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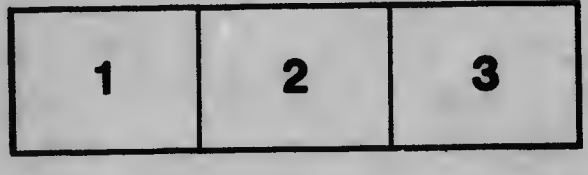
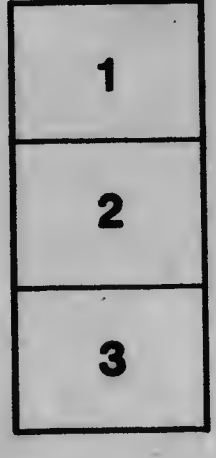
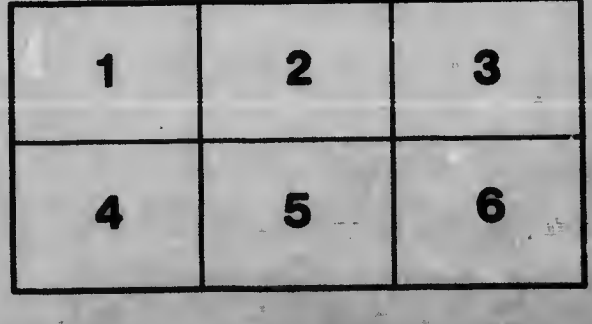
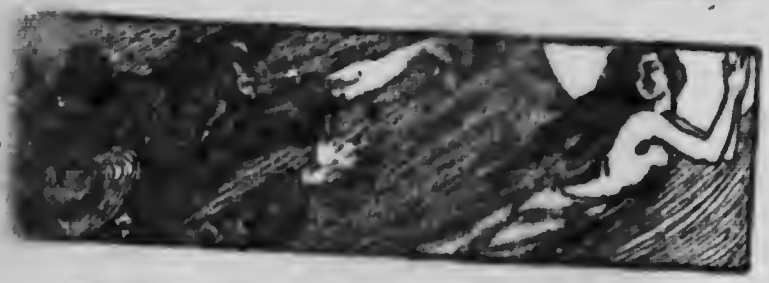






JOHN MORNING

The LURE O' GOLD



BY BAILEY MILLARD

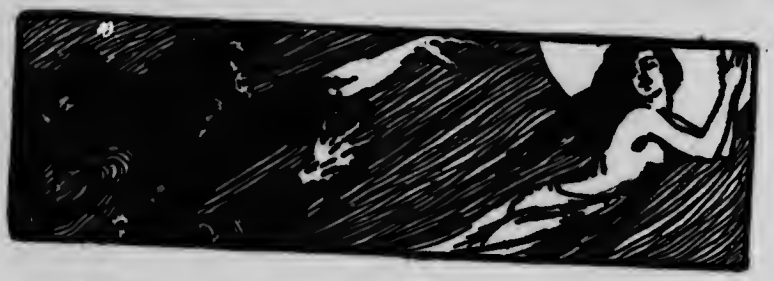
Drawings & Decorations by Arthur William Brown

Toronto
McLEOD & ALLEN
Publishers

ARTHUR WILLIAM BROWN—

JOHN MORNING

The LURE O'GOLD



BY BAILEY MILLARD

Drawings & Decorations by Arthur William Brown

Toronto
McLEOD & ALLEN
Publishers

June, 1904

Plimpton Press Norwood Mass.

To

WILLIAM RANDOLPH HEARST

Contents

Illustrations

I

The Lure o' Gold

MY BURDEN OF TREASURE

A SINGULAR wakefulness possessed me. I was thinking and thinking of the treasure and of how I was to convey it safely home. The treasure was at that moment in the care of the trusty landlord of the Golden North Hotel — he of the honest brown eye, the round frame, the heavy red beard and bald crown. I had selected him as the temporary guardian of my gold because he was the only responsible person in the whole mining camp of Nome that I knew intimately at the time.

Not that he was a model man, by any means. He was rather uncouth, in fact. His red beard had a rat's-nesty look and at times his language was as hard as his beds. As to the solidity of the beds I could freely have testified at that moment, if the one I was trying to sleep in was a fair example. The frame of it was made

of rough pine scantlings which supported a lumpy mattress, two pairs of shoddy blankets and no sheet or pillow. Still the blankets were clean and the box of a room was neat enough, though the red-and-green wallpaper was saggy and wrinkly in places.

