

that launch off. I can recollect how I put it out of my mind on the way up the pier.

I hadn't had a chance till then to see who my passengers were or what they looked like. But just then, in the dark, with only the swing of the lantern moving around, I came up close to the girl. I just saw one thing about her. It was her eyes.

It was her eyes, mate. Dead men's fingers! I never saw such eyes before on any living thing—animal or woman. They were nearly black, with long lashes, and the eyebrows was like a picture, and the flesh between those brows and the lashes was full and curved and rounded and soft and smooth. And then there were those eyes. They were a mile deep, mate, like the clear water off Nassau Reef. There was just that flick of light that showed 'em to me, and they were big and trusting and perfect like no eyes you ever saw. They belonged with a child's heart. I seen it in that second. And when I got up to my camp, I made up my bed fresh for her and took my lantern outside and put the latch on the door as if she'd been my own daughter.

I saw when I got outside that the storm had pounced down on us like a hawk. I heard the palms whistle and rattle in the wind. It was cold. The tide in the channel had begun to tumble and the norther had shut off the stars like you'd wipe out sparks with a sweep of a wet mop.

I called to the feller who'd come with the girl. He hadn't said much and he came to the door of that other shack what I use for a kitchen and stood waiting while I was trying to light the lamp.

"Stranger," I said, "you've lost your boat."

"I reckon so," he said, calm and cool as a fresh kingfish in the ice barrel. "But you needn't call me stranger."

When he spoke like that, I looked at his figure—thin and graceful.

"If this is Spongecake Key, then you're Pindar Rowe," he said. "You old reprobate. Hold up the lamp. Now look at me!"

"Young Joe Kitchell!" I roared.

It was him, just as I'm telling you. It was Joe Kitchell, with his palaver and cigarettes and his insinuating ways and his slouchy, easy clothes and his diamond scarf pin. He looked just as he used to look in Havana when he was in the sugar trade and later, too. I knew about him.

I knew how they'd put him out of the North American Club, and how an army officer's wife had cut him up one Sunday on those grassy banks of Moro, and how he'd been caught cheating in a game of poker in the Machado Hotel, and how he had left a girl in New York and what winning ways he had with all women—even the best.

So I leaned across the table and I said, sharp, "Who's this girl?"

He smoothed his brown hair and smiled. "Well, Pindar, I reckon you know enough about me and my adventures. I'll tell you. She's a prize. A Cuban."

MAYBE he saw me look at him, because he said right afterwards: "She's an orphan. She's just over twenty-one and you'll think it pretty comic, but she's been so carefully raised she won't even let me hold her hand. And money? Mr. Rowe, believe me, I've suffered grief about money so long that I can't believe it's true. Why, just before we left Key West, she sold an American broker who met her there a third interest in the Vista Hermosa plantation and machinery and cane mill. I'm going to be married, Mr. Rowe."

"Umph," I said. "You've been going to get married fifty different times, I reckon."

"Women take a fancy to me," he whispered. "They still do. She loves me. I don't like her to sit and look at me all day. There's such a thing as too much. But this time I'm going to be married all right. I've got to be married. There's no getting the money without it."

Somehow as he spoke, I thought of my wife. There was a bread knife on the table and I could have killed him. The norther had come up. It was howling outside like a pack of dogs. The light flickered. It showed me his grin. I wanted to kill him. I wanted to see him fall forward over the kitchen table.

"What's this runaway business?" I asked him. "Why did you have to start up among these keys alone with her?"

"My dear old Pindar," said he, "that is too plain. When a girl like that goes off alone on a trip like this, she must go back married or not at all. It just cinches the matter. Do you see?"

"Yep," I said, "I do. But have you told this girl you've had a wife?"

"No," he answered, licking his cigarette. "That

I'm not fool enough to risk anything by talking to you. She wouldn't believe you. Tell her! Swear. Take oaths. Cut up all the fuss you want, old feller. She'll hate you for it. Why? Because she believes me?"

