

CHAPTER XXVIII

At seven o'clock the sun was high, and above the morning damp on the moldered boards and thin grass of the alley, it fell through the window of the attic in a square of yellow warmth on the floor. The breeze from the ocean over hills and housetops streamed across this patch of sunlight, touching the Captain's face.

The dead man lay alone, untroubled by human ministrations, his fingers stiff in the silken sword-knot, the tricolored button of the Loyal Legion vivid against the dark blue coat. Into this peace—a stillness, yet pervaded by the detached and subtle morning hum of a place of people—a sparrow swept like a gray arrow through the sunlight, circling the room to the headboard of the bed where it lit, jerking a beady eye, now down at the dead man, now up at the window, uncertain of escape, breaking the silence with its shrill call.

From the hall languidly came the cat of the deserted Family Liquor Store to sit in the square of sunlight and blink, cropfull, at the scolding bird. Its slit eyes narrowed in the brightness, opening, closing, until, overcome by the warmth and its animal stupor, it laid to watch the sparrow working itself to fury, hopping and chirping on the bedstead. From the bird's ruffled neck a small feather floated down in intricate spirals to rest on the Captain's cheek; and this little drama went on—the small, gray bird jerking out its insistent