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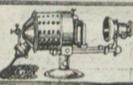
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Alan leaped away and up to the wheelhouse.

Men were struggling there—the skipper, a mate, and old Burr, who had held the wheel. He clung to it yet, as one in a trance, fixed, staring ahead; his arms, stiff, had been holding Number 25 to her course. The skipper struck him and beat him away, while the mate tugged at the wheel. Burr was torn from the wheel now, and he made no resistance to the skipper's blows; but the skipper, in his frenzy, struck him again and knocked him to the deck.

SLOWLY, steadily, Number 25 responded to her helm. The bow pointed away, and the beam of the ferry came beside the beam of the silent steamer; they were very close now, so close that the searchlight, which had turned to keep on the other vessel, shot above its scimmering deck and lighted only the spars; and, as the water rose and fell between them, the ships sucked closer. Number 25 shook with an effort: it seemed opposing with all the power of its screws some force fatally drawing it on—opposing with the last resistance before giving way. Then, as the water fell again, the ferry seemed to slip and be drawn toward the other vessel; they mounted, side by side . . . crashed . . . recoiled . . . crashed again. That second crash threw all who had nothing to hold by, flat upon the deck; then Number 25 moved by; astern her now the silent steamer vanished in the snow.

Gongs boomed below; through the new confusion and the loud cries of men, orders began to become audible. Alan, scrambling to his knees, put an arm under old Burr, half raising him; the form encircled by his arm struggled up. The skipper, who had knocked Burr away from the wheel, ignored him now. The old man, dragging himself up and holding to Alan, was staring with terror at the snow screen behind which the vessel had disappeared. His lips moved.

"It was a ship!" he said; he seemed speaking more to himself than to Alan. "Yes"; Alan said. "It was a ship; and you thought—"

"It wasn't there!" the wheelsman cried. "It's—it's been there all the time all night, and I'd—I'd steered through it ten times, twenty times, every few minutes; and then—that time it was a ship!"

Alan's excitement grew greater; he seized the old man again. "You thought it was the Miwaka!" Alan exclaimed. "The Miwaka! And you tried to steer through it again."

"The Miwaka!" old Burr's lips reiterated the word. "Yes; yes—the Miwaka!"

He struggled, writhing with some agony not physical. Alan tried to hold him, but now the old man was beside himself with dismay. He broke away and started aft. The captain's voice recalled Alan to himself, as he was about to follow, and he turned back to the wheelhouse.

The mate was at the wheel. He shouted to the captain about following the other ship; neither of them had seen sign of any one aboard it. "Derelict!" the skipper thought. The mate was swinging Number 25 about to follow and look at the ship again; and the searchlight beam swept back and forth through the snow; the blasts of the steam whistle, which had ceased after the collision, burst out again. As before, no response came from behind the snow. The search-

light picked up the silent ship again; it had settled down deeper now by the bow, Alan saw; the blow from Number 25 had robbed it of its last buoyancy; it was sinking. It dove down, then rose a little—sounds came from it now—sudden, explosive sounds; air pressure within hurled up a hatch; the tops of the cabins blew off, and the stem of the ship slipped down deep again, stopped, then dove without halt or recovery this time, and the stern, upraised with the screw motionless, met the high wash of a wave, and went down with it and disappeared.

No man had shown himself; no shout had been heard; no little boat was seen or signalled.

The second officer, who had gone below to ascertain the damage done to the ferry, came up to report. Two of the compartments, those which had taken the crush of the collision, had flooded instantly; the bulkheads were holding—only leaking a little, the officer declared. Water was coming into a third compartment, that at the stern; the pumps were fighting this water. The shock had sprung seams elsewhere; but if the after compartment did not fill, the pumps might handle the rest.

Suddenness already was coming into the response of Number 25 to the lift of the waves; the ferry rolled less to the right as she came about, beam to the waves, and she dropped away more dully and deeply to the left; the ship was listing to port and the lift of the ice-heaped bow told of settling by the stern. Slowly Number 25 circled about, her engines holding bare headway; the radio, Alan heard, was sending to the Richardson and to the shore stations word of the finding and sinking of the ship and of the damage done to Number 25; whether that damage yet was described in the dispatches as disaster, Alan did not know. The steam whistle, which continued to roar, maintained the single, separated blasts of a ship still seaworthy and able to steer and even to give assistance. Alan was at the bow again on lookout duty, ordered to listen and to look for the little boats.

