

ship as well—Ramsdell—the man whose money you have just told me had built this and was soon to build other ships. I did not understand why learning that affected him so much.

“Stafford wanted us’ (this is what Benjamin Corvet said) ‘to tow him up the lake; I would not do that, but I agreed to tow him to Manistique. The night was dark, Father—no snow, but frightful wind which had been increasing until it now sent the waves washing clear across the tug. We had gone north an hour when, low upon the water to my right, I saw a light, and there came to me the whistling of a buoy which told me that we were passing nearer than I would have wished, even in daytime, to windward of Boulder Reef. There are, Father, no people on that reef; its sides of ragged rock go straight down forty fathoms into the lake.

“I looked at the man with me in the wheelhouse — at Stafford — and hated him! I put my head out at the wheelhouse door and looked back at the lights at the new, great steamer, following safe and straight at the end of its towline. I thought of my two men upon the tug who had been crushed by clumsiness of those on board that ship; and how my own ships had had a name for never losing a man and that name would be lost now because of the carelessness of Stafford’s men! And the sound of the shoal brought the evil thought to me. Suppose I had not happened across his ship; would it have gone upon some reef like this and been lost? I thought that if now the hawser should break, I would be rid of that ship and perhaps of the owner who was on board as well. We could not pick up the tow line again so close to the reef. The steamer would drift down upon the rocks—”

FATHER PERRON hesitated an instant. “I bear witness,” he said solemnly, “that Benjamin Corvet assured me—his priest—that it was only a thought; the evil act which it suggested was something which he would not do or even think of doing. But he spoke something of what was in his mind to Stafford, for he said;

“I must look like a fool to you to keep on towing your ship!”

“They stared, he told me, into one another’s eyes, and Stafford grew uneasy.

“We’d have been all right,” he answered, “until we had got help, if you’d left us where we were!” He too listened to the sound of the buoy and of the water dashing on the shoal. “You are taking us too close,” he said —“too close!” He went aft then to look at the tow line.”

Father Perron’s voice ceased; what he had to tell now made his face whiten as he arranged it in his memory. Alan leaned forward a little and then, with an effort, sat straight. Constance turned and gazed at him; but he dared not look at her. He felt her hand warm upon his; it rested there a moment and moved away.

“There was a third man in the wheelhouse when these things were spoken,” Father Perron said, “the mate of the ship which had been laid up at Manistee.”

“Henry Spearman,” Sherrill supplied.

“That is the name. Benjamin Cor-

vet told me of that man that he was young, determined, brutal, and set upon getting position and wealth for himself by any means. He watched Corvet and Stafford while they were speaking, and he too listened to the shoal until Stafford had come back; then he went aft.

“I looked at him, Father,” Benjamin Corvet said to me, ‘and I let him go—not knowing. He came back and looked at me once more, and went again to the stern; Stafford had been watching him as well as I, and he sprang away from me now and scrambled after him. The tug leaped suddenly; there was no longer any tow holding it back, for the hawser had parted; and I knew, Father, the reason was that Spearman had cut it!’

I RANG for the engine to be slowed, and I left the wheel and went aft; some struggle was going on at the stern of the tug; a flash came from there and the cracking of a shot. Suddenly all was light about me as, aware of the breaking of the hawser and alarmed by the shot, the searchlight of the Miwaka turned upon the tug. The cut end of the hawser was still upon the tug, and Spearman had been trying to clear this when Stafford attacked him; they fought, and Stafford struck Spearman down. He turned and cried out against me—accusing me of having ordered Spearman to cut the line. He held up the cut end toward Ramsdell on the Miwaka and cried out to him and showed by pointing that it had been cut. Blood was running from the hand with which he pointed, for he had been shot by Spearman; and now again and a second and a third time, from where he lay upon the deck, Spearman fired. The second of those shots killed the engineer who had rushed out where I was on the deck; the third shot went through Stafford’s head. The Miwaka was drifting down upon the reef; her whistle sounded again and again the four long blasts. The fireman, who had followed the engineer up from below, fawned on me! I was safe for all of him, he said; I could trust Luke—Luke would not tell! He too thought I had ordered the doing of that thing!

“From the Miwaka, Ramsdell yelled curses at me, threatening me for what he thought that I had done! I looked at Spearman as he got up from the deck, and I read the thought that had been in him; he had believed that he could cut the hawser in the dark, none seeing, and that our word that it had been broken would have as much strength as any accusation Stafford could make. He had known that to share a secret such as that with me would “make” him on the lakes; for the loss of the Miwaka would cripple Stafford and Ramsdell and strengthen me; and he could make me share with him whatever success I made. But Stafford had surprised him at the hawser and had seen.

“I moved to denounce him, Father, as I realized this; I moved—but stopped. He had made himself safe against accusation by me! None—none ever would believe that he had done this except by my order, if he should claim that; and he made plain that he was going to claim that. He called me a fool and defied me. Luke—even my own man, the only one left

on the tug with us—believed it! And there was murder in it now, with Stafford dying there upon the deck and with the certainty that all those on the Miwaka could not be saved. I felt the noose as if it had been already tied about my neck! And I had done no wrong, Father! I had only thought wrong!

“So long as one lived among those on the Miwaka who had seen what was done, I knew I would be hanged; yet I would have saved them if I could. But, in my comprehension of what this meant, I only stared at Stafford where he lay and then at Spearman, and I let him get control of the tug. The tug, whose wheel I had lashed, heading her into the waves, had been moving slowly. Spearman pushed me aside and went to the wheelhouse; he sent Luke to the engines, and from that moment Luke was his. He turned the tug about to where we still saw the lights of the Miwaka. The steamer had struck upon the reef; she hung there for a time; and Spearman—he had the wheel and Luke, at his orders, was at the engine—held the tug off and we beat slowly to and fro until the Miwaka slipped off and sank. Some had gone down with her, no doubt; but two boats had got off, carrying lights. They saw the tug approaching and cried out and stretched their hands to us; but Spearman stopped the tug. They rowed towards us then, but when they got near, Spearman moved the tug away from them, and then again stopped. They cried out again and rowed toward us; again he moved the tug away, and then they understood and stopped rowing and cried curses at us. One boat soon drifted far away; we knew of its capsizing by the extinguishing of its light. The other capsized near to where we were. Those in it who had no lifebelts and could not swim, sank first. Some could swim and, for a while they fought the waves.”

ALAN, as he listened, ceased consciously to separate the priest’s voice from the sensations running through him. His father was Stafford, dying at Corvet’s feet while Corvet watched the death of the crew of the Miwaka; Alan himself, a child, was floating with a lifebelt among those struggling in the water whom Spearman and Corvet were watching die. Memory; was it that which now had come to him? No; rather it was a realization of all the truths which the priest’s words were bringing together and arranging rightly for him.

He, a child, saved by Corvet from the water because he could not bear witness, seemed to be on that tug, sea-swept and clad in ice, crouching beside the form of his father while Corvet stood aghast—Corvet, still hearing the long blasts of distress from the steamer which was gone, still hearing the screams of the men who were drowned. Then, when all were gone who could tell, Spearman turned the tug to Manitowoc. Now again the priest’s voice became audible to Alan.

Alan’s father died in the morning. All day they stayed out in the storm, avoiding vessels. They dared not throw Stafford’s body overboard or that of the engineer, because, if found, the bullet holes would have aroused

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