"When you tell us you're ready for it we'll bring that water off," said somebody.

Jordan nodded. "There'll be a big surf on the beaches, but you might do it unless somebody stopped you," he said. "They have a crowd of Aleuts on St. George, and I figure there's a gunboat hanging round somewhere handy. Well, now, if we went east to the Aleutians we could get all the water we wanted with less worry, but it would take us a while getting there, and every day means dollars."

"We'll take our chances at St. George," said Montreal.

"So long as you're willing!" said the skipper. "You've all got a stake in this deal, and I don't know that I'd like to help Mrs. Jordan keep house on nothing if I bring the schooner home without the skins. Still, if the Aleuts got you it's very few dollars you'd make sealing the next year or two."

He spoke slowly, and there was nothing to show that he was asking the men to do a perilous thing. Nor was there anything unusual in their answer returned by Montreal. "We're not sailing around here for pleasure. As soon as it's dusk you can run her in."

The rest of the day passed slowly with Appleby and Niven, but it came to an end at last, and when dusk was closing in the *Champlain*, under trysail and jib only, crept in towards the land. The sea ran behind her heaving, white-topped out of the gloom, for though there is no actual darkness up there at that season the haze that slid by before a nipping wind was thickened by the rain.

There was nothing now to be seen but the filmy vapours that whirled about them or heard but the splash of the sea, and Appleby wondered at the skipper's

daring in running in for the land. At last, however, when the obscurity had grown almost impenetrable the lads heard a deep rumbling sound that came off to them faintly in long reverberations. They surmised it was the roar of surf on a rocky shore, but it was to windward instead of under their lee.

"We were to weather of the island, Stickine," said Appleby.

"Oh, yes," said the Canadian. "But there wouldn't be much left of the man who tried to land on that side of it, and Jordan's running under the lee of it now."

"But it's beastly thick, and we've scarcely seen the land since morning," said Niven.

Stickine laughed. "It's about six hours since I had a glimpse of it myself, but that don't count for much," he said. "Ned Jordan got a bearing, and he'd tell you right off what the schooner had made every tack. Tie him up with a sack round his head, and she'd be just where he wanted her when he brought her up. I guess we've 'bout got there now."

Almost as he spoke Jordan's voice rose up. "Jib to windward, and get the boats over soon as she loses way. Don't hang around a minute after you're through with the water."

"Will we take the rifles?" asked Stickine.

"One," said Jordan dryly. "If you fire quick twice I'll send off another boat to you, but you've got to remember I don't want to. We've nothing against the Americans just now, and I'm not going round looking for trouble with anybody."

They swung two boats over, and Appleby managed to slip on board one before he was noticed by anybody except Niven, who sprang into the last one as the men got the oars out.

The skipper's dark figure showed up for a moment as he looked down from the bulwarks of the rolling schooner.

"You're going for water, boys, and if you bring one holluschack along you'll take it right back ashore," he said. "That's quite plain?"

There was a murmur which did not suggest altogether willing obedience, but no one could mistake the little ring in Jordan's voice, and Stickine signed to the men.

"You heard him, boys? Now, stretch your backs," he said.

They had pulled a few strokes, and the schooner was melting into the haze astern when one of the men looked round.

"Who've we got there in the bows?" he asked.

Appleby, who had hoped to escape their notice for a while, told him. "I fancied my place was in this boat," he said.

"Well," said Stickine dryly, "if I'd seen you before you'd have gone right back with a run. Hello! have you got the other lad, Montreal?"

"Sure!" came back the answer, and Donegal laughed.

"There was no keeping them out," he said. "It would not take a minute to pitch them over."

"We'll try it next time," said Stickine. "Pull in along our wake, Montreal. It's not a nice beach to land on."

After that nobody said anything for a while, and only the splash of oars marked the passage of the boats. Appleby crouched aft on the floorings where he could see the men sway through the dimness above him, while another sound grew louder than the hoarse growl of the seas that seethed about the reefs. It was scarcely like anything he had heard before, though once it faintly resembled the whistling of scores of engines and then swelled into a roar. He surmised it was made by the seals.

"The rookery's just thick with the bulls," said somebody.

"Hold on," said Stickine. "I guess you're here to row, and any talking that's wanted will be done by me."

They lurched on, seeing nothing, into the haze, but Stickine appeared to know where he was heading for, and by the easier rise and fall Appleby guessed they were pulling closer in under the sheltered side of the island.

Still, it was evident by the dull booming sound which grew louder that the swell lapped round to leeward too, and there would be a difficulty in making a landing.

Suddenly, however, the men stopped rowing, and the splash and thud ceased astern, while Stickine sharply turned his head as another sound that none of them had expected to hear came out of the haze. It was a dull grind and a rattle that jarred through the roar of the surf, and then stopped again. Appleby recognized it, and surmised that it meant peril to all of them.

"A gunboat," said Stickine half-aloud. "They're giving her more chain."

They lay on their oars a minute, staring about them and breathing hard, but could only see the sliding haze, and no sound that suggested man's presence in those misty waters reached them now.

"She's to windward. They wouldn't have heard us, boys," said Stickine quietly.

They went on, the oars splashing softly, while they strained their eyes, knowing that it was quite possible the gunboat's officers had gone ashore, and they might blunder upon her cutter. Still, there was no sound but that the seals made and the swelling roar of surf, until a wavy strip of whiteness heaved against the mist in front of them. Then Stickine laughed curiously as he turned his head and stared at the haze.

"I don't know if we'll find a cutter on the beach, but we have got to get the water, and we are going in," he said.

He gave no instructions, and they were apparently not needed, for the men

knew their work, and while they bent to their oars a sea that frothed a little swung them high and carried them inshore. When they sank down on the back of it the one behind grew steeper and the boat seemed driven forward by an unseen force as she swept up on its crest. This happened several times, and then a great rattling of pebbles came out of the spray ahead and the last rush was almost bewildering. Then there was a crash, and the foam that seethed about her lapped into the boat, but the men sprang over knee-deep in water, and whipped her out, while almost before they realized that they had got there the lads found themselves standing on dry land. The men who had pulled the boats up were, however, already shouldering little wooden kegs.

"You'll stop right here with the lads," said Stickine, turning to two of them. "Get the boats down as far as you can if you hear us coming back in a hurry. Now, boys, we'll get a move on."

In another minute the men had started, and the lads watched them flounder over the shingle and up a misty slope, until they faded into the dim background and the patter of their footsteps was lost in the growling of the seas. Then they sat down beside Donegal in the shelter of the boat, though the other man stood upright at her bows. There was a chilly wind, and now and then the uproar the seals made, rolled about them. It was also very lonely, and Niven shivered as he crawled closer beneath the boat and wished he was back in the snug hold of the schooner.

"How will they know where to find the water?" he asked at last.

Charley, the man who stood up, laughed. "That," he said, "is quite easy. You see, Stickine has been here before."

"But you don't always damage your water tank, and Jordan wouldn't let them kill the seals," said Appleby.

Donegal nodded. "'Tis as inquisitive as Mainsail Haul ye are," he said. "Now, Ned Jordan never took a dollar that didn't belong to him from any one, and he's carrying no score against the Americans just now."

"Still, you or Montreal told me they'd tried to stop him sealing," said Niven.

"Oh, yes," said Charley. "That's just what they did, but you've heard Donegal. Ned Jordan don't let his debts run on, and he don't like anybody else to owe him anything."

"But from his way of looking at it the Americans owed him a good deal," persisted Appleby.

Donegal laughed. "They don't now, and when Ned Jordan has got what was owing him he don't want any more," he said. "'Tis the man that's never contented who gets into throuble."

This was not very clear, but Appleby fancied he understood, because there was only one way in which Jordan could have paid himself. Appleby was, how-

ever, by no means sure that what Jordan had done was altogether warranted, but that was for him to decide, and the lad had already surmised that a man must relinquish his rights or enforce them by the means that came handiest in the misty seas. In the meanwhile, the skipper had been kind to him, and the excitement of the life they led appealed to him. Turning to Niven he laughed a little.

"I wonder what your father would think if he heard we were taken to Alaska in handcuffs for seal poaching, Chriss," he said.

"Well," said Niven dryly, "I hope we're not going to be, and I don't quite think he'd find it so amusing as you seem to fancy. There's not much use in talking that kind of rot!"

They said no more for a little, and Appleby felt inclined to regret his speech. It called up unpleasant reflections, for he had more than a suspicion that the thing he had mentioned might very readily come about.

There were, he had been told, well-armed Aleut Indians on the island, and not far away a gunboat lay hidden in the haze. If Jordan grew impatient and fired his gun the prospect of escape seemed very small for any of them. By and by he turned to Donegal as the din the seals made vibrated about them.

"Do they make that uproar always, and what do they do it for?" he said.

"They'll go on another month, and this is the way av it," said Donegal. "The seals are lying as thick as herrings in the rookery, and 'tis more room every bull is wanting to bring up his family in, while the place that seems nicest to him is just the one his neighbour is lying in. Sure, they're just like men, and when ye hear one roaring he's looking savage at the big fellow that's crowding too near and wondering if he's able to tear the hide off him."

Niven laughed a little. "I never heard of a man wondering if he could do that," he said.

"Then," said Donegal dryly, "'tis a curiosity that is not unknown in Ireland. Is it lambs ye are at the English schools, my son?—Ye do not see them, Charley?"

"No," said the other man, and while they waited the roar of the sea seemed to grow louder and the wind colder, and unpleasant misgivings began to creep upon the lads as they wondered what was happening behind them in the mist. It seemed quite possible that Stickine had blundered into the Aleuts' clutches or that a body of the gunboat's bluejackets had been sent ashore. Charley, however, laughed when Appleby mentioned it.

"It kind of strikes me we'd have heard them," he said. "There would be a circus before they corralled Stickine."

At last the sound of footsteps became faintly audible, and a line of men came out of the haze. They were panting as they floundered down hill under their burdens, and a few moments later Stickine gasped as he laid the breaker he carried into the boat.

"It's 'bout time we were out of this, boys. Heave her off," he said.

They went down the beach at a floundering run as a sea seethed in, splashed knee-deep with the pebbles ringing and rattling under them, and sprang on board just in time to get the oars out before another white-topped slope of water came hissing out of the mist.

"Shove her through!" roared Stickine. "Pull the buttons off you, boys!"

The oars bent as the men swung backwards, there was a plunge and a thud, and seething froth swept about the boat. It splashed into her to their ankles, and then, while Appleby plied the baler, swept away behind, and the boat flung her bows high to meet another comber. They went over this one more dryly, and drawing out from the surf pulled as noiselessly as possible, straining eyes and ears for any sign of the gunboat. There was none, however, and at last, tired with the long pull over the steep heave of sea, they came up with the schooner. It appeared astonishing to Appleby that they had found her, and while he watched the dark hull reel on the long slopes of water he wondered how they would ever get the breakers on board her. The sealers, however, were used to doing even more difficult things, and it was accomplished while the boats swung in towards the schooner, and then off into the fog again. As soon as they were on board Stickine drew the skipper aside.

"There was a gunboat lying 'bout abreast of the head when we were pulling in," he said.

"Then do you figure she isn't there now?" said Jordan.

"I don't know," said Stickine. "Any way, we couldn't see her, and it wasn't quite thick all the time."

Jordan nodded as he said, "We'll have the mainsail on her and the boom foresail, boys."

In five minutes the trysail was below, and though it was blowing tolerably fresh the *Champlain* was thrashing out to windward under all her lower sail. Two men stood forward in the whirling spray, and Jordan staring to windward through his glasses on the house, but for at least half-an-hour there was nothing visible but the whirling fog and long tumbling seas. Then a man swung up his arm, and Appleby gasped as something blacker than the vapours slid out of the fog. It was not far away to windward and coming on swiftly, for as he watched it the white froth about the shadowy hull grew into visibility, and he held his breath a minute as he made out a funnel and two slanted spars. Black and dark, with no light about her and ominous in her silence, the gunboat lay across their course.

There was, however, no sign of either confusion or consternation, and Jordan's voice was quieter than usual.

"Up helm. Off with the mainboom, boys," he said.

Stickine pulled over the wheel, the long mainboom swung out amidst a rattle of blocks, and the *Champlain* came round, until instead of sailing close hauled to it she was running before the wind.

"Topsails," said Jordan. "Yard-headers. He hasn't got us yet."

There was no controverting that, but while Appleby knew the pace the *Champlain* could make when hard pressed it seemed almost impossible that she could out-sail a steamer. Still, the skipper's quiet voice was curiously reassuring, and he remembered that Stickine had told him there were two ways of winning a race. In the meanwhile the gaff topsails went up banging, and the foam was flying white when they were sheeted home. Then the men stood still about the rail, each busy with the unasked question—Had the commander of the gunboat seen them? The *Champlain's* stern was towards him now, and her mainsail alone would be visible with her masts in line.

They had not, however, long to wait for an answer, for suddenly a blaze of light drove through the haze and smote the straining canvas. Then it sank a little, forcing up the men's set faces and lighting all the deck.

For a moment or two the lads could see every one of them sharp and clear in the dazzling brilliancy, and then there was a bewildering darkness again, for the light went out. The gunboat had also gone with it, and they were once more alone in the fog.

"Seen us sure!" said Stickine.

Jordan laughed softly. "Running!" he said. "She'll not come round with him as we did. Let her come up. Boys, we'll have all sheets in."

In came the mainboom, the foresail and jibs were hauled in too, and the schooner's lee rail was swept by the frothing brine when she came up once more close-hauled to the wind. Still, Appleby wondered, for the gunboat was to windward of them, and Niven, who stood close by him, turned to one of the men to ask a question.

"We're going back straight towards the American?" he said.

The sailor seemed to chuckle. "We're going where she was, but she'll be somewhere else just now," he said. "When they've brought her round they'll steam after us the way they saw us going before the wind, and we're pinched right up within 'bout three and a half points of it. It would take a very smart man to get in ahead of Ned Jordan."

Niven laughed excitedly, for, remembering Lawson's lesson on board the *Aldebaran* and what he had been taught since, the manoeuvre was now plain to him. If the gunboat steamed away before the wind it was evident that as they were heading at a very small angle to it the vessels would be sailing in almost opposite directions, and there only remained the unpleasant uncertainty whether the pursuer would find them with her light again. Still, the *Champlain*

was driving to windward very fast and the haze was thick.

"What did he switch his light off for?" asked Appleby.

"Well," said the sealer, "I don't figure he did. Seems more likely that something went wrong with it."

Others were doubtless wondering over the same point, for the men were still looking astern, and at last a faint silvery beam moved athwart the fog and then swept back again. Appleby fancied Jordan laughed as he came down from the house and stood by the wheel.

"That fellow's easily fooled. He's going right away to leeward as fast as they can shove her along, and the only thing that's worrying me is the mainmast head," he said. "'Pears to me we wrung it a little in the race with the *Belle*."

Almost as he spoke the *Champlain* put her bows in, and the deck was flooded ankle-deep with icy brine, while the lads could understand the skipper's misgivings as they glanced up at the big topsail and long gaff that stretched out the great mainsail's head. It was not difficult to see that the strain they put upon the mast must be considerable.

Stickine nodded from the wheel. "We've got to carry on and take our chances now," he said.

"Oh, yes," said Jordan. "Anyway, for another hour or so."

The time, however, had not passed when as the *Champlain* swung her bows out of a sea there was a sharp crack overhead, and almost simultaneously Jordan's voice followed it.

"Drop your gaff topsail and get the mainsail off her quick," he said.

Nobody lost any time, and there were many willing hands. In a few minutes the long boom was lying on the quarter and the *Champlain* jogging slowly to windward with the trysail only on her mainmast. Jordan did not appear by any means disturbed.

"I don't figure that fellow will find us again to-night, and we'll see what's wrong up there when daylight comes," he said. "You'll find me below, Stickine, if you're wanting me."

Then, except those who were needed for the watch, the men crawled below, and the *Champlain* rolled on into a thicker wisp of fog.

CHAPTER XIV
GOOD WORK

Next morning Montreal, who had been a carpenter, went aloft, and remained a while sitting on a little board the others hoisted up the mast. When he came down he followed Jordan and Stickine into the cabin, and all hands were curious when one of the Indians was sent for, too. Still, nothing transpired beyond that Brulée, who made an excuse for visiting the cabin, informed the rest that they were doing a deal of talking, until when breakfast was brought in Stickine and Montreal joined their comrades. Donegal quietly placed the can of coffee between his feet and signed to Niven to remove the eatables.

"Ye will have something to tell us, and breakfast will come on just as soon as ye have done it," he said.

Stickine laughed. "I don't talk when I'm hungry, and I want that can," he said. "When I've got a holt of it Montreal will start in."

"Well," said the carpenter, "my lot's just this. She's wrung her masthead, and I could splice a new one in with the lump of redwood forward and the irons Jordan found me, but it's a contract one could only put through in smooth water."

"What does he mean by wrung?" asked Niven.

"'Tis a complete 'cyclopedia with pictorial illusthrations ye will be when ye go home," said Donegal. "Just wrung, same as ye would twist a towel, by the strain on the halliard bolts! Ye will feed him on mustard, Brulée, if he talks again. Well now, Stickine?"

"We're making for a snug berth under one of the Aleutians," said Stickine. "Montreal figures he'll want three days there, but the Indian has a kind of notion we might find a sea otter."

"We wouldn't be very much better off if we did," said Niven. "Will anybody give me twenty-five cents for my share in one sea otter?"

Charley fumbled in his pockets, and apparently finding nothing there gravely laid a beautifully-made knife upon his knees. "If you'll take that for it we'll make the deal," he said.

Niven looked at the speaker in astonishment, and was about to take the knife when Donegal laid his hand upon it.

"'Twould serve ye right if I let ye. Is it shaming me with the ignorance av ye will be doing always?" he said. "What's a sea otter? Sure, 'tis the same thing as pearls and rubies, and what Mandarins and Emperors wear. Sorrow on the beast that would get himself exthinct."

Niven chuckled. "That's his usual rot, and I'll take the knife," he said. "What's the use of hunting any beast when it's extinct?"

"Give it him," said Donegal. "Thim as can't take telling ye must teach wid a stick."

Charley's eyes twinkled as he held out the knife, but Appleby broke in, "I fancy you had better wait a little," he said. "There are sea otters, Stickine?"

Stickine laughed a little. "They're getting scarce, and it takes a rich man to buy one now. If I had a few of them and silver foxes I would not go to sea. No, sir, I'd sit still ashore telling yarns in luxury. You're still open to make the deal?"

Niven saw that the eyes of all of them were upon him. "Of course!" he said. "I've made the offer, and I've been an ass again. Give me the knife, Charley."

Then somewhat to his astonishment the sealer slipped the knife back into its sheath, and Donegal thumped him on the back. "'Tis the makings av a man ye have in ye," he said. "A little sense is all ye need, but 'tis very hard to teach it ye."

Niven was not sorry that one of the others asked a question about the mast, and he was allowed to finish his breakfast in silence. Before it was over he heard a rattle of blocks, and when he went up on deck the *Champlain* was heading towards the east. Some time had passed, however, before she reached an anchorage under a rocky island hemmed in by smoking reefs. It was not an inspiriting place, and when they crept slowly in under shortened sail with the long swell heaving after them and the Indian standing impassive as a bronze statue at the wheel, the lads felt its desolation. There was no sign of life on the low shore that showed up dimly through the mist and rain. The grey rocks ran water, and the whiteness of the surf that seethed upon the beaches of rattling pebbles was the only brightness in all the sombre colouring. Here and there to seaward a stony barrier hove its black fangs out of the spouting foam and the growl of the sea rose from every side.

Still, they had little time to contemplate the dreary picture, for the cable had scarcely rattled out when the work commenced. The swell worked into the anchorage, and the schooner rolled with it lazily, but one of the big masts that swayed above her must be lifted out, and that was an operation usually accomplished in smooth water by the help of two great poles raised on end and lashed so that with the mast they formed a tripod. Jordan, however, had only his mainboom, and a few other very small spars to make them with, and while the others helped him Montreal spent the rest of the day lashing them together and wedging the fastenings before he fancied he could trust them to lift the heavy mast. It rained all the time.