But it was not the hardness of my bed which kept me awake, for I had camped on frozen tundra and sandy beach, and minded rough beds not at all. Nor did I miss the absent pillow, for my rigidly ruling father had taught me when I was but a little tad that a pillow was a dangerous luxury and that if I wished to be "straight as an Indian" I might better dispense with soft "head pads," as he called them; and, in this instance, at least, I had been obedient to his teaching.

No, it was not my bed that was cheating me of my much-needed sleep; but another bed in the opposite side of the sleeping-box, not more than three feet from mine, contributed not a little to my wakefulness. Mind you, there was nobody in the other bed. I had seen by the light of the candle, which I had extinguished some hours before, that it was empty and that there was no sign of any other person's occupancy of the room except a small black leather bag, with the initials "R. N." marked upon it. When the landlord of the Golden

North had conducted me to the room he had said that a light-haired, oldish man with a short, sandy beard had paid for the other bed for the night and had left his bag there. The landlord could tell no more about the light-haired man; nor did I, at the time, care to know, for I had seemed to be uncommonly tired and sleepy after my long tramp up the beach into camp; but soon after blowing out the candle and getting under the shoddy blankets I began to wish that I had had a little acquaintance with "R. N.," my unknown roommate. Had I locked the door before retiring I might have been able to sleep until he knocked and then to get up and let him in. But I had not locked the door, for the simple reason that it had no lock, nor even a bolt or "catch."

In the darkness of a strange bedroom one's fancies are often weird to the point of absurdity, and when one is only a lad of eighteen and has forty thousand dollars' worth of gold dust on one's mind one is likely to become rather morbid in one's meditations. To be sure, the treasure was not in the room. It was in a stout box which was in the landlord's securely locked private closet, which was just behind the hotel counter. The box had a big brass padlock on it and I had the key of that padlock, together with five hundred dollars' worth

of dust in my little "poke," or chamois bag, which was at that moment reposing under the mattress within easy reach of my hand.

At the head of my bed stood a rifle which I had carried all through my Alaskan travels for the purpose of providing game for the camp table, which had oftener been a rock in the open than anything more serviceable, and once or twice had been merely a smooth block of ice.

One comfort which I, in my fanciful condition of mind, extracted from the situation was that "R. N.," whoever he might be, was a light-haired man. For of course he had a light face; and there is something less of mystery and more of everyday plainness and openness about a light face than there is about a dark one. My overwrought brain — what might it not have conjured up had the landlord told me that my unknown roommate was a dark man?

I tried to reason with myself. What could "R. N." have to do with me or with my treasure? Supposing that, at the worst, while I was asleep he should rob me of the "poke" and take away the key of my strong box, I still had gold enough. And the key — he could do nothing with that.

And yet my eyes would pop open and my ears would be alert, for every time my weary lids closed I had a vision of a blond ruffian putting the key in the padlock and taking out of the box those eight buckskin sacks, each branded with the plain "J. M." lettering and each containing 287 ounces of the beautiful "ruby sand" gold dust. But it was very heavy — that treasure — it weighed about 190 pounds. How would he make away with it? I heard the rattle of a whiffletree outside in the street and the crunching of heavy wheels in the soft tundra, the angry call of a driver and the crack of a whip. Why, my infamous roommate might easily take the gold away in that wagon!

Then I heard other calls, the barkings of dogs and the laugh of a woman. The whole sleepless, busy, tent-and-shanty city was still awake and astir, and it must have been after eleven o'clock. In the Arctic in June eleven at night is not late, and at Nome you really have no night in the summer; but in September, when there is more than a hint of the near approach of the long winter, it is dark enough at eight. Yet there was so much feverish activity among the gold-seekers and those who followed them to leech away their gold, that the foolish system of staying up all night, so prevalent

in other Arctic mining camps, was adhered to in this oddest of all gold-diggings in the world. And how could anybody, like myself, who really wanted and needed sleep, find it in such a wild, noisy, bustling place as this Nome?