I tell you, mate, the man had me ready to do murder. I've seen necessity in my day and I've brought men down with lead. It seemd to me then I never had so much necessity before.

"Kitchell," I said, quiet, between the roars of the wind, "you have lived some thirty-eight years. You've done a lot of damage. Somewhere there is more women than I can count on my fingers that owes you a heap of evil. I don't suppose they'll ever pay it. It ain't like 'em. Kitchell, I wish I was going to pay it. Kitchell, I give you warning, man to man.

There's a sail-boat belonging to me down at my pier there. When the weather clears, you're going to take it and go to Key West and leave this girl here."

HE brushed back some of that silky hair of his, then, and looked at me good-natured and shook his head.

"Nothing like that," he said. "You're mistaken."

"If you don't," said I, "look out for yourself."

But he shook his head again. "You wouldn't kill me, Pindar," he said, with his smooth, sure way. He stopped to think it over to be certain, and then he laughed. "You wouldn't kill me. I know the cards you hold, my old friend, and it isn't a winning hand."

He sat there for a while, listening to the cracking of the boards when the wind drove against the walls of the shack. I saw the yellow light on his face and it was an evil face, too, for all its even features.

"No," he said, by and by. "I know when I'm going to win. I can feel fate just like a man feels warm or cold. I can tell by the feeling how the ball on a roulette wheel is going to drop. I know whether a card is good or bad without turning it over. Some things is certain. They're marked out beforehand. I feel 'em. I feel a confidence, and that confidence accomplishes anything. Nothing can stop me. And this is one of those times. No man can interfere. It was written down beforehand. This is a wild night—a night for strange things. See the light dance on the wall there. Look. Do you see letters written there—big, red letters?"

I looked, mate, and I hope to drop dead if I didn't see writing on the boards. It was dim at first and danced, and then it settled down and got clearer and clearer like a ship's name through a glass when the fog is blowing away. I couldn't read it yet, but I knew that Something had come into the

room and was writing there with its finger!

I could see the words growing clearer and I felt my blood pounding in my ears. The writing was done. And there it was on the wall. It was his name!

"What's it mean?" I whispers to him.

"What?" he said.

"That writing."

"I don't see any writing," he said. "I was just joking. I meant that things was marked out beforehand. What ails you?"

HE looked a little scared then.

"Did you see anything?" he said.

I looked again and the writing was gone.

"Speak up," said he. "What did you see?"

"Nothing," I said.

"You looked as if you saw something," he roars at me. "What was it?"

It came to me like a flash what it all meant.

"You said that sometimes things that happened was marked out beforehand," I said to him. "You was right. Something steered you onto Rib Rock Bar. Kitchell. Something brought you onto Spongecake Key. Something has been watching you, Kitchell. Something has a bill against you that's been standing



"The something he shook, mate, was these Rattles. He'd killed my snake!"

would scarcely do. This young lady is religious and in her religion they don't marry men who've been divorced, especially when the man wasn't the one who brought the suit. Oh, no. On the contrary, it is much better to deny ever loving anybody before. I've done that. It's comical, isn't it?"

"Will you stick to this one?" I asked, looking at the bread knife. "Will you stick to her?"

"Oh, as long as I have to. Just see how plain I am with you, Mr. Rowe!" said he. "Personally, I don't fancy undersized Cubans. A pretty little thing? Oh, yes. But delicate. Almost nothing. Possibly I am spoiled."

I leaned over the table again toward the rat and I said, "Suppose, Kitchell, I hate you like a scorpion. Suppose I hate your ways and suppose I'm going to stop your ways. Suppose I tell her what I know of you."

He just sat back in his chair and laughed. He laughed and laughed and kept on trying to laugh so as to show me how cocksure he was.

"Go ahead," he said, grinning at me. "Go ahead. Others tried it. They tried it in Havana. That's one reason why I had to get away with her so fast. You can try it. Do you think she'll believe you? Oh,