Even then he appeared to have misgivings, and the light was growing dim before they had jammed one end of them fast and hove the other up with the end of the mainboom lashed to it. Then he and Jordan talked for some time together, and the men went below to rest and wait for morning. They were all of them tired, for the rolling of the vessel had rendered the task of getting the big spars on end and fastening them a very arduous one, and the two lads, who had done what they could among the rest, were aching in every limb. When they had stripped off their wet clothes they were glad to crawl into their bunks and lie there almost

too tired and drowsy to ask any questions of the men who sat smoking below. Still, it took a good deal to overcome Niven's curiosity, and presently he reached out and tapped Montreal on the shoulder.

"Once or twice I fancied the whole affair was coming down on us," he said. "Can you lift the mast with it to-morrow?"

Montreal grinned. "Well," he said dryly, "I don't quite know, but I guess I can. Isn't that the kind of thing you could leave to me and Jordan?"

"Oh, yes, but I am a little curious. You see, I might be under it," said Niven. "What's going to happen if you make a mess of it?"

"A funeral if you don't get out from under handy," said the sealer. "What's more important to the rest of us, it might tear out half the decks. When she gets loose and swinging you can't fool with that size of mast."

"Then why can't you let it stay where it is?" asked Niven. "It would set the trysail, and that's about all the sail we seem to carry on the mainmast."

"And how fast will she go under trysail?" asked Charley.

"That depends upon how much wind there is," said Niven.

Donegal looked at him a moment and solemnly shook his head. "'Tis no credit ye are to me, and I've tried to do my duty by ye," he said. "The question is how fast ye would want to go when there were two cutters stuffed wid men and cutlasses pulling after ye. Then 'twould be sailing nice and quiet under trysail would content ye?"

"We haven't seen any of those cutters yet," said Niven.

Donegal laughed softly, and a little grim smile crept into the faces of the rest. "There's a good many things ye have not seen, but ye may have the opportunity of observing one or two av them yet, and I don't know that it would please ye then," he said.

Niven was about to answer when Stickine, who crawled into his bunk, flung a wet fur cap at him. "It's about time you were sleeping, sonny, and you'll want all the breath you've got to-morrow," he said.

When morning came Niven found this was correct enough, for as soon as it was light the work commenced, and when Brulée called them for breakfast the mainmast was ready for lifting, while the men were unusually quiet as they went back on deck. The mast looked very big and heavy, and the *Champlain* was rolling more than she had done as yet. It was also raining hard, and a cold wind blew the drizzle into their eyes, while the tackles were stiff and swollen, but when Jordan raised his hand they bent their backs, and for five minutes the mast rose inch by inch. Then it stuck, and Appleby fancied he could feel the deck quiver beneath him under the strain as one of the beams it was fastened to took part of the weight.

The men, finding they could not move it, stood still a moment, their faces

showing set and drawn with the fierceness of their effort, some with hands clenched above their heads upon the rigid ropes and one or two with bent backs, while their eyes were fixed on Jordan who stood impassive and motionless on the house.

"Hold on to it," he said quietly. "Montreal, see what's jamming her."

Montreal was, however, below already, and presently his voice rose muffled from the hatch. "Heave," he said, and then more hoarsely, "Heave!"

Appleby was gasping, while the veins swelled on his forehead as he clutched a rope, and he wondered whether the men who had borne that intense strain could make another effort, for already the faces of some were purple.

"Now. Up she comes!" said somebody.

Then the sinewy bodies rose and sank again, the blocks rattled, and the mast rose slowly, stopped a moment, and rose again.

"You've got to do it this time, boys," said Jordan very quietly.

Their foreheads were drawn together, their breath was spent in an intensity of effort, but they succeeded, and there was a half-articulate yell when the foot of the mast rose out of the hole. Then a man sprang wildly across the deck, and in another moment mast and shears were tottering as the former swung towards the rail when the schooner rolled.

"Check her. Give him a hand, Charley," said Jordan, and Appleby wondered that his voice was even. Then there was a bang as something yielded under the strain, and the mast swayed out-board while the frayed ends of a rope whistled past the lad who for several seconds held the little breath that was left in him. The great spar swung up and down above the vessel, and the shears it hung from were rocking with it, while it was not difficult to see that unless something were done at once they would come down together, smashing the men beneath. Still, it also appeared that Jordan had provided for similar accidents and not trusted to any single rope.

"Catch her with the preventer, Charley, when she comes in," he said.

Charley nodded, for he was bent double hauling at a rope, and for a horrible moment or two, while everything that held it groaned, the mast swayed above their heads. Appleby could feel his heart thumping and a curious coldness under his belt as he watched it. Then the strain slackened a moment when the *Champlain's* foremast swung upright, and Jordan's voice broke harshly through the silence—"Down with her!"

Blocks rattled, men panted, the end of the mast hung lower over them, there was a great clatter and a thud, and Appleby stood up gasping and drenched with perspiration. The mast was down on the deck, the men apparently blinking at it, and there was a horrible tingling in one of his hands. Still, it was a little while before he glanced at it and saw that the rope had chafed the skin away and left

his fingers raw and bleeding. That, however, scarcely troubled him just then, for he felt the keen and wholesome joy which comes to those who by the strenuous toil of their bodies have done an arduous and perilous thing.

Rude as it might have seemed to those who knew no better it was a man's work he had done, and the pride of accomplishment stirred him. It was a significant victory they had won, not by brute strength alone, for that would have been useless unless guided by the nerve and intelligence which gives man dominion over all the beasts as well as inanimate matter. The sealers also seemed to feel it, for there was something in their eyes which had not been there a few minutes earlier, and Jordan laughed softly as he turned to them.

"You fixed it quite handy, boys, though she was very near getting away from you," he said.

They laid the mast where Montreal wanted it, and that finished their task, but in the afternoon two boats went out to look for a sea otter. It was, however, blowing fresh, and when they met the long seas outside the reefs they were driven back again, and the water was ankle-deep in them when they returned to the *Champlain*. Jordan laughed when he looked down at the dripping men from the rail of the rolling schooner.

"I figured you'd find it too much for you," he said. "We'll try again to-morrow, and you can lazy round any way that pleases you till then."

Nobody seemed to want to go ashore, and even the lads did not find the appearance of the foam-fringed beaches and desolate grey rocks that showed through the haze and rain inviting. So while the chunk, chunk of Montreal's axe rose muffled through the doleful wail of wind they sat snug about the stove listening to stories of the sea and bush. Some of them were astonishing, for the sealer sees more than the merchant seaman does, and at one time or other most of the crew of the *Champlain* had marched with survey expeditions through, or wandered alone prospecting far up in, the great shadowy forests of British Columbia. Now and then the lads' eyes grew wide with wonder, but the faces of the men showed gravely intent through the drifting tobacco smoke, and it was evident they believed the tales they listened to. They were simple men, but they had seen many things beyond the knowledge of those who dwell in the cities, and even Niven sat silent, lost in the glamour of the real romance as he wandered with them in fancy over misty seas and amidst the awful desolation of ice-ribbed ranges.

At last when one of them lighted the lamp Montreal came down, and flinging off his dripping jacket stretched himself wearily.

"Can't see any more, but I'll have the contract through before I let up next time," he said. "If you want that sea otter, boys, you've got to get him to-morrow."

It may have been because of what he had helped to do that morning, but

Appleby, glancing at the wet face of the tired man, realized there was a greatness in all craftsmanship which had never occurred to him before. There was, of course, very much that Montreal did not know, but if one gave him the top of a redwood tree it would under his sinewy hands become a spar that would transmit the stress and strain of the *Champlain's* canvas into useful effort that would drive her safely through screaming gale and over icy seas. He could also build a boat or bridge, and Appleby had realized already that among all the things man has ever made nothing more nearly approaches the simplicity of perfection than the former, a frail shell evolved very slowly before the knowledge of them came in wonderful compliance with the great laws that uphold the universe. It was, of course, but dimly the lad grasped this, but he understood in part that now, as it was when the world was young, it was after all the toil of the craftsmen that human progress was built upon. The world, it seemed, could dispense with the artist and orator and a good many more, but it could not well get on without the smith and carpenter.

Still, reflections of this kind did not usually occupy Appleby very long, and he might have brushed them aside but that he presently heard something which gave him an insight into the responsibility that is attached to all skilled labour.

"'Tis you that's the fine carpenter, Montreal," said Donegal. "But I've been wondering what was after bringing a man who could earn his three dollars every day ashore to sea."

Montreal sat down steaming by the stove, and laughed as he took out his pipe. Then he seemed to remember something and his face grew grave again.

"That's quite simple," he said. "I was working on a big railroad trestle back there in the ranges when one morning the contractor's foreman comes along. The bridge wasn't quite ready for the metals, and I was sitting on the girder with the river a hundred feet under me, anyway. They'd lost a man or two on that trestle already, and I was getting my five dollars a day.

"'You can drop those stringer ends into the notches without the tenon, and you'll do 'bout twice as many in the time,' says he.

"'I'm not doing them that way. It's not a good joint under a big load,' says I.

"'And what has that got to do with you?' says he.

"It wasn't quite easy explaining, but I knew just a little about what bridge ties can do, and the river was a hundred feet under the trestle.

"'Well, so long as I'm notching these things in I'll do them so they'll stand,' says I.

"The foreman he didn't say any more, but I knew what he would do, and when we were through with the trestle he comes to me. 'Here's your pay ticket and you can light out of this right now,' says he.

"I went, and trade was bad everywhere in the province that year. Nobody was taking on carpenters, and when I'd 'bout half-a-dollar left I went up on a steamboat that wanted patching up to Alaska. It was there I fell in with the sealers."

Montreal slowly lighted his pipe and looked at the stove, while Donegal smiled. "Ye do not tell a story well, and 'tis after leaving the point av it out ye are," he said. "There would be no big freight locomotive going through that trestle into the river, which is a disthressful accident that is not quite uncommon in the country ye and Stickine come from. But bad thrade mends again, and ye have not told us what is keeping ye at sea."

Montreal sighed a little and did not turn his head. "My brother was raised a sealer, and he's up here or in Siberia still," he said. "I don't know that he's living, but I seem to feel it in me that if I can wait long enough I shall find him."

Donegal slowly closed one big hand, and Appleby saw the glint which showed in his eyes creep into those of the other men.

"Dead or living he's not alone," he said with a hoarseness that expressed more than sympathy. "May them that watch above send him back to ye!"

Then he turned to the others and his laugh had a little ominous ring as he pointed towards the west. "He's finding the time long, but wan day you and me or better men than us will call on them folks down there with clubs and rifles, and ask them what they've done with the men who sailed with us."

Nobody spoke, but Niven, glancing round at the stern brown faces, felt that whether they were right or wrong he would not care to be the man of whom the sealers asked that grim question.

CHAPTER XV
IN PERIL

Early next morning the lads took their places in Stickine's boat, and the chunk of Montreal's axe followed them as they pulled towards the opening in the reef. He had not spoken to any one since he finished his story the previous night, and when they last saw him he was chipping grimly at the mast. The lads, however, forgot him as they watched the long, grey seas crumble on the reef, and once they reeled out and met the swell the rowing occupied all their attention, for it was needful to watch every stroke and check the boat now and then when the

top of the heave frothed a little.

There was no wind, but the sea still rolled rumbling on the reefs, and the grey shadow which apparently never lifted there lay heavily upon the waters. Appleby did not remember how long they had rowed, but the schooner had faded into the haze, when the Indian pointed to a blurred line of rocks that showed here and there amidst a white upheaval. The lads fancied there was land behind them, but the smoky vapours were rolled in thicker belts in that direction, and they could see nothing but dim seas and foam as they pulled slowly under the lee of the reef. Now and then they crept close in with a rock, where long streamers of weed swayed about them as the sea that poured in frothy cataracts down the stone rolled in and out. It did not, however, only float off from the rock, but swung up with the heave from what appeared to be deep water, and Appleby had never seen any seaweed that would compare with this. The stems of it were apparently as thick as a man's arm, and the leaves a good deal longer than the boat. It gave him a curious, unpleasant sensation while he watched it writhe and twist as if alive, as far as he could see down into the icy brine.

"Is it growing loose on the top?" he asked.

"No," said Stickine. "It comes right up from the bottom forty or fifty feet, and if there's a sea otter anywhere around you're likely to find him crawling in and out among it. Seen anything yet, Charley?"

A man in a boat astern of them shook his head. "I guess the Aleuts have them all corralled now, though there's no sign of any Indians here," he said. "Anyway, if there is one left this is the kind of place we should find him in."

Besting now and then upon their oars while the boat swung up and clown on the heave that lapped frothing about the reef, they pulled on, until at last the Indian in the bows raised his hand, and for five long minutes after that crouched motionless. No man moved or asked a question, and there was nothing visible but swaying weed and foam, or to be heard but the growling of the sea. Then the Indian signed again, and with oars dipping softly they crept nearer in, the man with the brown face crouching still and impassive with his hands clenched on the rifle barrel, though Appleby, glancing over his shoulder, could see nothing on the face of the froth-swept stone. He, however, knew that no one born in the cities could hope to equal the Indian's powers of vision, for it is the artificial life of an incomplete civilization that dulls the white man's physical faculties, and there were few things in which Donovitch, who lived in close touch with nature, was not a match for the beasts.

Suddenly the rifle went up, moved as the boat swung, and grew still again, while the crouching object in the bows stiffened rigidly. Nobody was rowing now, and the lads, glancing over their shoulders, could see the side of the Indian's face pressed down on the butt, and it and the brown fingers on the barrel were

still and lifeless as copper. Then there was a flash, the muzzle jerked upwards, and the smoke was in their eyes, but so intent were they that the report scarcely reached them, and what they heard most plainly was a soft splash in the sea. As Appleby looked down something that left a train of bubbles behind it seemed to flash beneath the boat, and passed beyond his vision into the waving weed.

"Did you get him?" a voice rose from the other boat.

"No. Pull in between him and the second rock," said Stickine, and there was a splash of oars as Charley's boat slid away.

Then the Indian stood upright in the bows staring at the sea, and for a time the boats swung with the lift of swell, while the water trickled from the oars. Every eye was fixed on the long heave, but no more bubbles rose up, and there was nothing to be seen save when a great streamer of weed whirled and swayed beneath them as though it were an animate thing. How long this lasted the lads did not know, but the intent bronzed faces, smears of froth, grey sea, and drifting haze had all grown hazy before their straining eyes, when a rifle flashed in Charley's boat, and there was a shout, "Heading your way, played out!"

"Pull," said Stickine. "In towards the rock a stroke or two."

The boat slid forward and stopped. Once more the Indian's rifle flashed, and a hazy shape showed for a moment beneath them in the water. Then there was a shout from Charley, "Stop right where you are. One of us will get out on the rock."

His boat slid in towards the froth-swept stone, and when she swung up with the swell two men sprang out of her and floundered along a perilous ledge over the slimy weed. Then the boats pulled out, and for what seemed a very long time moved one way and another, while every now and then a rifle flashed. The lads, however, could see nothing but the weed streaming in the water, and surmised by Stickine's face that he saw little more, for it was the Indians who took command now.

At last a grey patch showed for a moment amidst the froth that swirled about the rock, and sank from sight as suddenly when a man floundered towards it swinging up a club. Then as they dipped the oars the Indian stood up and with a hoarse shout launched himself from the boat. Appleby saw his tense figure for a second, and then held his breath as he plunged down, a dim shadow, into the waving weed. He felt a little shivery, for it seemed scarcely possible that the swimmer could evade the horrible embrace of those whirling sterns. Then a head rose from the surface, there was a muffled shout, and when the man went down again Stickine stood up on a thwart.

"A white man's as good as an Indian, anyway," he said. "We'll head him in to you on the rock, boys."

The boat rocked as he plunged down with hollowed back and stiffened

arms, and Appleby shivered again. He could swim, but he felt that only the direst necessity would have sent him down amidst that clinging weed. Now they pulled in to the rock, and now back again, while between times the men beat the water with their oars and for a moment or two an arm or face rose up. Twice the boats drove together, and there was a shouting while a man thrust down a long-shafted weapon which resembled both a hook and a spear. Still, the lads could see no sign of the otter, until at last, when they were quivering with excitement, there was a shout from the rock, and a man clinging to it swung up his club, and then dropped it into the water. Next moment both boats had driven against the stone, and Appleby grabbed Stickine, who clung panting to the stern, while when somebody had helped him to drag him in, the Indian flung a limp object into the boat. Its head was flattened in apparently by a club, and the lads found it somewhat difficult to believe that it would reward them for their exertions in capturing it. There was, however, no mistaking the content in the faces of the men, and presently Stickine, who spoke to the Indian, pulled off his jacket.

"I guess we'll head for the schooner, boys. It's quite likely it would take us a week to find another otter, if we did it then, and that water's kind of cold," he said.

They turned back towards the *Champlain* while Charley's boat went on, and when Stickine had shaken off the chill by pulling and they had rested a few moments on their oars, Appleby said to him, "I fancied these Indians could shoot well, but it took them a long while to hit the otter."

Stickine laughed. "They didn't want to unless they could get him in the head. Nobody wants to drill big holes in a skin that's worth a bagful of dollars," he said.

Niven nodded, and turning round grinned at his comrade. "Of course, if you hadn't been so thick you'd have seen that, Tom," he said.

"Well," said Appleby dryly. "No doubt this is different, but I once went shooting with a friend at Sandycombe who gave a farmer's lad half-a-crown to meet him with a gun, and he would creep up so close to the first thing he fired at that all he could find afterwards was a few pieces."

Stickine's eyes twinkled. "Now, I knew a man down in British Columbia who found a fur seal on a reef, and got out his axe to catch him with," he said. "He'd never been sealing, and he wanted to make quite sure of him. I guess he did it, for when we went into that place for water the skipper laughed when he asked him to buy the skin.

"'One dollar for a seal?' says the man.

"'Yes,' says the skipper, solemn. 'You've chopped the rest of them right out of him. Nobody has much use for a pelt that's made of holes instead of skin.'"

It was noon when they reached the *Champlain*, and they spent the rest

of the day helping Montreal to drive the iron bands Brulée whipped out of the galley fire on to the patched mast, so that they would shrink and bind the joint together, and refitting the rigging, while it was dusk when Charley came back without having seen another otter. Jordan, however, did not appear surprised at this.

"I've heard of the Indians prowling round for three months and getting nothing," he said.

The next day was spent in arduous and anxious toil replacing the mast, but worn out as everybody was, Jordan slipped out to sea when they hove the last shroud taut in the dusk, and they were busy afterwards reeving halliards and bending on the mainsail half the night.

"Every hour means dollars, boys," he said.

It was, however, fortunate they finished the work, for on the next evening the *Champlain* had need of all her speed. They had crept along slowly through the drizzle all day, but towards sundown the breeze suddenly freshened, and a dull red glare flickered for a few minutes on the horizon. It smote a coppery track across the heaving waters as they sailed westwards into it, but the smoky vapours came rolling up astern, and a low island along which the surf beat white showed up blurred and grey to the south of them. The sea rolled out of the north foam-flecked here and there, and the *Champlain* swung with the heave of it, hurling the spray from her bows as she drove along with a fresh beam wind.

The ominous red glare was, however, fading rapidly, and the lads, who sought shelter from the cold wind under the lee of the galley, knew that in half-an-hour or so the dimness that was creeping up from the east and south would close about them. There is no night in the north at that season, but for a few hours the light almost dies away, and times, when the skies are veiled by haze and rain, there is very little day.

It was very cold and clammy, and the lads' faces smarted from the stinging of the spray, while as the coppery streaks grew dimmer, the seas turned grey, and the wet rocks to the south of them became dim and shadowy. The surf was to leeward so they could not hear it, and the splashing at the bows and shrill moan of wind seemed to intensify the silence that descended on the sea. Then just before the last paling rays flickered out in the north, something showed up black and sharp against it. In another moment the *Champlain* had slid down a sea and the thing had gone, but Niven stared at Appleby because the form of it had been curiously familiar.

Appleby nodded. "Yes," he said. "I believe it was the gunboat, but wait until she lifts again."

In another minute the *Champlain* was hove up with the brine frothing about her, and there was no mistaking the object that moved out into the dy-

ing light from the contracting horizon. A smear of smoke hung about it, and for a second or two the dim slanted shape was outlined against a flicker of saffron. Then it and the radiance faded out together, and the lads stared at the empty waters wondering if they had been a prey to a disordered fancy. Others had seen it, however, for already a man hung out from the hoops half-way up the mainmast.