HE gave to that duty all his conscious attention; but through his thought, whether he willed it or not, ran a riotous exultation. As he paced from side to side and hailed and answered hails from the bridge, and while he strained for sight and hearing through the gale-swept snow, the leaping pulse within repeated, "I've found him! I've found him!" Alan held no longer possibility of doubt of old Burr's identity with Benjamin Corvet, since the old man had made plain to him that he was haunted by the Miwaka. Since that night in the house on Astor Street, when Spearman shouted to Alan that name, everything having to do with the secret of Benjamin Corvet's life had led, so far as Alan could follow it, to the Miwaka; all the change, which Sherrill described but could not account for Alan had laid to that. Corvet only could have been so haunted by that ghostly ship, and there had been guilt of some awful sort in the old man's cry. Alan had found the man who had sent him away to Kansas when he was a child, who had supported him there and then, at last, sent for him; who had disappeared at his coming and left him all his possessions and his heritage of disgrace, who had paid blackmail to Luke, and who had sent, last, Captain Stafford's watch and the ring which came with it—the wedding ring.

Alan pulled his hand from his glove and felt in his pocket for the little band of gold. What would that mean to him now; what of that was he to learn? And, as he thought of that, Constance Sherrill came more insistently before him. What was he to learn for her, for his friend and Benjamin Corvet's friend, whom he, Uncle Benny, had warned not to care for Henry Spearman, and then had gone away to leave her to marry him? For she was to marry him, Alan had read.

It was with this that cold terror suddenly closed over him. Would he learn anything now from Benjamin Corvet, though he had found him? Only for an instant—a fleeting instant—had Benjamin Corvet's brain become clear as to the cause of his hallucination; consternation had overwhelmed him then, and he struggled free to attempt to mend the damage he had done.

More serious damage than first reported! The pumps certainly must be losing their fight with the water in the port compartment aft; for the bow steadily was lifting, the stern sinking. The starboard rail too was raised, and the list had become so sharp that water washed the deck about the fore-castle to port. And the ferry was pointed straight into the gale now; long ago she had ceased to circle and steam slowly in search for boats; she struggled with all her power against the wind and the seas, a desperate insistence throbbing in the thrusts of the engines; for Number 25 was fleeing—fleeing for the western shore. She dared not turn to the nearer eastern shore to expose that shattered stern to the seas.

Four bells behind Alan; it was two o'clock. Relief should have come along before; but no one came. He was numbed now; ice from the spray crackled upon his clothing when he moved, and it fell in flakes upon the deck. The stark figure on the bridge was that of the second officer; so the thing which was happening below—the thing which was sending strange, violent, wanton tremors through the ship—was serious enough to call the skipper below, to make him abandon the bridge at this time! The tremors, quite distinct from the steady tremble of the engines and the thudding of the pumps, came again. Alan, feeling them, jerked up and stamped and beat his arms to regain sensation. Some one stumbled toward him from the cabins now; a short figure in a great coat. It was a woman, he saw as she hailed him—the cabin maid.

"I'm taking your place!" she shouted to Alan. "You're wanted—every one's wanted on the car deck! The cars—" The gale and her fright stopped her voice as she struggled for speech, "The cars—the cars are loose!"

CHAPTER XVII.

"He Killed Your Father."

ALAN ran aft along the starboard side, catching at the rail as the deck tilted; the sounds within the hull and the tremors following each sound came to him more distinctly as he advanced. Taking the shortest way to the car deck, he turned into the cabins to reach the passengers' companionway. The noises from the car deck, no longer muffled by the cabins, clanged and resounded in terrible tumult; with the clang and rumble of metal, rose shouts and roars of men.

To liberate and throw overboard heavily loaded cars from an endangered ship was so desperate an undertaking.