"The American, sure!" he said.

Jordan, who signed to him to go higher, sat down on the house, and his face was anxious as he glanced at the men who gathered about him.

"I don't know quite whether he's on his way to St. Michael's or looking for us, but I figure he can't have seen us yet," he said. "She was steaming fast?"

"'Bout as hard as they could shove her along, by the drift of her smoke," said the man, who now stood on the jaws of the gaff.

"Well," said Jordan, "we'll see what he's after when she heaves in sight again. Let her fall off a point or two. Slack up your sheets."

The *Champlain* swung off a little towards the land, and Appleby fancied he understood the manoeuvre because it is one thing to see a vessel against the horizon, and quite another to make her out when grey rocks, round which vapours crawl, lie close behind her. Still, that reef-girt shore swept by the filmy whiteness of the surf did not look inviting.

For ten minutes or thereabouts they waited in silence, Stickine looking straight before him with his hands upon the wheel, Jordan sitting apparently quite unconcerned upon the house, while the men hung about the rail. Then the low, black shape of the gunboat crept out of the haze again, and the smoke cloud at her funnel showed she was steaming her fastest. Jordan turned his head and watched her in silence for several minutes.

"She's coming up with us fast, and we're going along," he said. "I guess we'll have the topsails on her as soon as you can get them. Tell Donovitch I want him. Stickine, you can give Charley the wheel."

In a minute or two the topsails were aloft and the *Champlain* sailing very fast, swinging her lee-rail down into the swirling froth when she rolled. The steamer, however, was closing with her rapidly, while there was only a desolation of reefs and foam under their lee. It seemed there was no escape for them, but Jordan was still sitting quietly on the house tracing something upon it with his finger, while the Indian nodded as he watched him, and now and then a grim smile crept into the face of Stickine. Appleby, however, found the silence was growing almost insupportable and walked up to Montreal.

"She's evidently coming after us, but they couldn't stop us when we're doing nothing wrong," he said.

Montreal laughed a little. "I don't quite know 'bout the sea otter, but we were right in abreast of the seal beaches when he last saw us," he said. "That with

the pelts on board, would be quite enough for him."

"But we didn't get the skins there," said Appleby.

"Well," said Montreal dryly, "you'd find it hard to make any one believe it. When you catch a dog with a mutton chop in a butchery store nobody's going to ask him where he found it."

"Still, with the land to leeward, the skipper can't get away unless he runs her on the reefs," said Appleby.

"He'd do that before he let those fellows have her, but that land's an island. They've most of them more than one shore," said Montreal.

Appleby asked no more questions. He was by this time quivering with suppressed excitement, and fancied the others were quite as anxious too, though there was little in their appearance to show it. They were quietly watching the gunboat rise higher out of the dimness, though they knew that a good many unpleasant things would follow their capture. One or two of them, however, glanced towards the land, which was very blurred and hazy now, and then turned to watch the skipper, who was still talking half-aloud with Stickine. At last he moved a little.

"We've got to take our chances, but I wish I knew just what water he draws in cruising trim," he said. "We're 'bout level with the passage. Donovitch will take her in."

Stickine said something, the mainboom swung further outboard, and as the schooner fell off towards the land, the lads, looking forward anxiously, could only see the dim face of a crag, and the whiteness of tumbling foam. Then they saw the man on the main-gaff nod as the skipper glanced up at him.

"Coming right in after us," he said.

Jordan laughed softly. "Well," he said, "I guess he'll feel kind of sorry he did before very long."

As he spoke there was a flash astern of them, and while yellow vapour whirled about the steamer the lads heard the roar of a gun.

CHAPTER XVI
STICKINE MAKES A DEAL

Nobody on board the *Champlain* showed that they had heard the gunboat's warning shot, and the sound was lost in the roar of the surf which was now

spouting white close in front of her. The shadowy crags were, however, falling away, and Jordan still sat on the house unconcernedly, though there were apparently only foam-swept reefs before him, and the war-vessel was coming up rapidly behind.

"I've been worrying about her draught when I've got it all the time," he said. "Bring me the handy book up, Stickine."

Stickine disappeared, and when he returned with a battered volume in which Appleby had once or twice seen the skipper writing, the two men's faces showed up sharp against the dimness as they bent over it in the faint radiance that came up through the skylights of the house. Jordan's was quietly contemplative as he turned over the pages.

"Here she is," he said at last. "Four-expansion engines; still that's not what we want. Now we're coming to it. Small displacement vessel for coast-wise service. Depth moulded. Here it is. Draught in seagoing trim!"

Stickine followed the skipper's pointing finger, and then laughed softly as he looked up. "Two feet more than the *Champlain*, and he's coming in," he said. "Well, he's not going to find it so easy to take her out again. We'll have the haze down thick as a blanket before we're through."

Appleby who heard them understood but little of this, though its meaning became apparent later, and his attention was too occupied for him to wonder much about it just then. The reefs were unpleasantly close to them, and the gunboat coming on, though the vapours that drove past the schooner left very little of her visible. The men were silent, and Donovitch held the wheel, while another Indian stood forward calling out to him.

Ahead the sea frothed horribly, and several times the schooner swung round a trifle as a cloud of spray rushed up from a big, white upheaval. Then a grey rock buried almost in the wash of a sea slid past, and the combers' tops subsided. Only a confused swell heaved behind them, but the stream seemed to be running with them, and the lads surmised that one of the reefs they had passed behind partly sheltered them from the sea. They were sailing through a tortuous strait apparently. The vapours were, however, closing in, and presently they could make out nothing ahead, though they could still occasionally see the masts of the gunboat or her smoke rolling blackly through the fog, while the wind seemed to be freshening, for the deck slanted further as the *Champlain* tore along. Twice again a rock that rose suddenly out of the grey heave went by, and once a beam of brightness flickered past the schooner and faded in the fog. Jordan laughed as he glanced astern.

"He's not going to see much of anything in about two minutes," he said. "Down topsails, and get the mainsail off her, boys."

It was done, though the lads who helped wondered, for the gunboat was

coming on, until it occurred to them that with the little sail she still carried it would be very difficult to distinguish the *Champlain* in the haze. Once again the blaze that whirled up dimly behind them went past, and then grey and clammy the fog rolled down.

Jordan nodded with evident content. "We've shown that fellow the way in, and that's about all we'll do for nothing, boys," he said. "You'll be handy with your sheets because it's going to take a little contriving to wriggle out of this."

The men stood about with the ropes in their hands, and swung the boom foresail over when Donovitch spoke to them. They did it more than once, hauled the sheets in and let them run again while the schooner apparently twisted like an eel, and here and there a dim line of foam crept by. Once or twice the lads held their breath as they watched it, and they could see that their strained anxiety was shared by the men, for the roar of the surf rose from every side, and it was evident that all the helmsman's nerve was needed to thread that labyrinth of reefs. Indeed, Appleby fancied that nobody but a sealer would ever have attempted that perilous passage. There was no sign of the gunboat now, and he could picture the consternation of her Commander who had, he surmised, no Indian to take him through.

That, however, was the Commander's affair, and did not lessen the lads' anxiety, while now the thrill of the chase had gone they stood expectant and silent among the rest, listening to the clamour of the surf and staring at the sliding fog. At last there was a slackening of the strain, and Niven laughed excitedly while Appleby drew his breath in when Jordan's voice rose up.

"We've clear water before us now, and we'll have the trysail on her," he said. "Then we'll let her come up with staysail to weather. The Commander will be wanting us by and by."

They went about the decks at a floundering run, and the *Champlain* soon lay almost stationary with her head to the wind. Then they stood still to listen. No unusual sound the lads could catch came out of the vapours, but one of the men fancied he heard the American's cable. The roar of running chain carries a long distance, and Jordan seemed inclined to agree with him.

"That fellow's had 'bout enough, and he'll be feeling kind of sick when he sees his anchor coming home," he said. "We'll give him an hour to find out the fix he's in, and then some of you will go off and talk to him. Boys, there's dollars in the thing."

Most of the men went below, and the lads with them. There was nothing to be done on deck, and it was considerably warmer in the hold, while it was plain that the gunboat had given up the chase. When they sat down under the swinging lamp there was a little bewilderment in some of the faces, and Stickine watched them with a quiet chuckle.

"Ye will be permitted to reshume the intherrogation, Mainsail Haul. There's things one or two av us would like to know," said Donegal.

Niven was not unwilling to avail himself of the opportunity. "Then," he said, "what sort of a place was it we were running through, and what is keeping the American?"

Stickine laughed softly. "The fog and his nerves; but I wouldn't blame the man," he said, placing a can or two upon the floor, and pointing to them.

"Now, you'll see the island's there, and this can is one reef and that one another. More of them yonder. Says you, 'It's a nasty place to crawl through even in clear weather,' but the Indian knows it just as he knows the back of his hand. He was round here for most a year once, before they killed off the sea otter. Still, there's no charts that show these places quite complete, and the American came in because he'd have a man aloft to watch us and another taking bearings each time we swung round. He done it very well. Says he, 'Where that schooner goes there's water enough for me.'"

There was a murmur of somewhat impatient comprehension, for the men at least understood most of this already, and Stickine proceeded, "When we got the mainsail off her he lost us, and I'm figuring he felt kind of sorry for himself. Still, like a sensible man he brings up with his anchor."

"What will he do now?" asked Appleby.

Stickine looked at the rest, and grinned. "First thing, he'll find that anchor's not going to hold him. There's a big stream going through, and it's not the kind of bottom you can get a grip in. Then he'll get his boats out to look for the passage, and when they come back to tell him they've only been finding reefs he'll feel sicker than ever."

"Still, he could stop where he is with his engines just turning to take the weight off the chain until the fog lifted," said Niven.

There was a general chuckle, and Montreal said, "It mightn't lift for a week, and I've known it last a month, while the breeze that shifts it will bring the sea right in."

"Then," said Appleby, "what are we going to do?"

Stickine laughed again. "Wait till the Commander's shaking in his boots, and then get a boat over and go in and assist him. I'm figuring it will pay us better than sealing."

There was grim humour in the faces of the men, and Charley grinned. "It's a head Ned Jordan has," he said.

The lads joined in the laughter, for they could realize that the skipper had with no small ability turned what had looked very like disaster into victory. He had also done no wrong, and was, so far as they could see, justified in exacting some compensation from the men who would in all probability at least have

seized all the skins and prevented him sealing any more that season. They had not, however, long to consider the question, for presently Jordan sent for Stickine, and a few minutes later Appleby, to his great delight, was told to help to swing out a boat. He did not ask for any further instructions, and but once she was over the rail sprang down into her, and in a few more minutes the fog was blowing into his face as they drove her lurching over the long swell. It was not, however, very thick, which was possibly fortunate, because they could see the foam upon the reefs before they came too close to them.

Still, the lad found the shadowy dimness that was not night curiously impressive, as he did the reverberations of the seas that swung in smooth, black slopes out of the haze and crumbled into smoke upon the unseen barriers. Now and then the blurred outline of a crag upon the island loomed up and was lost again, while the wind moaned dolefully, though at times it sank awhile and the vapours rolled down upon the sea like a great, grey curtain. At last, however, they made out a light, and the men pulled a trifle faster. More lights blinked at them presently through the haze, and when a hoarse shout came down they stopped pulling close under the side of the gunboat. She swung up and down above them looking very big and black, while now and then when her bows went up there was a horrible grind of cable.

"Boat ahoy!" said somebody. "What are you wanting?"

"A talk with your Commander," said Stickine. "We're sealers from the schooner."

"Pull her in," said the unseen man. "We'll give you a rope."

"That's not going to do for me," said Stickine, with his soft, almost silent laugh. "I want the ladder."

Appleby chuckled, for he could understand how this demand from one of the men he had almost made prisoners of would exasperate the Commander, while he also knew that it takes some time to get a steamer's accommodation ladder over. So far as he could make out by the voices above him, some of the officers were conferring together, and he managed to catch the words, "Concerned insolence!"

"We don't feel like waiting here all night," said Stickine; "unless you get a move on we'll pull away."

"You wouldn't pull far," said somebody. "We've got a quick-firer trained on to you. Now then, up with you!"

"No, sir," said Stickine, grinning. "I'm expecting some show of civility as an officer of the sealer, and if you turned that gun loose on us there'd be nobody to take you out of here."

There was a growl on the deck above them, and somebody said, "Oh, give it him! We want to get through with the thing."

It was probably ten minutes before the ladder was hung over, and leaving one man in the boat the others went up, while Appleby stared about him with interest when he reached the deck. The gunboat looked very big after the *Champlain*, and even in the haze he could see that she was very trim. Lights blinked about him, there was a simmering of steam, and the long wet deck, tall spars, swaying funnel, spotless paint, and the neatness of everything gave him a sense of security and comfort which he had not been used to on board the schooner. He had, however, little time to look round, for as the sealers stepped in through the gangway a cluster of bluejackets closed in about them, and one of them laid his hand on Stickine's shoulder. The sealer shook his grasp off, and swung round, doubling up a great fist.

"Hello! Are you wanting anything?" he said.

An officer stepped out into the light. "You're under arrest! The Commander is waiting aft," he said.

Appleby was almost surprised into a little gasp of consternation, but he saw that Stickine was smiling dryly and checked it. Then they tramped aft along the deck, and finally stopped outside a cabin in the poop.

"I'll bring the leader in first, sir?" said their conductor.

"That's what I am wanting," said Stickine. "Still, as somebody has got to hear what he has to tell me, this lad's coming along."

He grasped Appleby's arm and shoved him into the cabin, and for a moment or two the lad stood blinking about him. At first, being still a trifle dazzled by the light, he only noticed that the little cabin with its snowy paint, varnished panelling, and curtains on the brass-ringed ports, seemed very luxurious after the hold of the *Champlain*. Then he saw that a young officer sat at a table, while another stood behind him. His face was not unpleasant, though just then he looked angry, and in his trim uniform he formed a striking contrast to Stickine, who stood, bronzed and lean, in curiously fashioned garments of fur and canvas, smiling at him.

"It's a kind of thick night," said the latter with a little nod. "Now, as I'm going to talk to you neighbourly, I've no use for the boys outside there. Because it wouldn't have been quite square to you as Commander I didn't object to them before."

There was something very like a grin in the face of the officer who still stood in the doorway, and the Commander's cheeks flushed a trifle. Stickine, however, met his gaze with complete unconcern, and finally he raised his hand and a patter of feet on deck showed that the guard was retiring.

"You don't seem to understand that unless you give me a very good reason for not doing it I'm going to take you prisoners to Alaska," he said.

Stickine laughed a little. "Well," he said dryly, "I don't figure you will. In the

first place, you can't take us anywhere until you get out of here, and unless you and me agree it's when you try to the trouble will begin. She's not holding with you now, and we'll have it thicker still until the wind piles the sea in to-morrow. When you've got a holt on that we'll go on."

The other officer leaned over the Commander's shoulder, and said something Appleby did not hear. Then the Commander sat silent a while as he watched Stickine. "Well?" he said at last.

Stickine's eyes twinkled a little. "First time you've been up here after the sealers? You don't know us yet. Now, I was wondering when you were going to offer us something to eat and drink."

The Commander stared at him, while the other man, who appeared divided between anger and laughter, turned away his head. Then, as if it were in spite of him, a little smile crept into the former's face.

"Sit down. You deserve anything we can give you for your assurance," he said. "Well, have you any especial fancy?"

Stickine appeared to reflect, "Champagne would be good enough for me," he said. "The last time I had any a Russian officer I did something for gave it me. The lad will have coffee. That is, if the cook has any fire in his galley."

The Commander touched a bell, and the other officer flung himself, laughing, into the chair. "I guess you'll get on with him better that way, sir," he said. "I've had a good deal to do with these fellows, and generally found them difficult to bluff."

In a few minutes a man brought in a big cup of very good coffee, and set some glasses and a box of biscuits upon the table, but while Appleby fell to when the Commander nodded to him, Stickine did not touch his glass.

"Now I'm going to talk," he said. "In the first place, I've shown you where you are. Next, the schooner's waiting outside the reefs, and unless the boat's back inside an hour with a note from me to the skipper he'll get sail on her, and you can take us and your ship to Alaska, if you can get her out of here. To put it quite plain, we've got the best end of the stick, and we know enough to keep a holt on it."

Somewhat, to Appleby's surprise, the Commander laughed. "I almost believe you have," he said.

Stickine nodded, and once more Appleby wondered. A few months earlier it would have appeared incomprehensible to him that a rough schooner sailor should so quietly enforce his right to be treated as an equal by a naval officer, and prove a match for him. The Commander now appeared quite willing to recognize it.

"Well," said Stickine, "we'll take you out to-morrow for——" and he asked a sum that astonished Appleby.

"No, sir," said the Commander. "I'll have the boats over at sun up and find my own way out."

"I guess not," said the sealer. "You've been looking round and coming right upon a fresh reef at every turn already, while there's a sunk ledge in one of the openings, and before you're through you'd have the gale in on you."

The two officers conferred together half-aloud, and finally the Commander said, "I couldn't pay more than half what you're asking."

"Well," said Stickine dryly, "it strikes me it would be a long way cheaper than losing your ship. The dollars would come in quite handy to us but they wouldn't count for very much with the U.S. Treasury."

The Commander drummed on the table with his fingers. "The trouble is I don't know I could send a bill of that kind to the Treasury," he said. "I'm not a rich man, and the dollars would take a good deal of raising if I had to find them myself."

Stickine nodded sympathetically. "Then I'll come down a hundred, but we can't take less. I've got to do the square thing by the boys."

The Commander sat still again, and Appleby could not quite understand the expression of his face. Then he said, "I should be taking a risk. You're not fond of us, anyway, and even you mightn't know all the reefs."

Stickine stood up very straight and grim. "You've just got to trust me, as we'll trust you for the pay. We wouldn't have made that deal with you unless we knew we could put it through."

"Sit down," said the Commander with a little smile. "We'll make it a deal. Take us out, and you'll get your dollars. Put us ashore and we'll shoot you. It's quite plain you're taking a few risks too. And now if you will join me in a glass of wine."

Stickine nodded, and laughed silently as he held up his glass. "I'm taking those dollars from you, as you'd have taken the pelts or the schooner from us, if you had the chance, and that makes us square," he said. "Every man to his own business, but that's no reason he should hate the folks who are now and then too much for him."

Ten minutes later and Appleby and the rest were in the boat pulling for the *Champlain* with a note asking Jordan to send the Indian across to the steamer.

CHAPTER XVII
THE PLEDGE REDEEMED

The light was slowly creeping through the mist when Appleby, who had returned with two of the Indians, sat with Stickine in the gunboat's cabin. It was very early in the morning, and though there is no actual darkness in those seas at that season, the haze provided a very good substitute, and now it was sliding past as thickly as ever. Appleby also felt clammy all through, for they had had a hard pull from the schooner against a freshening wind, and nobody is very vigorous at four o'clock on a very cold morning. He shivered a little as he sat with a steaming cup of coffee before him watching his companions. Their faces showed curiously pallid in the dim light, and Stickine's was grave, while the two Americans appeared more than a little anxious. Outside the wind was wailing through the rigging, and every now and then there was a jarring grind of cable as the gunboat swung up her bows.

"You believe we had better make a start right now, and you can pick up the passage?" asked the Commander.

Stickine nodded. "The haze is not going to lift to-day, and you'd find it hard work to hold her here when the sea rolls in. There's a nasty reef close astern of you too. Now, before we start we'll go over the deal again and see if you've got it straight. Our skipper has your cheque, and I'm to take you out. You're to take our word we've killed no seals in American waters, and leave us to go just where we're wanting once you're free of the reefs."

"Yes," said the Commander. "I pledge myself to that, but you've overlooked one thing, and that's the one that's going to happen to you if you make a blunder."

There was a moment's silence, and during it the naval officer pulled his belt round a trifle and rubbed a speck of dust off his pistol-holster. The hint was plain enough, but the sealer only smiled.

"That's all right, but I want the lad up on your bridge with me," he said. "If there was any trouble he could tell folks I did the square thing by you!"

The Commander signified agreement. "Who is the lad, anyway?" he said. "He hasn't the hard look of the rest of you."

Stickine glanced at Appleby. "I don't quite know. We picked him up, and his partner told a kind of curious story. Allowed his father was a big man back there in the old country."

A little smile crept into the Commander's eyes. "Well, I shouldn't wonder if it was the right one, but that don't concern us now. Would you like more coffee before you begin?"

"No," said Stickine. "You can tell them to start the windlass when you're ready."

The windlass was rattling and the chain grinding in when they crossed the sloppy deck and climbed to the bridge. A jet of steam roared away into the haze from beside the funnel, and the tinkle of iron came up from the gratings, while

Appleby noticed that every boat was swung out ready for lowering at a moment's notice. Except for one or two men forward the bluejackets were drawn up in little groups about the deck and stood motionless, apparently watching the sealers' boat that heaved in the haze ahead. Then the windlass stopped rattling and there was for a moment or two a curious silence while the steamer rolling lazily slid sideways with the stream.

"Keep your anchor at the bows," said Stickine. "Back her until she comes round under a starboard helm."

The Commander touched a handle, there was a tinkle below, the bridge commenced to tremble, and with a thud-thud of engines the steamer crawled astern. Then when her bows had swung round Stickine raised his hand.

"Ahead slow!" he said. "Just keep her going."

The engines thudded once more, and then commenced a monotonous rumbling as they crept on into the haze, while with every man pulling hard the sealers' boat slid towards them. Donovitch the Indian was standing in the bows, and Appleby, glancing round a moment, saw that the faces of the two officers on the bridge were grim and set. Neither of them or the men below, however, moved an inch, and the stillness and the silence through which he seemed to hear his heart thumping affected Appleby curiously. He felt cold beneath the old fur waistcoat Jordan had given him, for he had more than a suspicion that Stickine would only have the one chance of blundering now, and that if he did it a good many of the gunboat's company would never get ashore. A long swell heaved through the passage, roaring ominously as it seethed upon the reefs.

Then the Indian in the bows swung up an arm, and while Stickine signed to the helmsman who stood rigidly still gripping his wheel the sea was rent ahead and there rushed upwards a great cloud of spray and foam. It whirled high and a deep rumbling followed it, while another hoarse roar rang through the haze in front of them, and Appleby saw the officers glance at one another. He knew, as they did, what would happen if lifted by the swell they struck that froth-swept stone, and he felt that swift death was very near them all just then.

Still, Stickine only nodded to the helmsman, and the bows swung slowly round, while when the long swell foamed again the reef lay a score of yards away from them, and the growl of another grew louder. Appleby could faintly see the filmy cloud that whirled about it, and held his breath as he realized that the stream was carrying them towards it, and wondered if the helmsman could swing the ship clear in time. Then he gathered a little comfort from a glance at Stickine, whose face was unconcerned.

"Give her steam," he said.

For a moment the Commander stood quite still with his fingers motionless on the handle that would quicken the engines, and Appleby could guess his

thoughts. If they drove the steamer faster now, and she would not swing, in less than another minute her bows would be crumpled in.

"You're taking your chances with us," he said.

"Oh, yes," said Stickine. "Unless you're quick with that telegraph I'm not going to have any. Give her steam."

The Commander thrust down the handle, there was a tinkle below, and while the engines beat faster Stickine turned his hand round as he glanced at the helmsman. Then Appleby saw nothing but the spray ahead, and heard a hollow rumbling sound that sent a shiver through him as once more a white cloud whirled up. His eyes grew dazed as he watched it blow away until the foam about the reef beneath it was blotted out by the steamer's bows. Next he became dimly conscious that the helmsman was spinning his wheel, and noticed nothing further until the horrible white confusion was sliding away behind them. There was only the haze before them now, and it seemed to be growing thinner.

"Slow!" said Stickine signing with his hand, and while the rumble of engines slackened a faint cry came out of the dimness.

Then the sealer turned to the officer, and his bronzed face was as unconcerned as ever, though his hands seemed to tremble a little. The Commander was standing very rigid, but there were beads of moisture on his forehead.

"We've left your boat astern," he said.

"Well," said Stickine gravely, "we're not going to want her. I guess I've put this contract through, and you can whistle for the schooner."

Then the tension suddenly slackened, and there was a half-audible murmur from the men below when the scream of the whistle was flung into the fog. It screamed twice before the thin tinkle of a bell rose up in answer.

"That will be your schooner. She's not far away," said the Commander.

Five minutes later the steamer stopped her engines, and while the boat crept up again the *Champlain*, rolling under her jibs and trysail, grew out of the haze. Stickine touched Appleby's shoulder, and turning towards the Commander held out his hand.

"It's about time we were going now. A deal's a deal, and I've kept my part of it," he said.

There was a little grim smile in the Commander's eyes, but he shook hands gravely with the sealer. "And I'll do mine," he said to Stickine as he went down the ladder. "Still, you can tell your skipper that if I ever find his schooner inside our limits again, I'll have much pleasure in sinking her."

Stickine made no answer, but he grinned.

In another minute they were pulling towards the *Champlain*, and when with the froth streaming away across the sea behind her the steamer forged ahead, a red flag with a beaver and maple-leaf in a corner fluttered aloft to the

Champlain's masthead. Appleby smiled as he watched it stream out and sink again, for there was, it seemed to him, something almost ludicrous in this assertion of equality between the little rolling schooner and the big war-vessel, and he waited to see if the Commander would return the salutation or steam past in contemptuous silence. As he watched, a figure on the gunboat's bridge raised a hand, and the scream of her whistle vibrated across the waters. Again it hurled out its greeting while the schooner's flag rose and fell, and then with a last great volume of sound ringing above the clamour of the surf the gunboat steaming at full speed swept into the haze.

Next minute the boat was under the *Champlain's* rail, and Jordan looking down on them with a little, dry smile.

"I've no use for riling folks when it can be helped, and that fellow took his licking well," he said.

They climbed on board and hove the boat in, and Stickine followed Jordan into the cabin while Appleby sat down to tell the story to every unoccupied man of the *Champlain's* company. There was a broad grin on the listener's faces when he had finished, and one of them said, "There's not many men who could come out to windward of Ned Jordan."

Montreal nodded solemnly. "No," he said. "I guess you'd get tired considerably before you found one of them."

By and by Stickine came out of the cabin. "We'll have the reefed mainsail on her, boys," he said. "Now we're here and the wind's hauling westerly so we can't get back, we're going to run a little further east to a place where we might pick up a few pelts cheap from the Indians."

It blew hard presently, but the haze still followed them, and towards the close of the afternoon they hove the *Champlain* to, and lay with the stinging drift whirling about her plunging to a sea that frothed white as snow. Most of the men were sleeping or sitting snug in the hold when Stickine came below, and shook his head at Niven and Appleby. "The skipper's wanting you," he said.

Both lads felt a trifle uneasy as they went out on deck. They could not recollect any offences they had committed, but there was an unfortunate resemblance between Stickine's intimation and others they had received at Sandycombe when unpleasant things had followed the headmaster's request to see them in his study.

"I wonder if he means to put us ashore when we get to the place we're going to," said Niven.

"Wouldn't that please you?" asked Appleby with a little smile.

Niven appeared thoughtful. "No," he said, "it wouldn't, or you either. That is, if it meant we had to go back to the *Aldebaran*. Still, by this time she should be half-way to China, or somewhere else as far."

They had, however, reached the house now, and when they went in Jor-

dan was sitting by the little stove, with a big lead-bottomed ink-pot standing on some papers on the table beside him. The lads stood still a moment, and waited somewhat anxiously for him to speak.

"You've folks in the old country who would worry about what had become of you?" he said.

"Yes, sir," said Niven. "It has troubled me a good deal now and then."

Jordan nodded. "You can write and tell them where you are," he said. "Sit down right here and do it now. If we've better weather we'll run for the harbour I'm making for to-morrow, and now and then a boat from St. Michael's looks in there. She would take any letters I left to Vancouver."

Niven sat down at the table, and Appleby felt very lonely as he watched the smile creep into his face, and the rusty pen scratch across the paper. He knew that other eyes would brighten when they read that letter, but there was nobody to grieve or rejoice over him, and once he coughed for no reason that was apparent to Jordan, who was watching him.

"And you. Haven't you got anybody? There's another pen," said the latter.

Appleby was never quite sure what prompted him, but the skipper's tone was kindly, and fumbling in an inner pocket he pulled out a little leather case and took from it a picture of a sandy mound with palm fronds drooping over the wooden cross at one end of it.

"That is all I have, sir," he said.

Jordan took the photograph, and his eyes grew softer as he returned it with a little nod of sympathy. "It's rough when you're young, but a lonely man's not always the worst off, my lad," he said.

Niven, however, looked round with a flush on his face. "That's not straight talk, Tom," he said. "You know my mother would do almost anything for you, and there's the rest of them. Even Nettie, and she has the faddiest notions, took to you."

"Hadn't you better get on with your writing, sonny?" said Jordan dryly. "She's your mother, and not his, anyway."

Niven made another dab at the inkpot, and though it was difficult to keep his feet at the table as the schooner rose and fell he finished his letter. He was about to fold it up when Jordan glanced at him. "You've put something 'bout me and the *Champlain* in?" he said.

"Yes, sir," said Niven.

"Well," said Jordan, "I'd like to hear that part of it."

Niven flushed a trifle, and sat still a moment twisting round his pen before he said, "It isn't worth listening to."

"Still," said Jordan grimly, "I'm waiting to hear it. Start in."

Niven looked round at Appleby, but Appleby only grinned, and then with

the colour showing plainer in his face read a line or two. "The skipper has, taking it all round, been very good to us. He's——" The lad stopped for a moment. "This piece isn't of any moment. I'll leave it out, sir."

"I can tell better when you've read it," said Jordan.

Niven made a little half-conscious gesture of dismay, but he had reasons for remembering that when Jordan asked for anything it was wise to give it him, and he continued hastily, "He's quite a clever man in his own way, though nobody would fancy it from his appearance."

Appleby could not quite restrain a chuckle, and saw a twinkle in Jordan's eyes. He nodded as he said, "I can't find fault with that, anyway. Go on with the rest of it."

"If you saw him in his usual rig you would take him for something between a stuffed sealskin and a navvy on the tramp," said Niven.

"Now, I don't know what a navvy is," said Jordan.

Niven looked at his comrade again, and Appleby tried not to laugh. "He's a man who digs drains and makes railways in our country, sir," he said.

"Well," said Jordan dryly. "It can't be tougher work than sealing. Go on."

"Still," said Niven, turning again to the letter, "he has been quite decent, and treated us a good deal better than they did on board the *Aldebaran*, and I fancy it would be a nice thing if——"

He stopped again. "I can't read any more of it, sir," he said, growing very flushed in the face.

"Then," said Jordan, "I figure your partner can, and one of you is going to."

Niven set his lips a moment, and then went on with a little groan, "It would be a nice thing if you wrote one of your Canadian friends to give him a cheque. There can't be much profit in sealing and——"

"I guess that will do," said Jordan, whose face grew suddenly grim. "Get hold of your pen, and knock the last piece out of it. You've done it? Then you can put this in. 'Don't worry 'bout me. Skipper Jordan will see I earn every dollar's worth of anything I get from him, and before I get home he and Donegal have hopes of licking a little sense into me.' Got that down—all of it?"

"Yes, sir," said Niven, who was apparently almost suffocated, hoarsely.

"Well," said Jordan with a little, dry smile, "that will set your folks' minds at rest, and I guess your father will be grateful to me. Now you can tell the rest of them to get any letters they want sent home ready."

They went out together, and Niven kicked at the first thing that lay in his way savagely. As it happened, it was one of the iron pump fastenings, and it hurt his toe, while as he hopped about the deck Appleby laughed uproariously. Then almost before he knew it Niven was laughing, too, and when they climbed down into the hold there was water in both their eyes.

"AS HE HOPPED ABOUT THE DECK APPLEBY LAUGHED UPROARIOUSLY."

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"AS HE HOPPED ABOUT THE DECK APPLEBY LAUGHED UPROARIOUSLY."

"Have ye been after hearing anything funny in the cabin?" asked Donegal.

"Well," said Niven with a little chuckle, "I can't help fancying the skipper did, since you want to know. Sure, now, Donegal, 'tis a testhimonial he's been after giving you."

"Tell me," said Donegal, seizing him by the neck and nipping it while the lad struggled fruitlessly.

"It's no use. I wouldn't tell any one a word of it if you strangled me," he said.

They made sail again early nest morning, but in the forenoon the wind fell away, and it was late on the following day when they crept into sight of a grey blurr that lifted itself out of the misty horizon. They could just make out that it was land, but Jordan, who went up the mast hoops with his glasses, saw something more.

"No chance of a deal now we've got here, boys," he said. "There's a steamer coming in. She'll be heading south at this season, and it's not going to take them long to heave a few bundles of furs on board her, so if you've any letters to go along with mine you'd better be handy getting the boat over."

They had her out in about two minutes, and as it was Stickine's boat the lads who sprang down refused to come out of her. She was also the biggest boat they had, and had in all probability seldom travelled faster than she did for the first mile or so. There was scarcely a breath of wind now, and the long swell ran with them, while Niven remembered what the letter he had written would mean to those who had long waited for news of him at home as he put all his strength into the oar. Appleby also recollected the tenderness he had now and then seen in Mrs. Niven's eyes as she looked at her son, and her kindness to him, and strained every muscle, for now at least it seemed he could do a little to repay her.

So they sent the boat foaming over the long swell, but each time she rose the land seemed very little nearer, and when at last a smear of smoke rose out of the greyness that hung about it, Stickine spoke.

"The steamer's firing up! You've got to stretch out, boys."

Panting and gasping they swayed up and down, the oars thudding, and the grey sea frothing under them when the boat surged forward quivering at every stroke. Still, when the veins on Appleby's forehead felt swollen to the bursting and Appleby's eyes were dim the land was at least a mile from them, and a jarring rattle came off across the water.

"Windlass going! She'll be off soon as they heave her anchor. Stiffen up," said Stickine.

The lads did what they could, for they knew it was a good deal they were rowing for. The letter they carried would bring relief from torturing anxiety

to those who loved them, and tranquillity to a mother's mind, while Niven, half-choked as he was, nerved his aching arms as he remembered how in all his follies his father had borne with him. Appleby was aiding him loyally, his lips set, his face almost purple, and still, though Stickine and Donegal made the oars creak and groan, the land was only crawling towards them.

"You've got to do it, boys! There's folks back south worrying 'bout most of us," said Stickine when the scream of a whistle came off to them.

Neither of the lads had more than a hazy recollection of the last ten minutes. They had no breath left, every joint was aching, but their arms still moved almost without their will, and they were dimly sensible of the thud of oars, gurgle of water, and lurch of the quivering boat beneath them. They felt they could not be beaten now. At last while the whistle screamed again something big and black bore down on them, and they heard the thudding of engines and the flap-flap of a slowly-turning propeller.

"Stop pulling. Hang on to her," gasped Stickine, and then while the oars rested in their palms the lads could see that the bows of a steamer hung almost over them. Next moment there was a crash, and they were being hauled along with the froth splashing about them and Donegal holding on to something desperately. A man was shouting above them, and while the foam that was piled about her bows sluiced into the boat Stickine roared out hoarsely, "Letters!"

"Give us a grip of them. Let go before she goes over with you," shouted somebody, and a man swinging himself over the rail clutched at the packet held out to him. Then Donegal loosed his grasp, and they were rocking on the white wake as the steamer went on.

"Just 'bout did it," said Stickine. "I guess it was worth a pull."

Neither of the lads said anything, for they were dazed and dripping, and had no breath to waste, but they forgot their pains in a supreme content. It had been a good race, perhaps the best they would ever make, for they knew as they watched her roll away into the mist that the letters the steamer was bearing south would lift a dark cloud from an English home.

CHAPTER XVIII
TREACHERY

Here and there a streak of ripples crept across the water as they returned to the

schooner, and when they stopped rowing, Jordan called to them.

"You can pull her head round before you come on board."

They pulled hard before they swung the schooner round, and when they had hoisted the boat in Stickine glanced at the skipper.

"We're going back west?" he said.

Jordan nodded. "Right now," he said. "We've lost two weeks already and the season's getting through."

They close hauled the schooner, and the lads went below when she slowly crawled away. They had questions to ask, and it was Donegal who answered them.

"And what would be the use av going on when Jordan knew the steamer had got all the skins there was?" he said. "'Tis a week this journey will be costing him, and ye will observe 'tis not sitting still and complaining that 'tis hard on him the skipper would be doing. "Tis the best av it, we've got to make and get back at wance, or sooner,' sez he, and there's folks as don't know better call him a—fortunit—man."

Niven made a little grimace, and swung himself out of reach of the sealer's hand. "Sure 'tis a priest or a schoolmaster ye should have been," said he.

It was some time before they worked their way back to the sealing ground, and then, although the boats were out all day, they got very few skins. The holluschackie had, it seemed, all crawled out on the beaches, and the men grew gloomy as they saw the prospect of returning home with dollars to draw growing rapidly smaller, until at last one morning Stickine came forward after a talk with Jordan.

"There's just 'bout nothing to be done here, boys, and we're going west to see what we can find," he said.

There was a murmur of approval, and Appleby fancied he understood the curious expression in the men's bronzed faces, for it was Russian waters they were making for. It was, however, some time before they reached them, and then they found few seals, while the men were growing anxious again, when at last one wild evening they beat in to an anchorage under an island. Like the others the lads had seen in those misty seas it was a desolation of wet rocks and foam-licked beaches; but worn out by a week's bitter gale, they were glad when the *Champlain* ceased her wild plunging at last and swung to her anchor on the long, smooth heave.

Nobody wasted much time in stowing the canvas, and when they sat listening to the swish of the rain and the growling of the surf in the stuffy hold, Appleby turned to Stickine.

"What have we come in here for?" he asked.

"You can't always catch seals, but you can buy them now and then when

you know where to go," said Stickine. "The further it is from the market the more likely you are to get a bargain."

"Then there is somebody living here?" asked Niven.

"Sure!" said Donegal. "There's no place that forlorn a man can't somehow raise a living out av it, but the one Ned Jordan's after visiting is not what ye would considher a favourable specimen."

Charley looked up and laughed. "Meaner than a shark. There's nothing too low down for that man to do."

Donegal evidently saw the curiosity in Niven's eyes and nodded gravely. "'Tis Charley that's speaking thrue. Now, some men are bad on occasion, and ye will now and then find sailors and sealers doing things that are no credit to them by way av diversion, but they work, and that and the lashing of the bitther seas is the saving av them. Still, there's things no man may do continual."

Stickine smiled dryly. "That's quite right," he said. "The sea, and just the sea—that sets Donegal talking like one of those patent medicine books—and if we had a thousand dollars which of us wouldn't be glad to leave it? Still, I've no use for a man who goes back on his own country, and if it's solid meanness and wickedness you're wanting, you'll find them and Motter quite close together."

"He must work if he catches seals," said Niven.

Charley grinned ironically. "I guess you've found that out, but when Motter has any pelts to sell it's tolerably plain figuring he stole them. Tricked the Indians out of them—though they're not Indians on this side either—and they didn't belong to them, anyway."

"Then why don't the Russians run him out?" asked Appleby.

Stickine laughed softly. "I guess the ones who would do don't know," he said. "This is a kind of curious country."

Just then Jordan flung back the scuttle. "Get your boat over, Stickine. I'm going ashore," he said.

Stickine rose, and Montreal, who had been sitting gloomily silent, looked up. "If you've any use for me I'd like to come along," he said.

Jordan shook his head. "It 'pears to me you're better where you are," he said.

Montreal sighed, but said nothing, and in a few minutes Niven and Appleby were pulling the skipper ashore. It was raining when they stepped out on the beach, and saw for the first time a ramshackle wooden house that seemed falling to pieces beneath a dripping crag. Two great dogs growled at them as they picked their way towards it amidst a litter of fish-bones and offal that had been apparently flung out of the windows. Then somebody beat off the dogs, and when they went in a man who lay in a skin chair by the stove nodded to them. A smoky lamp hung above him, and the lads felt a curious disgust as they glanced

at him. His eyes were red and bleary, though there was a blink of evil cunning in them, and his puffy cheeks overhung his chin. He seemed horribly flabby, and wore greasy canvas garments which looked as though nobody had ever washed them. Appleby realized as he watched him that loneliness is not good for a white man unless he has work to do.

"How are you, Motter?" said Jordan. "This place hasn't made you tired yet? It's kind of forlorn for a Britisher."

Appleby fancied there was a little half-scornful inflection in the skipper's voice, which was not altogether astonishing, for the building had a horrible smell, and here and there the rain dripped in, but Motter laughed.

"Well," he said, "I was an American too, and I guess I'm a Russian now. Up here it pays one better—but it's business you came after?"

Jordan nodded, and the contrast between his lean, bronzed face and steady eyes and that of the other man did not escape the lads' attention. "Got anything to sell?" he asked.

"I might have," said Motter. "Still, I'm in no way anxious, because by and by there's a steamer coming along, and I've no great use for dry talking."

He thrust a bottle towards the skipper, but Jordan shook his head. "That's a stuff I'm not used to, and I don't like the smell," he said. "Well, now, let me hear what you've got and I'll make you a bid. This place is a little too open to leave the schooner long."

Appleby fancied Motter was not pleased at this, but he helped himself freely to the liquor, and for half-an-hour he and the skipper were busy bargaining. Neither of the lads quite understood all they said, and they sat vacantly listening to the rumble of the surf, until at last Motter raised his hand.

"Well," he said with a curious little laugh that jarred upon the lads unpleasantly, "you're too keen for me, and it will save worry if I let you have the skins. I want one hundred dollars down for the bundle I've got here, and you can take them with you or leave them until you come back again. The rest are lying at Peter's Bay, but I'll be there to hand them over or send one of my people along the beach, and across by the skin boat. It's going to take you some time to get there with the wind ahead."

"It's a deal," said Jordan, counting out the dollar bills. "We should fetch the beach by to-morrow evening. You haven't seen any gunboat round here lately?"

"No, sir," said Motter. "There's none nearer than Peter Paul, and I'm going to be a richer man if they'll keep away. By the way, I heard they had a Canadian at the sealing post."

"Are you sure of that?" asked Jordan. "What would he be doing there?"

Motter fumbled at his glass. "Well, I don't quite know," he said. "Still, I scarcely figure he was there because he liked it. Anyway, the folks could tell you

more about him at Peter's Bay."

Somebody was waving a lantern on the schooner and the roar of the surf had grown louder when they returned to the beach, while it was with difficulty the lads got the boat afloat. Jordan did not seem pleased at something, and bade them pull their hardest, for the wind had gone round and the sea was working in.

"It's kind of unfortunate Motter didn't remember he'd lost his store key before he got my dollars," he said reflectively. "Still, it's no great risk, because he knows we could pull the place down for him when we come back."

The schooner was plunging viciously when they reached her, and while they swung the boat in Jordan said, "Get the trysail and foresail on her, and we'll let her lie to when we're round the head." Then he signed to Appleby. "You'll not tell them anything about that Canadian."

They beat out of the bay they had only a few hours earlier beaten into, and, for the sun was going back to the south now, it was quite dark when on the next night they crept into an inlet hemmed in by smoking reefs. The wind was fresh and astern of them, but when they brought the schooner to off the first of the reefs Jordan stopped Stickine who was about to lower her forward sails.

"It's not going to take us long to bring off a boatload of skins, and you'll keep the canvas on her," he said. "I've no use for taking chances with a man like Motter."

Appleby, of course, understood that as there was evidently a seal rookery not far away it would be perilous for Jordan to be discovered within Russian limits, but he could not see how he would run any risk since there was no gunboat in the vicinity. He had seen that Jordan could be daring, but he fancied he was almost needlessly cautious when, although only one was wanted for the skins, he had two boats swung out. He also sent back Montreal, who would have gone in one of them, and bade the men bring their sealing-clubs with them, which seemed curious, since if they fell in with any Russians, it would be a proof that they were prepared to kill seals ashore.

It was dark save for the light of a half-moon when they started, and when they landed with difficulty through the smoking surf the beach was wrapped in shadow. Here and there a boat of some kind was drawn up, but nobody could see them clearly, and the only light was the blink from the windows of a tottering wooden house.

"You lads will come with me," said Jordan. "Donegal and Charley too. The rest of you will stand by the boats and keep your eyes open."

Then they turned towards the house, and when Appleby afterwards recalled that night he could remember the pungent smell of the weed, and the curious shrinking he felt when he set his foot on a fish head or some of the slimy

offal that lay everywhere around. He could just see the schooner, flitting a dim shape across the long heave that rolled into the bay and frothed upon the roaring beaches. It was some minutes before they reached the house, which seemed horribly damp and foul, and found Motter sitting at a table. His eyes had, Appleby fancied, a little cunning gleam, and his hand seemed to tremble slightly.

"Excuse me coming down to meet you. This place is rough on one's legs," he said. "Well, you have come to put the deal through and brought the dollars?"

"Yes," said Jordan. "As I'm anxious to be off I want it done right now."

"That will suit me," said Motter. "If you don't want to be sociable you can come along and count the skins."

He limped before them into an adjoining room, which was littered with bundled furs, and Appleby noticed that while these were no doubt of value, and there was a shutter to the window, it was not closed. Motter also turned the lamp up a little, though it was apparently burning well, when he set it on a table. Then Jordan opened several bundles of the furs, and when the two other men took up a load Motter laughed a little as he said, "Haven't you forgot the dollars?"

Jordan looked at him steadily. "You'll get them all right when we're through. This lot 'bout squares up the others I didn't get from you."

Motter smiled again. "Well," he said dryly, "a man would have to get up tolerably early if he wanted to come in ahead of you."

Then Donegal and Charley went back to the boat with their bundles, and Motter sat down watching Jordan sort out and count the furs.

"Quite sure you've got them all?" he said ironically when the skipper stopped at last. "Then we'll go back to the stove. It's kind of shivery here."

"Shall I bring the lamp along?" asked Jordan.

"Leave it there. We've another in the room," said Motter, and fumbled about some time striking a good many matches before he lighted it, while Appleby became sensible of a curious uneasiness as he watched him. There was no apparent reason for this, but he fancied the man could have been quicker had he wanted. At last the lamp was lighted, and Motter sat down at the table with his face towards the door.

"You've seen the furs are there?" he said.

Jordan took out his wallet, and laid a roll of dollar bills on the table. He had another in his hand when Donegal stood in the doorway signing to him.

"You're wanted out here," he said.

Jordan asked no questions but rose at once, and Appleby, fancying there had been a change of wind, followed him. When they stood outside Donegal laid his hand on the skipper's arm, and Appleby saw that he and Charley both carried their clubs.

"'Tis a trap the beast has laid for us. Will I tell them to shove off?" he said.

"Go on," said Jordan quietly.

"'Tis like this," said Donegal. "When he went in with the light he opened the shutter, and what was he after doing that for? Then he would leave it so any wan could see there was two lights where there was wan before."

Jordan nodded. "The rest—out with it."

"Well," said Charley dryly, "there was somebody running a boat down way back along the beach. They did it kind of quietly, but we could hear them. 'Pears to me it's 'bout time we were getting out of this."

"Somebody coming down the gully," shouted a man below, and there was a faint patter of running feet in a dusky hollow that wound amidst the rocks behind the house.

Jordan swung round. "Motter has sold us to the Russians, boys," he said. "Still, if there's time yet we'll take him along."

They were back in the room the next moment, but Motter had gone, and when another shout came from outside Jordan swung round again with his face showing very grim.

"He'd have had all my dollars in another minute," he said. "Well, we'll be going."

Charley, however, stopped a moment, and taking down the big lamp swung it round his head, while a great blaze sprang up when he hurled it on the floor.

"I guess it will take them all they know to put that out," he said.

Then they blundered down the stairway, and in another moment were floundering across the beach. It was rough and strewn with boulders, while the boats lay some little distance away, and as they tripped and stumbled a hoarse shout rose out of the darkness. Nobody stopped to answer, and a rifle flashed, while a patter of feet became audible behind them.

"They're tolerably close," said Jordan. "We've got to run, boys."

There was for some reason no more firing, but the men behind were evidently used to the boulders and gaining on them. Once Appleby fell heavily, but he lost no time in picking himself up again, and went on with a horrible pain in his side, gasping as he watched the white wash of the surf that seemed to grow nearer so slowly. Just before they reached it Niven went down, and groaned when Appleby seized his shoulder and jerked him to his feet.

"Don't give in, Chriss. You must hold out," he said, and floundered on again, dragging his comrade after him.

"I'm hurt. Only one foot to run with," gasped Niven.

Stumbling and blundering they reached the boats, but the men behind were almost upon them when Appleby, taking his hand from Niven's arm, grasped the nearest. Then there was a breathless shout, and they were floundering down the beach waist-deep in froth as a sea rolled in, while dusky objects came clattering

over the shingle a few paces behind them. Two men sprang in over the gunwale, and Jordan's voice rose up.

"Don't fool it by too much hurry, boys. Wade right in until she's clear afloat."

The next sea took them up to the shoulders, and Appleby, gasping with the icy cold, and half-blinded by the spray, saw that Niven was no longer with them.

"Chriss. Hallo! Where are you?" he shouted breathlessly.

He fancied a half-stifled cry answered him, and loosed his grasp on the boat. He did not remember whether he shouted again, or not, for he was only sensible that his comrade had been left behind, but next moment another shout rang out, and he felt his heart throb, as struggling shorewards he recognized the voice.

"Boys, will ye be leaving Mainsail Haul?" it said.

There was a growl in answer, and the boat came surging in almost on top of Appleby. Then men were apparently splashing through the water all about him, and one ran several yards in front of them howling gleefully and swinging a great club. After that Appleby was not quite sure what happened, but there were shouts and blows and a pistol shot, and they were floundering back again, Donegal dragging Niven through the water after him, and most of the men swinging their clubs. The boat lay half-swamped on her side when they reached her, and Appleby wondered afterwards how they got her through the surf, but he knew Niven lay on the floorings, and straining every muscle and sinew he tugged at his oar. Donegal was apparently yelling gleefully still. Then, as they drew out from the shore there was another red flash, and Jordan's voice rose up from the next boat.

"If he can't be quiet, boys, you'd better heave him over. I've no use for letting them know just where to shoot."

"That's sense," said Charley. "Reach out and put some weight on, Appleby. Your partner's all right."

Appleby did as he was bidden, though the spray that whirled about them rendered the boat almost invisible as she lurched over the swell, while his contentment increased when Niven assured him that it was only his foot, that was hurting him. Presently the *Champlain* ran past the boat with canvas banging, and while they hove her in Stickine drew the skipper towards the rail.

"There's a boat on our bow. Came off 'bout a mile back down the beach," he said. "They pull like white men, so far as I make out."

"Heading straight to windward, too!" said Jordan, quietly. "Well, we'll have the main topsail on her."

The topsail was aloft in another minute, and the *Champlain's* rail almost awash as she thrashed out to sea, but it was only in short tacks she could work out

of the bay, and their pursuers seemed to know it, for they had rowed to windward and could accordingly chose their time for approaching her.

"'Pears to me they mean to come on board," said Jordan dryly. "Well, you'll pass up the clubs and lay them handy on the house, but there'll be trouble for any one who takes one up before he's told to. Is it you, Montreal, at the wheel?"

There was a growl in answer, and Jordan seemed to smile.

"Then," he said, "you'll keep her going and not too high, until I tell you."

They swept on hurling the spray aloft, for though the bay was slightly sheltered the swell worked in, and it was blowing tolerably hard, while, so far as Appleby could see, the boat meant to intercept them when they went about close off a smoking reef. He could just make her out every now and then as she rose with a sea.

"That," said Jordan, "'pears to me uncommonly like a gun-boat's cutter, and by the way they're pulling they've a good many men in her."

They drove on, the boat growing nearer and larger, until she came reeling towards them with oars thrashing up the froth, and Jordan sprang up on the rail. Appleby could see that if they went round now, the boat pulling straight to windward would still close with them when they came about to clear another reef not far away, but Jordan, it seemed, had no intention of coming round.

"It's not my fault I can't run away," he said quietly. "Keep her going, Montreal."

The reef was close to leeward now, the boat nearer still to weather, and already somebody was shouting on board her. She was pulling straight towards the schooner's bows, and would be alongside in another few moments. Appleby felt his heart throbbing painfully. Then the skipper raised his hand.

"Down helm—a spoke or two," he said.

There was another shout from the boat, for it seemed that the schooner had yielded, but if that was its meaning it was premature, for while her headsails rattled she still drove ahead, and Montreal's harsh laugh jarred through the crash and sound of smashing oars below.

"Up again. Fill on her!" roared Jordan, and Appleby, running aft with the rest, saw the boat drive away helpless astern. Nobody was apparently pulling, and he surmised that the rending oars had hurled the men who held them one upon the other.

Then the *Champlain* came round, and a rifle flashed harmlessly as she once more swept past the disabled craft. Ten minutes later there was no sign of the boat, and they were thrashing out to sea alone.

"I don't quite know what they were, or that I want to, but if they'd been sealers they'd have had us sure," said Jordan, with a little laugh. "Well, we'll fix

up how we're going to square this thing off with Motter to-morrow."

CHAPTER XIX
THE SEALERS' RECKONING

The wind fell light next morning, and the haze closed in, but it became evident there were reefs not far away when the *Champlain* fell in with a herd of holluschackie. The men were in an unpleasant temper, and worked in eager haste when Jordan bade them get the boats over, for to have gone back and swept every seal off the island would have been a relief to them then. Jordan, however, seldom let his feelings overcome his prudence, and he smiled dryly as he watched the men.

"I don't quite know where the beach is, but there are the seals," he said. "If we run the flag up you'll pull back just as quick as you can."

The boats had started in another minute, and with rifles flashing every now and then they swung over the long swell, until the men's arms and backs were aching.

Darkness was creeping in when they came back one by one, and then by the flicker of blinking lanterns the work went on. The deck grew foul with grease and blood, the knives slipped in the tired hands that held them, and the lads would stop gasping a moment or two each time a stripped carcase went over the side, and wonder whether anything would ever free them from the horrible smell. At last it was over, and while the *Champlain* crept on her way again they sat greasy and slimy in the hold. They were very tired, but there was content in the sealers' bronzed faces, save for that of Montreal, who sat gloomily silent away from the rest.

"You've not been talking much to-day. Feeling sick?" said somebody.

Montreal's brown fingers slowly clenched themselves. "Not in the way you mean. You know what I came up here for, boys, and I've had 'bout enough of this," he said. "How'm I going to find out anything when Jordan yanks me out of every boat that goes ashore?"

Donegal, whose forehead was wrapped in a crusted bandage, shook his head.

"And Ned Jordan knows as well. Can ye not be trusting him?" he said.

Montreal appeared to find some difficulty in checking a groan. "I've waited

a long while, boys, and I'm kind of tired," he said.

There was silence for a minute, for the men knew it was a brother their comrade had come to find, and Niven, who lay upon the floorings with one foot tied up, remembering what he had heard in Motter's house, was about to speak when Appleby kicked him on the leg.

"Still," said somebody, "there's nothing you can do."

Montreal glanced round the shadowy hold as though to make sure that Stickine was not there. "Well," he said slowly, "I guess the *Champlain* will be short of a boat and a man short one morning—and there'll be trouble for some folks yonder if it's dead that man's brother is. It's the not knowing—the knowing nothing, that's killing me."

"One man couldn't do much alone," said Charley dryly.

Montreal laughed mirthlessly, and there was a curious glint in his eyes. "I guess he could," he said. "That is, if he had a rifle, and didn't worry 'bout anything so long as he used up the magazine before they got him down."

Donegal's face lit up under the crusted bandage, and his voice had a little gleeful ring. "And two av them would do just twice as much—and it's two, or more, there'll be, but we'll give Ned Jordan a fair show first," said he.

A little growl of grim approval rose from the men, but none of them said anything further, and they did not seem quite at ease when Jordan and Stickine came down the ladder. The skipper sat down, and looked at them gravely, but if he noticed anything unusual he did not mention it.

"We've got to have a little talk, boys," he said. "You know the kind of trick Motter would have worked off on me. He'd have taken my dollars and then before I got the furs turned the Russians loose on us. He and one of their officers fixed up the thing, and before I got out of their grip I'd have left skins and schooner behind me. Now, I don't like being kicked that way by anybody."

The skipper may have been mistaken, but the men believed him.

"We'll go back and pull his place down," said somebody.

Jordan smiled and shook his head. "And find a squad of bluejackets waiting for you? That's just what Motter would figure on, and there's a gunboat crawling round," he said.

"Are we going to sit down and do nothing?" asked Montreal.

"No," said Jordan with a little twinkle in his eyes. "Now, it's kind of difficult for a gunboat to be in two places at once, and while she's hanging round Motter's watching for us there's nothing to stop us walking right into the sealing post."

He stopped a moment, and looked straight at Montreal. "Well, now, that isn't in the deal you made to go sealing with me, but I heard they had a white man there."

There was a murmur of astonishment, and Montreal stood up quivering a

little. "And," he said hoarsely, "you're going for him?"

Jordan nodded. "Oh, yes," he said. "If the boys are willing."

The answer was not effusive, but Jordan, who saw the little darker flush that crept into the bronzed faces and the slow clenching of a brown hand here and there, appeared contented. He knew that he had but to lead and the men would follow.

"Well," he said grimly, "if we've any kind of fortune we'll be there to-morrow."

He nodded to them, and when he went up the ladder Donegal gleefully thumped Montreal on the shoulder.

"It's you and me that's spoiling—just spoiling for to-morrow," he said, and made a run at Appleby who was grinning at him. "And you knew it and never told. Sure I saw ye kicking Mainsail Haul. It's me that would be caressing ye wid a rope end, me darling."

Appleby swung himself up the ladder. "Sure, 'tis no sensible man would go looking for a row when he could run away," he said.

Donegal shook his fist at him. "Ye will stop up there where it's nice and fresh," he said. "No man can be sensible always. 'Twould not be good for him."

Next day they raised a gray blur above the horizon, and Jordan, when he saw it, headed out to sea again. Then he laid the *Champlain* to, and it was not until dusk was creeping across the waters that they edged in towards the land again. The time passed very slowly, and the men were for the most part unusually silent, though there was a curious anticipation in their faces, and Montreal sat very grim and quiet rubbing out a rifle. It occurred to the lads who watched him now and then that it would not be nice to be the Russians who had ill-used his brother if he came across them.

There was no moon, and the sky was dimmed by driving haze when they pulled ashore, three boatloads of them with rifles, clubs and knives, and no man spoke when they sprang out waist-deep in the long white wash that went seething up the beach. Two stayed behind to watch the boats, and with the stones rattling beneath them the rest went on. Appleby and Niven, who limped painfully, followed too, because Jordan had apparently been too much occupied to notice them. It seemed to the lads that anybody who might be listening must hear the noise they made a mile away, but the sea frothed and roared upon the beaches close behind, and when they wound beneath the face of a crag another sound grew louder. It was the voice of the big bull seals, and while they blundered over the slippery ledges the lads could dimly see that every shelf of rock was packed with curious shadowy objects. Some of them were shambling forward, some lying still with heads held up, but all were roaring, piping, bleating at once, and the din they made was indescribable.

Suddenly two of them flopped over a ledge and came shambling towards the men, one of whom stepped aside, while Appleby, starting a little at the sight of the half-seen shapeless thing heading for him, swung up his club. It looked very big as it came on through the semi-darkness. Somebody, however, laughed and grabbed his arm.

"He's not going to hurt you, sonny, if you get out of his way," a voice said. "Just a bull seal they've shoved out of the rookery. He'll go back and pull one of the rest of them out presently."

The seal flopped away into the shadow or into the sea, and the men finding better footing went on more rapidly, until when Jordan signed to them they stopped breathless on the crest of a rise. Beneath them in the dimness the sea frothed whitely, and a swarm of shadowy objects were apparently shuffling down the slope between.

"Holluschackie!" said Jordan dryly. "It's quite likely we'll take a few of them along. Get the lie of the place into you, boys. You might want to find the boats handy when you come back again."

The lads looked round with the others, but there was very little to see. A low black rise ran up into the haze in front of them, and here and there they caught the glimmer of a patch of snow. All round the darkness seemed closing in, and out of it came the boom of the sea on the beaches and a doleful wail of wind, for the seals were almost quiet again. Appleby could feel his heart beating and his temples throbbing as he wondered what that dimness hid.

"It reminds me of the night we stole Jimmy's duck," said Niven, but his voice was not quite the same as usual. "It will be something to look back upon."

"Oh, yes," said Appleby dryly. "So long as we do it on board the schooner. It wouldn't be quite so nice to remember it in Siberia."

"If I couldn't talk of anything more cheerful I'd shut my mouth tight!" said Niven, who felt the chilly darkness growing curiously unpleasant.

He fancied he could have made a dash at an armed loghouse as well as the rest, but this slow crawling in on an unknown enemy was a very different and much more disconcerting affair.

Just then Jordan raised his hand, and they went on again, blundering over a boulder here and there, and now and then splashing through a little slushy snow, but still there was only sliding haze about them and in front grey obscurity, until the lads commenced to wonder whether they would go tramping on the whole night through. At last, however, they stopped again on the summit of another rise, and Appleby grasped Niven's arm when he made out the dim blink of a light in the fog. The men murmured together, and Jordan seemed to be speaking, but Appleby did not hear what he said. He could only watch the light, while Niven afterwards admitted that he could recollect very little but a feverish desire to get

what they had to do over.

Once more the men wont on, a little quicker now, while the soft patter of their feet and the rattle of a rifle as one of them stumbled seemed horribly distinct in the stillness. Nobody, however, appeared to hear them, and at last when the dim outline of a house rose blackly against the night the pace grew faster, until it became a run, and the lads saw the line of shadowy figures split up left and right. Then they heard Jordan's voice.

"In with you. You know what you have to do!"

Appleby's fears seemed to fall from him, and it was with a wild desire to shout that he followed the rest at a breathless run, while Niven floundered along a few paces behind him. The house rose higher and blacker, and still nobody seemed to hear them until a dog commenced growling as they swept round to the rear of it, and stood apart on either side when Montreal with his rifle-butt beat upon the door.

There was a cry of surprise inside, a sound of voices, and footsteps that stopped again, while a deep growl made answer when Montreal once more beat upon the door. Then he stepped back and swung up his rifle.

"No time for fooling, boys," he said. "In she goes."

Appleby saw the weapon whirl high, and another shadowy man standing with the muzzle of his rifle pointed at the door. Then it came down crashing, there was a rush of feet, and he went in with the rest over the shattered door.

A glare of light shone into his eyes, there was a savage growl and a flash as something sprang straight at the foremost of them. A smear of acrid smoke filled the passage, but Appleby fancied he saw a big sealing-club whirl up, and the dog went down, for next moment he stumbled over something that felt soft beneath him. Then with somebody running before them they burst into a room, and the lads long remembered the picture that met them.

Two men who had apparently fled along the passage stood sullenly at the further end of it, and two more who had evidently dragged a table into a corner behind it. They were less than half-dressed, but one who was tall with blue eyes and straw-coloured hair had on a partly buttoned naval uniform. A pistol glinted in his hand, and an inch or two of blue-grey steel shone at his belt. The other man's face was sallow, but he was unarmed, and there was a curious glint in his little dark eyes as he watched the sealers.

For a moment they stood looking at each other, and then another door on the opposite side of the room was driven open and Jordan, rifle in hand, came in. Behind him came Stickine and Donegal. More sealers in shaggy furs and greasy canvas trooped in, but still the blue-eyed officer stood apparently unconcerned. Then Jordan dropped his rifle-butt and held up his hand.

"When I want a man to do anything I'll tell him," he said, and turned gravely

to the officer. "You can put that thing down. Nobody's going to hurt you. Can you talk any English?"

The officer who, Appleby surmised, was from the Baltic coast, made a sign of comprehension. "A little—but more easy the French," he said.

"Then," said Jordan dryly, "we'll get ahead. Fetch Brulée in, Stickine."

While Stickine went out the officer laid down his pistol, and with a little deprecatory gesture straightened his uniform and drew tight his belt. Then, to Appleby's astonishment, he took out a little silver box and shook a few cigarettes out from it on to the table. He did not seem in any way disturbed, though the faces of the big bronzed sealers who carried clubs and rifles were very grim as they watched him. This was almost a shock to Appleby, who had hitherto half-instinctively believed that quiet fearlessness and resolute composure in times of stress and peril were only to be expected from Englishmen. Yet here was a Russian helpless in the hands of men whom he knew had a bitter grievance against him and his comrades, and if he felt the slightest fear of them it was at least imperceptible. Appleby was, however, to discover later on that while some lands are considerably more pleasant to live in than others the fact that he was born in England or Russia, or elsewhere, after all makes no great difference in the qualities that become any man.

Then he saw that Stickine had returned, and the officer was speaking. "What you make here, Captain?" he said, getting out the words with evident difficulty.

"He's too slow," said Jordan. "Ask him if he has more men anywhere around, Brulée."

"Two of them at the huts, and 'bout a dozen natives," was the answer.

Jordan nodded, and Montreal stepped forward, his face grey and set, and his fingers trembling on his rifle. "I guess it's 'bout time I did some talking too," he said "Ask if he has seen my brother."

"Get right back until you're wanted. It's me that's running this show," said Jordan. "Ask him if they've got an Englishman there, Brulée."

The officer made a little gesture of assent. "They have one who works," he said.

"Send for him right now," said Jordan sternly. "Four of my men will go along in case there's any blundering."

The dark-skinned man slipped out from behind the table, and when he went out with four of the sealers behind him the blue-eyed officer held out the little box.

"You will do me the pleasure, Captain," he said in French.

Jordan smiled dryly. "No, thanks," he said. "I've no great use for these things, and I don't know that I'm open to take anything of that kind from you

just now."

The Russian, who seemed to understand him, laughed a little. "With permission," he said, and lighted a cigarette. "Now you can tell me what you come for, Captain."

"You can tell him 'bout Motter, Brulée. Two of you will keep a look-out outside there," said Jordan, and crossing over sat down on the table.

Then there followed a very anxious interval, and Appleby fancied by the way the men glanced towards the door that they were as expectant as he was himself. Now and then one of them moved restlessly, and the lads could hear the crackle of the stove and the moan of the wind about the building. They caught very little of Brulée's narrative, but long afterwards the scene returned to them, and they could see Jordan sitting very still, with an impassive bronzed face beneath his fur cap, on the table, and the blue-eyed officer languidly watching him while the smoke of the cigarette drifted between them. It also seemed to both the lads that if either of the men let his fear or anger master him a much more deadly vapour would whirl in thicker wreaths about the lonely building. Brulée seemed disposed to make the most of his opportunity, but he stopped at last, and the officer nodded to Jordan comprehendingly.

"*Lache. Infame*! It was not my affair," he said in French.

After that there was silence, until a tramp of feet grew nearer, and a murmur rose from the anxious men when a voice came out of the darkness hoarse and exultant, "We've got him."

Then, with Montreal and another man in front of them, the sealers came in, and there was once more a murmur when the first two stopped close by Jordan, who held out his hand.

"And you're Tom Allardyce?" he said.

The man's hand seemed to shake as he grasped the skipper's, and his eyes grew a trifle hazy when the rest grinned at him encouragingly and Montreal patted his shoulder.

"Yes," he said. "I was cast away up here 'most two years ago."

"Sit down," said Jordan quietly, with a glance at the Russian officer. "Tell us all about it. Don't worry, and go slow. I've a reason for wanting to know."

The man sat down, and there was another little murmur when the sealers saw his lined and haggard face, for there was on it the stamp of hunger and suffering. His hands were clawlike, and there was a great scar upon his forehead.

"It's good to see you, boys," he said, and his voice died away hoarsely. Then he turned to Jordan. "You're going to take me back with you?"

Jordan laughed a little. "Oh, yes," he said. "Look at the boys. I guess they're not going to let me leave you, if I wanted to."

The lurking fear died out of Allardyce's eyes. "Well," he said, "I was cast

away—me and an Indian and Stetson, sealing from the old St. Michael. 'Twas back there on the eastern reefs we came ashore, and when I got him out Stetson's head was crushed in. That left me and the Indian, and the Russians sent us west when the gun-boat came. I don't know how long they kept us yonder, but one night when they sent us down the coast on a schooner me and the Indian got away from her. The boat was a good one, and, for it was blowing fresh, we ran back north before the wind I don't know where, and lived with the natives ashore until the Indian got drowned in an ice crack while we starved through that winter. There's lots of things I don't seem to remember, but I got blown off in a skin boat at last, and when I'd lived most of a week on nothing a schooner fetched me here."

It was a very disjointed story, but the sealers could fill in the cold and hunger of those terrible wanderings which Allardyce, whose face spoke more plainly for him, left out. Brulée rendered it into French, and Jordan turned to the officer.

"Your people take away a white man's liberty and leave him to rot without a hearing?" he said.

The Russian made a little deprecatory gesture. "The Department is slow—or perhaps it is occupied, and he ran away too soon. One waits the instructions, and if the papers do not come—what would you? Sometimes a man is forgotten."

"Did you ever see this man before, Allardyce?" asked Jordan.

"No," said the sealer. "Not until he came here with the gun-boat a week ago."

Jordan nodded, and pointed to the dark-skinned man. "Have the folks here ill-treated you?"

"No," said Allardyce. "I had to work for them, and I was glad I had, but they never did no harm to me."

Jordan turned once more to the Russians. "I guess," he said grimly, "that was quite fortunate for all of you. Now, how long have you been working for them, Allardyce?"

"Since soon after the ice broke up. When that was I don't quite know."

"Well," said Jordan dryly, "we'll fix up the thing. I've had to come here with my schooner for this man, and I'll charge my time to you at forty dollars the day besides what Motter stole from me. We'll figure he has been working here two months, anyway, and he'd have got 'bout two dollars and a half for every day of it in our country. Then there's the months you kept him on the other coast without giving him a show to make out his innocence, and his damaged feelings. That will run to five hundred dollars, anyway, and it's very moderate. You can't do things of that kind to a Canadian without it costing something. Still, the trading folks aren't going to lose anything, because the Government's bound

to pay them. Now, have you got any roubles with you?"

"Very few," said the dark-skinned man in French. "We pay the natives in provisions."

Jordan nodded. "Then I'll work it out in seals," he said. "Now I'm wanting that pistol and your sword from you."

The blue-eyed officer laid his hand upon the blade. "You can have my word—a six hour's truce—but this only in one way."

"Well," said Jordan with a little laugh, "I guess I can trust you, because we've got your men's rifles, and I'll leave enough of the boys to take care of you. Montreal, you'll stop with four of them, and the rest will come along with me. It's going to take a good many holluschackie to square this deal."

The Russian nodded, and lighted another cigarette, and the lads went out with the rest into the misty night.

CHAPTER XX
THE NEXT MEETING

The men stopped at last at the head of the slope to the sea, and the lads discovered that the task before them was a good deal less simple than they had fancied. There were the seals—they could see them dimly lying in groups on the shingle or shambling about—but it became evident that their destruction could not be undertaken in a haphazard fashion, for Jordan sent two of the men to work round between them and the sea.

"We'll give them 'bout ten minutes, boys, and then start in. I'm entitled to so many skins, but I've no use for spoiling the whole herd," he said.

Here and there a man beat his hands while they waited, for the night was cold, others lighted their pipes, and Niven, who was glad to rest his wrenched foot, sat down.

"Why don't we go straight in and club them?" he asked Stickine.

"It wouldn't be the square thing," said the Canadian. "A seal knows a good deal, and if we killed 'bout half of them among the rest, those that got away would tell the others, and it would be a long while before they came back to this beach again."

"But seals only do things instinctively," said Niven.

Donegal, who was standing close by, laughed as he asked, "And what is

instinct, anyway?"

Niven appeared to have some difficulty in finding an answer, and Appleby grinned at him. "Better tell him you don't know," he said.

Donegal nodded. "Nor any one else, but the holluschackie have brains in their heads, as ye will see before this conthract's through. And what were they given brains for if 'twas not to make use av them? 'Tis the vanity of ignorance would have ye believe there's no sense in the wondherful things in the sea. Sure, Donovitch and his Indians could tell ye better."

This was a new point of view to Appleby, but being aware that his sealer comrades had seen more of the denizens of the waters than all the city men who lectured and wrote about them put together he made no answer.

"Then when are we going to club them?" asked Niven.

"When we've drawn out those we want and driven them nice and slow to a handy place," said Stickine.

Before they had time for further questions Jordan spoke to Stickine, and spreading out they floundered down the slope and then closed in on the seals. The latter made no very great effort to avoid them, and when they had driven them together Jordan separated those he wanted from the rest.

"We'll take these along," he said.

Then while most of the herd went flopping down the slope in a hurry to the sea the men urged the rest slowly towards the higher ground, pushing one here and there with their feet, or prodding them with their rifles. It was dark, but the lads could see the seals more or less plainly, though it would have puzzled either of them to describe their progression. They did not walk, they did not crawl, but every move set their blubber-coated bodies quivering, and nothing more appropriate than flopping occurred to Niven. They also went faster than he fancied they could have done, though the men seemed desirous not to hurry them, and when he asked, Stickine told him the reason.

"If you make them hot before you club them, they'll spoil their pelts," he said. "You could strip the fur right off a seal that had been run too hard with your fingers."

They went on, and when now and then one of the seals made a futile endeavour to get away, or stopped, and, raising itself in a curious fashion, gazed at its persecutors, the lads commenced to be sorry for them. They also felt a squeamishness that was almost too much for them when at last, after they and the seals had rested a little, the men set about the slaughter. After the first few minutes both lads slipped away, for the sight of the limp, quivering bodies and whirling clubs almost sickened them, but they dare not go too far, and the thud of the crushing blows followed them. Niven had seen Donovitch stand over his victims and beat their heads in, and the recollection of it remained with him.

"Of course you can't have seal-skins without killing seals, but they seemed so harmless—and I wish I hadn't come," he said.

His regret was even stronger when Jordan called him, and very much against his wishes he helped to roll round the horribly smelling, greasy bodies while the others flayed them. At every clutch his fingers sank in the warm, shaking blubber, and when at last the work was over his face was white and he shivered from revulsion. It was daylight now, and the men stood about him dabbled here and there with blood, and foul with grease all over, while he fancied that one could have smelt them from the schooner.

"It's beastly," he said to Appleby. "I feel as if I'd eaten no end of things that didn't agree with me."

Then Jordan sent two men back for the Russian officer, and nodded to him when he came.

"I want you to see what we've got. We're 'bout square now," he said.

The officer glanced down at the slaughtered holluschackie with a little gesture of disgust. Then he laughed as he said in French, "It is not my affair. I see you again one day, Captain, and it is perhaps different then."

Brulée made this plain, and Jordan smiled. "If you do it's quite likely I can show as good a fist as you. Anyway, we're going off now, and I'll bid you good-morning. You'll find your men's rifles down there on the beach when you want them."

In another half-hour they were pulling off to the schooner, and when they sat at breakfast in the hold Stickine grinned at the lads.

"Feeling any better now?" he said. "You don't like clubbing holluschackie?"

"No," said Appleby with a little shiver of disgust. "I've been wondering whether it's not going to make trouble for Jordan, too, because somebody will, in all probability, send on the demand to Canada if those folks ask their Government to pay the damage."

Stickine smiled dryly. "It's not quite likely that they will," he said. "The fellows who're responsible do some kind of curious things, and neither they nor the sealers have much use for talking. 'Pears to me that more than one Government is getting tired of us, and the Russian department bosses want a man who knows how to keep out of trouble. If he gets worrying them they're quite likely to find another use for him. Of course, there'll be some writing, but Ned Jordan only took what he was entitled to when he might have swept the island, and it isn't going to suit anybody to drag Tom Allardyce in."

Appleby could not decide then or afterwards whether Stickine was right, but it seemed to him that there was a good deal of reason in his opinion. In any case he had little leisure to consider the affair just then, for Jordan called them up on deck to hoist the topsails, and they spent most of that day watching for a

wind. It was as usual dim and hazy, and the lads fancied that Jordan was a trifle anxious, for he swept the sea with his glasses as they rolled slowly east. Appleby was also within hearing when he drew Stickine away from the rest.

"We're in a kind of fix," he said. "There's nothing the Russians wouldn't do to square up the deal with us, and that fellow we left behind will be pulling all he's worth for Motter's to turn the gun-boat loose. If I'd figured we were going to have this weather I'd have set his boat adrift. Send an Indian to the cross-trees to keep a look-out for her."

The wind came, almost too much of it, in the afternoon, and at dusk the *Champlain* was lying as close as she could to it with her lighter canvas stowed, and a nest of reefs to leeward. The lads could see the white foam flying and the whirling clouds of spray, and were wondering whether the schooner could weather them on that tack when the Indian aloft stretched out his hand, and somebody shouted—

"Boat close in with the surf."

Appleby went up the masthoops, and could just make out something that swung into sight now and then against the whiteness of the surf behind it. It was, he surmised, a boat, and he saw that Jordan was watching her under the main-boom.

"The Russian!" he said. "It don't seem sense to let her get that close in with the rocks to lee."

"Somebody waving!" said Stickine, who had taken up the glasses. "They're used up, and can't pull her out against the sea."

There was silence for at least another minute, while the men stared at the whirling spray and the dusky object that was hove up every now and then, and Niven shivered a little, for he could guess what would happen to worn-out men, hurled upon those fangs of rock by the frothing sea. The reefs would mangle them out of human semblance, in all probability. Then Jordan glanced to weather at the big froth-tipped slopes of water that rolled up towards them, and shook his head solemnly.

"We can't let them drown," he said. "Get your maintopsail up, but let it lie below the gaff, and shake loose the outer jib. We'll want them when we come to beat her out again."

"Square away?" asked Montreal at the helm.

Jordan nodded. "Out main-boom, boys. Slack up everything."

The long boom swung outboard, the schooner swung round, and as she swept in for the reefs with the wind on her quarter now the lads realized as well as the others did, the risks the skipper was quietly taking. It was easy to run for the boat, but to beat out again would be a very different affair, and Appleby fancied that only a very handy vessel would do it once she felt the grip of the

sea that grew higher as it swept forward through shallowing water to crumble on the reefs. It was also unpleasantly evident as he watched the white spouting that swimming would not be much use to him if she did not succeed. Still, he had confidence in the lean, grim-faced man who stood quietly by the house. The men in the boat would have taken the schooner from him and ruined him if they could, but Appleby knew that so long as the *Champlain's* spars and canvas would hold out, Jordan would not let them drown.

In another few minutes it was also apparent that the Russians were in sorest need of help, for each time she swung up the boat seemed closer to the surf. The men were pulling desperately while the spray that blew in from the streaming bows whirled about them, but every one could see they were making no headway, and the reefs were close astern. At last Jordan signed to Stickine.

"You've got to be handy, boys," he said quietly.

Appleby was at the rail, and saw for a moment the straining bodies swing with the thrashing oars and the white upturned faces, as the schooner rushed by the boat. A great wreath of foam frothed about her as she swung over the top of a sea, but in another second she had passed astern, and every man on board the *Champlain* became busy when Jordan raised his hand. Down went the helm, in came the long boom, there was a great rattle of blocks and banging of canvas, and as the schooner swept round a voice rang through the din.

"Get a holt of them. Up gaff topsail and jib while she's shaking!"

Appleby, as it happened, was at the topsail halliard, and could see very little as they ran the sail up. He, however, knew the schooner had run to leeward of the boat, and now when she lay to, he had a momentary glimpse of the Russians. They were flying towards her with the boat hove up on the back of a sea, but the *Champlain* rolled heavily and he lost sight of her. In another moment or two there was a thud and a shouting beneath him to lee, and struggling with the topsail tack, he could dimly see black figures leaning down through the shrouds and apparently clutching at something in the sea. Then bedraggled objects came scrambling over the rail, and Montreal was whirling the wheel round while something drove away astern.

"They're here. Haul staysail," said Jordan.

It had taken less than a minute, and now the *Champlain*, heaving her bows out of a seatop, was going on again nobody seemed to consider that they had done anything unusual, though it was evident that it might still cost them very dearly. The reefs were waiting close astern, there was also an ominous spouting in front of them, and black seas that had grown steeper came seething out of the dimness to weather. The schooner was hove down by her canvas until the lads could scarcely stand upon her deck, but she must carry the last inch of it if she was to beat off shore.

On she went, deluging her jibs at every plunge and drenching her foresail half-way up, until the reef was close ahead, and Jordan signed with his hand. Then with canvas banging she swept round head to wind, and, while the men, who needed no telling, grasped the jib-sheets, hung there a few breathless moments, for everybody on board her knew that if she would not stay, or come round on the other tack, she would be on the reef in another minute. Appleby cast one brief glance at the tumultuous spouting and chaos of crumbling seas, and then turned his eyes away, for he had seen rather more than was good for him.

"Let draw staysail. Lee-sheets," said somebody, and she was coming round with them.

Dripping men grabbed at the ropes, there was a banging of canvas, and she was thrashing out on the other tack when Jordan, turning to the blue-eyed officer, held out his hand.

"It's kind of fortunate we came along just then. I'll fix you up by and by," he said.

There was still just enough light to see by, and Appleby afterwards remembered the cloud of spray that blew into the foresail, the white seething of the reefs, and the two figures beneath the drenched canvas on the *Champlain's* deck. The Russian stood erect in his wet uniform, Jordan swaying a little, uncouth and ungainly in his spray-wet canvas and greasy furs, but the two shook hands as men and equals, and Appleby dimly realized that a great deal was implied by that grasp. One was, up there, an outlaw, the other an officer of the Tsar, but the likeness between them was greater than the difference of race, and Appleby commenced to understand things he had heard and read that had once been incomprehensible to him. Men, it seemed, were much the same wherever they came from, and neither varying speech nor colour could make them less than men, while the pride that set the nations at each others' throats was an evil thing. Then there flashed into his memory lines he had once been made to learn, and had straightway forgotten, "When the battle flags are furled."

In the meanwhile he was wanted to get another pull on the staysail-sheet, and when that was done all his attention was occupied by the reefs and the schooner. Hove down by her canvas she put her bows in every now and then, and her deck ran water, while the masts were groaning under the pressure, and the surf seemed very little farther away. Once or twice when a white sea smote her it seemed to both the lads who clung tight to what was handiest that she was going over, and Appleby saw that Montreal glanced at Jordan as though asking a question from the wheel. The skipper, however, shook his head.

"We've no time for luffing. She has got to take what comes," he said.

For several minutes it seemed scarcely possible that the *Champlain* could

resist the overwhelming heeling stress of her canvas, and her deck was swept fore and aft during them. Then there was a lull in the wind, and as she lifted her rail a little, Stickine glanced at the boat astern of them.

"She's most swamped, and a big drag on us," he said. "Shall I cut the painter?"

Again Jordan shook his head. "Not unless we have to. We'll want her tomorrow."

For an hour they thrashed to windward before they could clear the reefs, and when at last the horrible white seething swept away behind them, and they swung the topsail and mainsail peak down it was with a great contentment that the lads, who were drenched through, crawled away below. Niven laughed excitedly as he stripped off his dripping clothes.

"I'm glad we got them," he said. "Still, I wouldn't like to do this kind of thing often."

In the meanwhile the Russian officer had gone with Jordan into the cabin, but the bluejackets were put into the hold, and though nobody could understand them they smiled and nodded to the sealers and took all the tobacco that was offered them. Next morning the wind had once more fallen, and a little grey smear, which was apparently an island, showed on the hazy horizon. The lads knew that Brulée had taken an unusually good breakfast into the cabin, and Jordan and the Russians came on deck together. Montreal, at a sign from the former, span round the wheel, and the *Champlain* came up head to wind. She lay there for ten minutes while the Russians emptied and dried up their boat, then water and a bag of provisions were lowered into her, and Jordan smiled at the blue-eyed officer.

"There's not going to be much wind for three or four hours, and you'll be ashore by then," he said. "It's a good pull, but you'll be that much longer sending the gun-boat after me."

The Russian, who seemed to understand him, laughed and clapped the skipper's shoulder. Then he glanced down at his uniform with a deprecatory gesture.

"It is my affair," he said in French. "But, my captain, what you do for us we others do not forget."

Then he went over the side, and the boat slid away when he spoke to his men. Jordan signed to Montreal and the schooner went on again, but looking aft they saw the blue-eyed officer for a moment standing upright bareheaded, as the boat lurched over a swell. They saw no more of him, but when they sat at dinner Stickine came grinning into the hold.

"That fellow left a little silver box with some pencil writing in it on the cabin table," he said. "Brulée's been down worrying out what it means, and it's

quite a long while since I saw Ned Jordan so proud of anything."

CHAPTER XXI
IN VANCOUVER

It was, as Donegal observed, in American waters, but far enough outside them, that the *Champlain* fell in with the last holluschackie herd, and that day bright sunlight shone down on the gently heaving sea. There was not a boat that returned without its load, and tired as they were the men seemed unusually cheerful as they pulled back to the schooner when dusk was creeping in.

"The seals were a long way out to-day," said Appleby when they stopped pulling for a minute or two. "Except when we first came up we haven't found them so far from the beach before."

Donegal nodded as he shifted his brown hands along his oar. "'Tis getting into training they are. They'll be off south to where they come from by and by, the same as us," he said. "When is it we're taking the road, Stickine?"

Stickine laughed softly as he glanced towards the north across the long heave, and a little cold breeze fanned the lads' faces as they followed his gaze.

"I don't know. Jordan hasn't told me yet, but I guess we'll be shoving her along for Vancouver the first time the wind frees us," he said.

"It's fair now," said Niven with a curious eagerness.

"Is anybody telling you different?" Stickine said dryly. "It's time we were getting our supper, boys."

They went on again, and though they had rowed since morning the stroke was faster than it had been before, while all seemed expectant when they lay waiting for the other boats to give them room close by the rolling schooner. At last they hove her in, and there was a curious silence when Jordan moved a pace or two forward and glanced at the trysail with a little smile in his face. The schooner was just creeping through the water under it and her jibs.

"We'll have it down and the mainsail up. It would be a kind of pity to waste a slant like this," he said, and stopped a moment while the men watched him expectantly with the twinkle showing plainer in his eyes. "I don't know any reason you shouldn't give her the topsails too. She'd be that much nearer Vancouver to-morrow, boys."

In a moment the deck seemed covered with scrambling men. Blocks rattled,

brawny backs were bent, great folds of rustling canvas swayed aloft, and as it swelled and banged Stickine's voice rose up, "Blow, boys, blow!"

The peak of the big mainsail tilted faster, with a fresh rattle the foresail stretched out too, and the lads' cheeks were flushed and a light was in their eyes when with voices hoarse from excitement they swelled the roaring chorus—

"Blow, boys, blow for Californio,
For there's shining gold in heaps, I'm told,
On the sunny Sacramento."

It grew louder and faster, and they pulled with feverish eagerness as they sang,

while when at last one or two gasped and stopped, their voices were replaced by the wheezing of Brulée's accordion as playing with all his might he capered on the hatch.

"Way oh, Sacramento!" the voices rose again, and stopped when Montreal turned on Niven, who was dragging a sail after him.

"We've no use for that thing. Get the biggest yard header. We're starting home," he said.

Then they sent the topsail up, and the schooner was sliding south with a merry splashing at the bows when the last refrain floated out to leeward, and was lost in the silence that crept up across the sea, from the frozen North they had turned their backs upon.

"Shining gold in heaps, I'm told,
Down there in Sacramento."

"Now I guess we'll fix these pelts up," said Jordan quietly.

Without a thought of weariness they worked most of the night, and the lads did not even notice the horrible smell, while when at last the deck was swilled down Niven went forward and leaned a moment over the rail in the bows. The jibs swung blackly through the night ia front of him, the sea frothed white below, and the breeze was fresh and cold now, but the lad's face was flushed, for with every lurch that flung off the creaming foam the *Champlain* was bearing him so much nearer home. Then he turned and, because a half-moon hung low in the sky, noticed that there was another dark figure close beside him. It was Tom Allardyce, and when the man moved his head his face still showed worn and drawn, but his eyes seemed to shine, and it was with a curious little sigh that bespoke a great content he stretched out his hand and pointed to the south.

"She's footing it bravely—and taking us home," he said. "Many a time I've wondered what it would feel like—up there—when there wasn't much use worrying over things of that kind."

"It must have been beastly," said Niven, feeling that this very inadequately expressed his sympathy, and the man's voice was a trifle strained as he answered him.

"It's behind me now, and the folks I left down there in Vancouver are alive and waiting for me. It's—kind of wonderful, but Ned Jordan fixed it all. Well, I'm not the only one who'll bless the *Champlain* and him."

Niven felt curiously moved as he went down into the hold, and long afterwards the memory of the lonely man staring south across the dusky sea from the bows of the *Champlain* returned to him. Just then, however, his blood was tingling with exultation. He, too, was going home, and there were folks in England waiting to welcome him.

Next day it was blowing tolerably fresh, but though the spray whirled about them and the seas frothed white behind, not an inch of canvas was taken in, and it was with a little smile in his haggard face that Tom Allardyce held the wheel. As it happened the favouring wind swept south with them, and one morning a cry brought every man on deck.

"There, that's *British Columbia*," said Stickine when the lads stared over the rail. "She'd most have licked the C.P.R. steamer."

Looking east the lads could see a great white rampart lifted high against the sky. Drifting mists cut it off from the world below, and here and there the fires of sunrise burned up from behind it through the hollows between the peaks. No light, however, touched the western snow as yet, and it shone ethereally majestic in its blue-white purity. Then a single golden ray streamed heavenward like a flash of a celestial beacon, and the lads watched it in wondering silence held still almost in awe, and forgot the limitless sweep of prairie, rock and forest that lay between those mountains' eastern slope and Montreal, until Stickine'e voice reminded them that they had still work to do.

"She'd go home faster, boys, with another foot of main-sheet in," he said, cheerily.

It was a week later when one night they crept past Port Parry before a faint wind. Ahead the lights of Victoria blinked at them, and every now and then a smoky haze drove athwart the moon, while Appleby, watching the dusky shore slide by, could almost have fancied it was once more the night he and Niven had been blown away from the *Aldebaran.* She was not there, however, and though the scene was the same he and his comrade had changed. They had seen things few men have looked upon up in the misty seas, and the spirit of the silent North had set its stamp on them, giving them gravity in place of boyish exuberance,

and for the quality Niven had esteemed as dash the sterner, colder courage of steadfastness.

Presently a sailing-boat came flitting towards them, and a man in her waved his liaud.

"Hello, Jordan! Going straight across?" he said.

"Oh, yes," said Jordan, who seemed to recognize the voice. "I'm getting along as fast as I can, though there's not much wind. Have you anything for us?"

"No," said the man. "I just wanted to make sure of you. Holway of Vancouver asked me to wire him if I saw you pass."

"Well," said Jordan, "what has it to do with him?"

"I don't know," said the other man, as the boat dropped astern. "Still, he seemed quite anxious to hear when you were coming."

Jordan turned to Stickine. "There's something I don't understand. I don't owe a dollar to Holway or anybody."

Niven heard a little chuckle, and drew Appleby away as he saw that Donegal was grinning at them. "I fancy Ned Jordan will get a surprise to-morrow. It's you and I Holway is anxious about," said he.

An hour later Jordan called them into the little cabin. "We'll be in to-morrow, and have got to have a talk," he said. "Now, I've a use onboard the *Champlain* for lads like you, and would be open to take you again next season, but"—and he looked at Niven—"you'll be hearing from your folks in the old country?"

"Yes, sir," said Niven, checking a smile with difficulty, as he glanced at Appleby. "I fancy they will want me home again."

"It would cost a good many dollars to take you there, and this is a great country for a young man who wants to make his living," said Jordan. "You figure they will send you them?"

"Yes, sir," said Niven gravely. "I believe they will."

"Well," said Jordan, "in the meanwhile you can come home with me. That leaves your partner out, and he turned to Appleby. "Now, if you're open to sail north again it's quite likely I might get you something to do this winter on the wharf or in a mill, and I guess Mrs. Jordan could find room in the house for you."

Appleby felt the kindliness which had prompted this offer to one whom the skipper evidently believed to be a destitute lad, and his face flushed a little.

"It is very good of you, sir, but I fancy my contract with the shipowners is binding still," he said. "Anyway, I would like to write and ask Mr. Niven."

Jordan nodded. "One has to do the square thing. Take your time, my lad, and I'll put you in the way of earning your keep in the meanwhile."

Then Niven stood up. "I fancy he will go ashore with me to-morrow, sir," he said. "That is why, as I may not have another opportunity, I want to thank

you for the kindness you have shown us both. I believe that others, as well as Appleby and I, will always be grateful to you."

Jordan looked at him curiously, and then made a little gesture of impatience. "Now, that's a kind of talking I've no use for, and you've earned everything you got out of me. You'll let me know what you're going to do to-morrow, Appleby."

They went back to their duties, Niven chuckling over something with evident delight, and it was next day when they crept past the pines on Beaver Point, into view of the clustering roofs of Vancouver. As they slid into the blue inlet a boat came pulling towards them, and while the mainsail peak swung down a gentleman climbed on board. Jordan, who recognized him as one of the wealthiest merchants of that city, nodded in salute, and then stared at him in astonishment.

"You'll know me, Captain Jordan, though I've not had the pleasure of talking to you before," he said. "I've come for the two lads you picked up, and with your permission I'd like to take them now. Niven's father has asked me to look after them, and you'll find them at my house any time you want them the next few days."

Jordan seemed to gasp, Stickine nodded, and Donegal smiled curiously as he glanced at the skipper.

"I could let them off their work to-day, though they're not through yet," said Jordan. "Still, I was figuring on their going along with me. They might worry Mrs. Holway, and my wife is used to lads from the schooners."

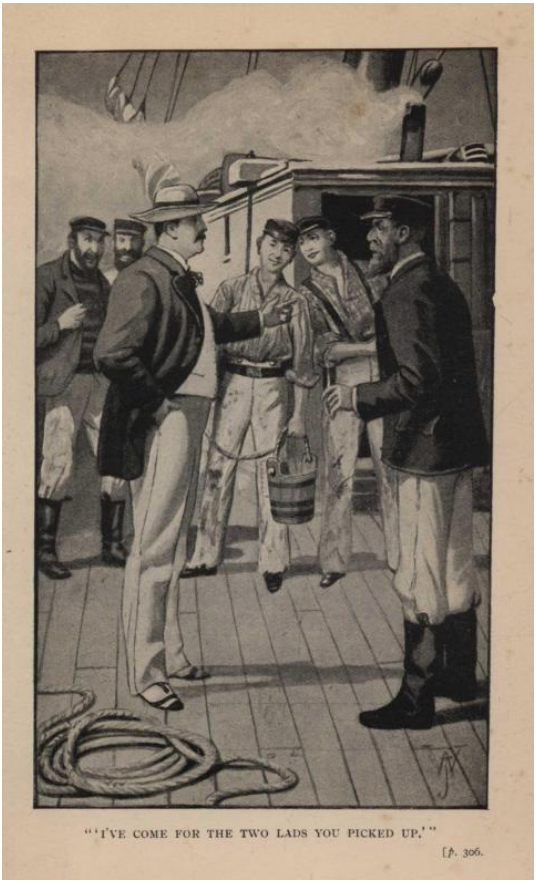
The merchant, who laid his hand on Niven's shoulder, laughed a little. "I scarcely fancy they'll go to sea as sealers again," he said. "Boys, we'll go right along, and you needn't worry about your things. We'll get you an outfit at a store in the city."

The lads shook hands with Jordan, who had apparently not yet recovered from his astonishment, and only looked at them gravely when Niven said, "Thank you for letting us off, sir, and I'll just bid you good-morning now, because we're coming down to see you and the boys again."

Then they sprang into the boat, and Jordan shook his head bewilderedly as they pulled away. "Well, I'm jim-banged—and that lad was talking straight all the while," he said. "Going along to stay with one of the biggest men in Vancouver City!"

"Sure," said Donegal, "an' who would take better care av the son av a ducal earl?"

In the meanwhile Niven and Appleby went home with Mr. Holway to a very pretty wooden house on the hill above the city, where they revelled in the luxury of a bath with hot water and clean towels, and new clothes, though it took them an hour or two to get used to the tight collars that galled their necks. The merchant and his wife were also very kind to them, and when they concluded



"'I'VE COME FOR THE TWO LADS YOU PICKED UP.'"

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"'I'VE COME FOR THE TWO LADS YOU PICKED UP.'"

the recountal of their adventures late that night, Niven said, "Now, there's one thing I would like, and that would be to do something for all of them. I feel quite sure my father would be pleased with it."

Mr. Holway nodded. "I believe he would. In fact, he wrote me to make the skipper any recompense that appeared advisable. The trouble, however, is that things are different here from what they are in the old country, and these men earn dollars enough themselves to resent any attempt to pay them for a kindness."

"Still, it could be managed somehow," said Niven.

"Yes," said Mr. Holway, "I believe it could. We can find out if the skipper wants, for example, a good sextant, and I've a notion that the men would be pleased if you gave them a farewell dinner. It would show that you still looked upon yourself as one of them."

"Yes," said Niven, "that would be the best thing."

When they next saw Jordan he was squaring accounts with the men, and apparently too busy to do more than nod to them. They accordingly waited among the rest, who were dressed much as they were in neat, new clothes, and had only the bronze in their, faces and the steadiness of their eyes, to show they were from the sea, until at last he drew his pen through two lines on the roll on the table in front of him.

"Christopher Niven and Thomas Appleby," he said, holding out two little piles of silver coins with a few bills beneath them on a document. "Look through that, and tell me if it's all quite straight before you sign it."

Niven flushed a trifle as he said, "I don't fancy we should take the dollars, sir."

Jordan looked at him somewhat grimly. "I've a good deal to put through, and no use for talking," he said. "You made the deal the night I found you, and they're yours, my lad."

The lads took the dollars, and found Mr. Holway waiting for them when they went out. He glanced at the handfuls of coin, and laughed a little as he asked, "Whose are all those dollars?"

"They're mine," said Niven, with a trace of pride in his smile. "I've earned them, and I fancy it would astonish the folks at home. My father used to tell me now and then that I'd never have a shilling that wasn't given me. Now take me to one of your biggest shops, because I'm going to buy my mother a brooch or a bracelet with the first money I ever earned in my life."

The merchant nodded gravely. "I fancy that would only be the square thing," he said. "Now, I was keeping myself and my sister when I was younger than you."

The bracelet was bought, and during the day Niven sent a note down to the schooner, while on the next evening they and the sealers sat down to a very

elaborate dinner in a big room of the Canadian Pacific Hotel. They were all of them present, and nobody appeared in any way uncomfortable or ill at ease in his unusual clothes, for the life they led had made them men, which is very much the same and occasionally a greater thing than gentlemen. In fact, Niven felt curiously abashed when before they went into the dining room he spread out before them the things he had brought. There was a silver-mounted sextant for Jordan, a knife that most sealers coveted with an inlaid handle for Stickine, a watch for Donegal, and boxes of tobacco for every one of the rest.

"I'd like you to take these little things just to remember us by," he said diffidently. "I wouldn't have asked you if they had been of any value, but it would be good of you to keep them, because you have, though of course it isn't for that, done a good deal for Appleby and me."

Donegal's eyes twinkled. "Tis twice, anyway, I've run ye round the deck wid a rope's end, and I would have licked ye often if 'twould have been of any use," he said. "Sure, we'll take them and remember ye. 'Tis not every day the son av a ducal earl goes sealing with me."

Then they went in to dinner, and when Niven had insisted on Jordan taking the head of the table most of them made a somewhat astonishing meal, that is, to those who did not know how the sealers ate and worked. Afterwards there were a few speeches, but these were to the point and short.

"Mr. Niven and boys," said Jordan. "I've had a good company with me this run, and the next time I go to sea I don't want a better one. I'm counting the lads in, and we'll feel kind of lonely without them when they go back to the old country. That's 'bout all. I'm not much use at talking."

Then Donegal stood up and rubbed his coppery hair. "Sure," he said, "'tis rough on me. They're taking my bhoys away—just when me and Stickine was licking them into men. Still, I'll be bearing it better if 'tis credit they're doing us in the old country. Boys, ye will not go back on Donegal, and if sealing has taught ye anything 'tis this that's at the bottom of the scheme: 'Thrue hearts is worth more than silver spoons,' an if that's not quite what the pote said it's what he was meaning."

It was getting late, and there was a pause in the laughter, when Niven rose up. "I wish I could talk as I want to—but now when I've so much to tell you I can't," he said, standing with flushed face and eyes shining at the foot of the table. "Still, before we go I want you to join in a last good wish with me. Boys, here's long life to Ned Jordan."

There was a roar, and the voices rang through it one by one. "The man who beat the Russians and the Americans too. The skipper who never went back on his crew. Ned Jordan of the *Champlain* who brought me home again!"

Niven long remembered them standing about the long table with the sea-

bronze in their faces and the pride in their eyes that were turned on Jordan. At last he once more stood up awkwardly.

"Boys," he said simply, "I couldn't have done nothing without the rest of you, and with the same men behind me it wouldn't be very much to do it all again."

Then they went out, shaking hands with Niven and Appleby, who stood in the great hall of the hotel, to bid farewell to them. Last of all came Jordan, and he stopped a moment.

"I've been wrong a good many times in my life, Mr. Niven, and that makes it the easier to tell you I was more club-headed than usual 'bout you," he said. "Still, I figure there's nothing but good feeling between us now, and you'll not forget Ned Jordan if you come back again."

Then he went down the pathway, and the two lads stood still, until from out of the darkness down by the water-front a voice they knew raised a song and the last of it came faintly up to them—

"Shining gold in heaps, I'm told,
On the bunks of Sacramento."

Niven glanced at Appleby, and his voice was not quite steady as he said, "Starting home to-morrow—and we'll not see any of them again. Well, I'm sorry."

"Yes," said Appleby quietly. "I feel that way too."

CHAPTER XXII
THE RESULT OF THE CHOICE

The Montreal express was waiting to commence its six days' eastward journey when Appleby and Niven stood in the C.P.R. station next afternoon. The lads, however, scarcely noticed the great locomotive and long cars, or the roofs of the city that rose row and row up the face of the hill with the ragged spires of the sombre pines towering high above them. They were looking out on the blue inlet which, streaked in places by the smoke of the mills, lay shining in the sun, with dusky forests and a lofty line of snow beyond. Broad in the foreground rode the *Champlain*, looking very small and dainty with her bare masts standing high

above the sweep of bulwarks, and they could recognize the men stripping the canvas off her. Behind her with the beaver ensign streaming at her peak another schooner was beating in, and Niven smiled curiously as he followed her with his eyes.

"It's the *Argo*," he said. "We'll be off in a minute or two—and of course I'm glad we're going home. Still, it hurts a little to leave it all behind."

Appleby nodded, for he fancied he knew what Niven was feeling, and it was with a faint sigh he turned towards the cars.

"It will be a long time before I forget the *Champlain*," he said. "Still, you see we couldn't be sealers."

Then a big bell commenced ringing, and Mr. Holway came up. "Here are your ticket coupons right through to Liverpool, and the Allan boat will sail an hour or two after you get to Montreal," he said. "Better take your places."

They shook hands with him while the big engine panted, and swung themselves on to the platform of the nearest car. It lurched forward, Mr. Holway waving his hand to them, slid away behind, wharf and mill went by, but they still stood out on the platform looking back at the *Champlain*, until with a sudden roar of wheels the train swept into the shadow of the pines that shut out blue inlet and schooner from their sight. Then Niven sighed a little and Appleby looked at him with a curious little smile.

"That's the last of her, Chriss," he said. "We've got to look forward now."

They were, however, soon too occupied for any vague regrets, and that journey from ocean to ocean over British soil excited their wonder and now and then brought them a little thrill of pride. Hour by hour the cars went lurching through the shadow of great pine-forests, and up an awful chasm with a river foaming far away below, swung over dizzy trestles, and past flashing glaciers through a tremendous desolation of rock and ice and snow that no man's foot had ever trodden. Still, the valleys were sprinkled with little wooden towns from which there rose the scream of saws and the smoke of mines, while when two great engines hauled them slowly in snake-like curves up to the Selkirk passes the lads stood gazing in silent awe at the white peaks above them.

"The men who built this road would stick at nothing," said Niven with a little gasp of wonder as he glanced back at the shining metals which lay apparently straight beneath him.

Later, with a roar of wheels flung back from the dark rocks that had for centuries barred off from the prairie the wild mountain land, they climbed the Kicking Horse defile beside a frothing river, and went roaring down into the rolling hills on the Rockies' eastern side. These, too, swept back and faded, and they were racing eastwards straight as the crow flies across the prairie.

Little wooden stations, herds of sheep and cattle, lonely mounted men

seen miles away, were left behind, and still hour by hour the great white levels stretched away. From the dawn that flushed red before them until the sunset flamed behind, the gaunt telegraph poles and shining metals that led straight on came flying back to them, and there was no change in the white waste the moonlight shone upon. Then they ran through yellow stubble where the splendid wheat had been, past lonely homesteads, lines of toiling teams, and clouds of dust and blue smoke where the thrashers were working in the field, until they rolled across a great river into Winnipeg City.

There they stopped an hour or two, and afterwards ran past vast blue lakes into the forests again, swept across wooden bridges over frothing rivers, until the lads clinging to the platform looked down on an inland sea when the dusty cars went lurching along the Superior shore over a road riven out of the adamantine granite that had been paid for with brave men's lives. By and by they came out of the wilderness again, and swept through green Ontario past wooden farms and orchards into Montreal, where they had decided to join the steamer, though they could have done so nearer the sea. They were, however, stiff and aching, and glad to stretch their limbs, while Niven stared about him in wonder as they walked through Montreal and stopped a moment outside the great cathedral.

"It's a city of palaces and churches, and there's no dust and smoke at all," he said. "I never fancied they'd places of this kind in Canada. Well, we'll go on to the steamer as soon as we've worked out the kinks we got in the cars."

The steamer went down the river soon after they reached her, and it was an hour or two before the lads felt at home on board her. She seemed so big and high above the water after the *Champlain*, and they felt almost abashed and out of place amidst the luxury of the great saloons. That did not, however, last long, and there was much to occupy them, the huge rafts of timber with houses on them, barges piled with hay until they resembled a drifting farmyard, the countless islands they steamed among, and the tin-roofed villages along the wooded shores. Then they stopped where the river narrows under the battlements of Quebec, and saw the crowded roofs of the city climb the slopes of the plateau where Wolfe won that great Dominion for England.

After that the river grew broader, until at last they rolled out past the rocks of Labrador into the Atlantic, and it was scarcely a fortnight since they left Vancouver when one night the liner steamed into the Mersey. Rows of lights blinked at them through the smoke and drizzle, whistles screamed, steamers crowded with passengers went by, and at last the tender swung alongside. Then amidst the bustle and confusion a gentleman forcing his way through the groups of travellers grasped Appleby's hand, and he saw his comrade, who did not seem abashed as he once would have done, being hugged publicly by Mrs. Niven.

In another minute she had turned to Appleby, and Mr. Niven led both of

them under a big electric light. He stared hard at them, and then smiled at his wife.

"Well," he said slowly, "these are not the lads we sent away. The sea has done a good deal for them, and if I hadn't been looking for him I would scarcely have known my son."

It was a very happy party the tender took ashore, and for several days Mrs. Niven, who regaled the lads with dainties and fussed over them, would scarcely let Chriss out of her sight. On the third night, however, Mr. Niven called them into his own room.

"And now it's about time we had a little talk," he said with a trace of dryness in his smile, as, lighting a cigar, he laid the box on the table. "You can take one if you like. No doubt you know the flavour by this time, and it would take a good deal to hurt you now."

Chriss grinned at Appleby. "As a matter of fact we found that out at Sandycombe, sir, though the results were very far from encouraging," he said.

"No?" said Mr. Niven.

Appleby laughed. "I lost a good chance of winning the quarter-mile, and Chriss spent two Saturdays writing lines."

"I understand," said Mr. Niven dryly, "that you didn't get many luxuries on board the *Aldebaran*."

"We didn't," said Chriss. "Still, after a month or so, there wasn't much we couldn't eat except the stuff in one barrel the pickle had run out of. Appleby tried it once when we hadn't had anything worth mentioning for a week. Tom, how long did you revel in that pork?"

"About two minutes," said Appleby. "Eating it wasn't quite as nice as skinning holluschackie."

Mr. Niven nodded, but there was a twinkle in his eyes, and once more he noticed the steadiness with which they returned his gaze, and that though they smiled there was a new gravity in their sea-tanned faces.

"I fancy you have found out how much one can do without, and that is a good deal gained," he said. "Still, all that is beside the question, for I want to know right off how you like the sea, and I've no use for anything but the straightest kind of talking."

Chriss seemed a trifle astonished. "That was just how Ned Jordan spoke," he said.

Mr. Niven laughed. "You may remember that I have been over a good deal of Canada on business and in Vancouver. In fact, you may do so too. It depends on your answer to my question."

Chriss sat silent for almost a minute in place of speaking at once, which is more than he would have done before he went to sea. Then he answered very

slowly.

"Well, I like the sea, and would be willing to go back again, but not—if it could be helped—in the *Aldebaran*. Still, after what I have seen of it, I fancy I could be quite content to live ashore if there were other things for me to do."

"Even if people laughed at you for swallowing the anchor, which I believe is how they put it?" asked Mr. Niven.

Chriss laughed without any sign of confusion or embarrassment, and his father noticed it. "One doesn't mind a little banter after being kicked with seaboots, and growled at all day for weeks. You don't fancy it would matter greatly if they did?"

"Not in the least," said Mr. Niven with dry approval, "In fact, the man who does not mind being made fun of has often the best cause for laughing. So you would go back to sea if I told you to?"

"Yes, sir," said Chriss. "Still, if you fancied it would be better I would stay ashore."

"Then," said Mr. Niven, "we'll decide on the latter. You might after years of hard work, and if you were very fortunate, make five hundred pounds a year at sea, but while there are thousands of lads in the country who would be very content with the prospect of getting it, there are considerably fewer who have your opportunities, and by and by I shall want somebody to take up my business after me. If you are to do it you must begin at once at the bottom, do what you are told, and make your way upwards slowly as you would at sea. Now, then, would it suit you to go down to my office at nine o'clock the day after to-morrow?"

"Yes, sir," said Chriss. "It would."

"Then," said Mr. Niven, "that will do in the meanwhile, though we will have a good deal to talk about later. Now, Appleby, you have heard what I proposed to Chriss, and we can find room for you. I will see you get a fair start in life—and what it may lead to afterwards will depend largely upon yourself."

Appleby's answer was quiet but resolute. "I have to thank you, sir, but I am afraid I should never be quite contented away from the sea."

"Don't be hasty," said Mr. Niven. "It's a hard life, but you know that better than I do. I also fancy that if you serve me well you will be a richer man by and by than you ever would be at sea."

Appleby looked at him steadily. "I've been considering ever since I left the *Aldebaran*, sir. It's hard enough—but I can't help fancying it is the life that is best for me."

Mr. Niven nodded gravely. "Then you are right in going back, but we'll try to find you a more comfortable ship. Well, we have decided quite enough for one night, and I fancy Mrs. Niven is waiting for you."

The lads went out, and though both of them afterwards found there was

now and then need of all their courage and endurance in the lives they led neither regretted the decision they had made. Niven went into his father's office, and Appleby back to sea, while a good many things happened to both of them before the former, who was now a partner, returned on business to Vancouver. The day after he got there he stood on the wharf with Mr. Holway. It was crowded with travellers making for a steamer on the point of sailing, for the Montreal express had just come in, but Niven was watching the trail of swiftly-moving smoke that smeared the blue sky behind the great pines on Beaver Point.

"That will be her by the pace she's making," he said.

Mr. Holway nodded. "Yes. They're wonderful boats," he said. "It's a long way to Japan, but they keep their time like a clock, and they'll not check the engines until she's close up to the wharf."

"Twin screws," said Niven. "Still, with the barque yonder there's very little room to swing a big vessel in, though, of course, he could scrape past the schooner and back one propeller."

Mr. Holway laughed. "You might have been to sea yourself!"

"Well," said Niven dryly, "I have, and they taught me a good deal in the *Champlain*."

"I had forgotten," said Mr. Holway. "You'll have been glad you left it."

Niven smiled. "There have been times of business anxiety when I've been almost sorry, too. After all, one had nothing to worry over on board the *Champlain* when his work was done. But she's coming in."

With the blue water frothing at her bows a great white-painted steamer swung out of the shadow of the pines, and while her whistle sent a sonorous scream ringing across the inlet swept towards the wharf. She gleamed like ivory from the purple shimmering in her shadow that was streaked by froth about her water-line to the yacht-like lift of her bows and long sweep of rail, and above it her tiers of houses and rows of boats shone dazzlingly in the sunlight. In every line and flowing curve there was a suggestion of speed and beauty, and Niven was silent as he watched her come on, remembering how the command of such a vessel had once been his most cherished dream. Then as the other steamer splashed away and the liner swung in towards the wharf he saw that one of the officers high up on the bridge was staring at him. Niven knew the brown face under the white cap, and waved his hat, but the officer only raised his hand for a second and then looked straight ahead again. Niven laughed softly as he turned to his companion.

"There's very little difference in Tom Appleby," he said. "It's four years since I've seen him, but if it had been forty I wouldn't have expected him to spare more than a moment from his duties to nod to me."

"That," said Mr. Holway, "is probably the reason he has got on so rapidly,

and I know the Company's people here have a high opinion of him. Now sit down. He's not going to thank you for worrying him while he's busy."

It was half-an-hour later when they went on board the great steamer and asked for the second officer. The two young men looked at each other as they shook hands, and each saw a difference in his comrade, for bronzed mate and keen-eyed merchant had both grown used to the yoke of responsibility. They were quieter than they had been, and their faces were graver, while though it was long since they had met, they were not effusive when they spoke.

"Glad to see you, Tom," said Niven.

Appleby nodded. "Of course I needn't tell you the same thing. How did you get here?"

"Allan boat and Canadian Pacific sleeper," said Niven. "I told you I'd been made a partner, and fancied I'd run over to look up some of our customers in Vancouver when I was in Canada. At least, that's one reason. You can guess the other. Now, what's wrong with this Company that you're not commander?"

Appleby laughed. "I've got on so fast already that I can't help fancying friends of mine who put business in the Company's way have as much to do with it as my merits. Now, I'm not quite sure that's good for me."

"Tom," said Niven with apparent severity, though his eyes twinkled, "are you so foolish as to fancy that the men who run a line like this would take a hint from anybody? You climbed up yourself, but if ever I do have any influence I'll know how to use it. Still, we're not going to argue already. Come out. I've got a buggy waiting, and we're going to drive and talk in the woods all afternoon, and then have another dinner at the Hotel. To make it all complete Jordan's coming."

"I'm half afraid I couldn't stay that long," said Appleby, and Niven turned to Holway, who had joined them.

"You're coming right along. Holway has seen the skipper, and he knows better than refuse—him—anything."

They drove through the dusky shadows of the pines all the afternoon, and when evening came they and Jordan sat down to a very choice dinner in the room where they last met. Jordan, however, seemed leaner and grimmer than he had done that night, and his hair was grey, but there was no mistaking the pleasure in his face when he greeted them. Niven made him sit down at the head of a little table by an open window.

"That's your place, sir," he said. "I don't quite know what they're bringing us to eat, but it's not going to be as good as the canned beef you gave us the night you came across us in the *Champlain*."

He smiled curiously as, glancing round at the glittering glass and silver and the sumptuous decorations of the great dining-room, he remembered the little, stuffy cabin of the schooner that swung with the seas. All this was very

pleasant, but he felt he had lost something that could never be regained since then. Appleby seemed to understand, for he nodded.

"There's a difference, Chriss," he said. "We shall never be quite the same again."

"A man can't have quite everything—and you've got the dollars now," said Jordan with a little twinkle in his eyes. "Well, I've made my blunders, like most other folks, but the one I made that night was my biggest one. Still, it was a kind of curious story you told me."

Niven laughed. "I've no doubt I did it badly—but there are times when I wish I was only a lad sailing north again sealing, and I fancy I shouldn't be a partner in a good business now if it hadn't been for a few things that voyage taught me."

While he spoke the dinner was brought in, and for a while they postponed their questions. Then as they sat by the open window looking out across the blue inlet towards the climbing pines and the distant snow Jordan glanced at his cigar.

"I've only had a dinner of this kind once before in my life, and you know who it was gave it me then," he said. "Now, I've a notion Donegal believed you all along."

"I wonder where he is now," said Niven. "I should like to have seen him."

Jordan's face grew grave, and he stretched out one hand pointing towards the north. "He's sleeping sound up there," he said.

Appleby bent his head. "I have not often met his equal—and we both owe him a good deal. How did it happen?"

"Stowing jibs," said Jordan quietly. "Wind turned loose on us sudden one night we were carrying everything, and she lay down with her lee rail in. Outer jib wouldn't run down, downhaul jammed, and Charley was clawing out on the bowsprit when the sail whipped over him. None of us saw what came next but Donegal, and when I had a glimpse of him he was hanging out from the foot-rope grabbing at Charley. Then she put her nose into a sea, and when she swung out of it there was nobody under the bowsprit. We'd gone straight over them."

Jordan stopped a moment, and his voice was a trifle hoarse when he went on again. "It was quite ten minutes before we could get the mainsail off her to wear her round, and a boat over, and an hour anyway before we hove her in again. They'd found nothing, and Charley couldn't swim, but Donegal wouldn't never have let go of his partner. He was that kind of a man."

Appleby nodded gravely, but nobody said anything further for several minutes, and then Niven asked, "Where's Stickine?"

"Coast trading. He was kind of saving. Put the dollars he'd scraped up into a little schooner, and it would astonish me if he wasn't making more of them. Montreal and his brother doing quite well too. Gone back to the carpentering

and taking contracts for putting up mining flumes."

"Then there's only yourself, and the *Champlain*," said Niven.

Jordan sighed a little. "We had to part with her. Sealing's not what it used to be—too many gun-boats and too much government fussing—and the holluschackie are getting scarcer too. They'll have to try round the South Pole for them presently. Still, a man has got to live, and I'm figuring on a halibut-catching scheme. There's going to be dollars in it if we can raise enough of them to start us off with the proper outfit."

"Tell me all about it. I'm a business man," said Niven.

Jordan did so, but his face was a trifle anxious as he concluded. "I'm not quite sure if I can put it through. We've got to have a schooner, and it's where to get the last two or three thousand dollars that's worrying me. The banks don't seem to care about backing me."

Niven sat silent a moment or two. Then he said quietly, "Now, I've about that many dollars I'm getting very little for in the old country, and I would be glad to put them in your venture as a partner."

"And I've five or six hundred," said Appleby.

Jordan's face brightened, but he did not answer for a minute. "Well, I've no use for pretending I wouldn't be glad to have the dollars—but one has to do the square thing," he said. "The risks are going to be heavy, because until we get it all quite straight we may lose the catch quite often before we can put it on the market, and there's always chances of losing the schooner, while you'd have to take too much on trust. You don't know the ins and outs of this contract, and I couldn't figure them all out to you."

Niven laughed a little, and laid his hand on Jordan's shoulder. "I know the man who's going to put it through, and I could trust him with a good deal more than the dollars. We'll go round to Holway's, and fix it all up to-morrow."

It was late before Jordan left them, and Niven and Appleby, who walked with him a little way, stopped a moment as they went back to the hotel. On the one hand, sprinkled with big electric lights, the city climbed the rise, and they could see its maze of roofs and towering telegraph poles. On the other the inlet shone like silver under the moon, with the ivory shape of the liner in the foreground and three great ships riding to their anchors farther out. Niven smiled a little as he turned to his companion.

"One is your home, the other mine," he said. "Tom, you haven't told me whether you are still quite contented with the life you have chosen."

Appleby's face was grave, but his eyes shone a little. "It is a grim life—especially in the sailing ships—Chriss, though they are not all like the *Aldebaran*, but I still fancy it is the one that is best for me. After all, are there any things your money can buy you better than those which are given for nothing to every

man at sea?”

THE END

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