Nome! What a leaping inspiration the name had been to me! What a loadstone it had been to the thousands who were now crowding its crooked streets! What a golden hope! What a lure! My thoughts ran far over the tundra and up the yellow Yukon to the Klondike from which my father and I had come in the early summer. In the Klondike we had felt the frustration, the depression and the bitterness of the late comers — the men who were in at the tail of the stampede. Not but that my father was seasoned to defeat, though he had never been soured by it. He was an old Californian miner and had seen many a fair prospect melt away. Of late years he had been making a modest living as a mining secretary in the office of a San Francisco company. When the Klondike rush set in he had felt the old gold fever stirring in his blood, but he hesitated for months about going. Finally the impulse became too strong for him to resist any longer, and he declared that he would go to the gold fields and take me with him.

We sailed from our home city up through the wonderful Inland Passage, threading among fairy summer islands — up toward what seemed to me the golden top of the world — up past shores on which in those June days it seemed always afternoon — up past the mysterious Taku Inlet, to Dyea and thence by the trail over the rough Chilkoot and down by Lake Lindermann, Lake Bennett and the swift-flowing upper reaches of the Yukon, over the tragic White Horse Rapids and down to Dawson.

But we were too late. There is no gold at the tail of the stampede — no gold, only the galling regret, "Had we but been among the first!" Our means were running low and we could make but a short stay in Dawson. After the weary pilgrimages in which we sweated under the hot, searching, ever-shining sun and fought the mosquitoes up and down the creeks after vanishing golden Meccas, my father was offered a position as bookkeeper at St. Michael's, a small trading post near the lower end of the Yukon, a thousand miles away, and he hastened there before his last dollar should be gone, that he might earn passage money for the two of us in some homebound vessel.

I now thought of that wonderful river journey, the

grandest I had ever made, down that broad and beautiful Yukon, steaming by banks lined mile on mile with silent armies of spruces, or by inspiring cliffs, splashed with red and yellow, or along great sweeps of tundra over which I saw the weirdest cloud piles, electric storms and majestic plays of sunlight; on down by the villages of the wild Esquimaux, from which strange women would run out to secure the boats that would have been sent adrift by the great wave from our paddle-wheel; and so on through the broad mouth of the river, into the great Norton Sound and on to the low-lying island where the roofs of St. Michael's greeted my eyes. There my father found that the position he had come so far to take had been given to another man. But he was not downcast. He was a plucky man, that strict-living, abstemious almost Puritanical father of mine, and he walked the streets of the little town day after day, looking for any sort of work with which to earn the coveted passage money. At last we secured positions as carpenters' helpers, for which service we were so well paid that in a short time we had enough money to buy second-class passage to San Francisco.

But just as we were about to purchase our tickets and go aboard the steamer the news came flying down the

coast that up on the Cape Nome beach, a hundred miles north, gold had been discovered in the sands and that three men had washed out a thousand dollars in a single day.

At first my father shook his head, but when a man in whom he had unlimited confidence assured him that the story was true and that by hurrying to the beach and getting in at the head of the new stampede he could make an easy fortune, he hesitated no longer, and we set sail in a small steam schooner for the new Eldorado. There were not many miners on the beach when we arrived, but though we were almost in the vanguard of the great army that was to follow, the hope of securing even a "grub stake" seemed at the first sight a desperate one.

Looking back as I lay there that night in the Golden North Hotel I could see the whole picture: Before us, just at the eastern rim of the broad Bering, stretched a gray, desolate, forbidding shore, wind-swept, bare, low-lying, mist-haunted, with here and there a dreary heap of drift over which mournful-voiced sea-fowl wheeled and cried.

When my father saw the gray picture, I knew at once by the sad look in his brown eyes that he was bitterly

disappointed. Being an old miner, he knew the "lay" of gold fields as well as any one I had ever seen.

"Of all the unlikely places to find gold," he said, "this is the most unlikely. Those low-lying hills," he went on, pointing to the east, "this long, wide strip of tundra, and then the beach — why, it's absurd! There is no place for the gold to wash down from. There are such things as beach diggings, of course, but gold is secured there only in limited quantities. Still, they say 'gold is where you find it,' and there may be more than a little thin pay-streak here, but I doubt it. Let's get ashore, my boy, and find out the worst. We'll not waste much time here."

I remember how I shivered when I splashed through the low waves beyond the surf when our boat was beached and we carried our packs ashore. How cold the water was! Within an hour after our arrival we had staked our claim and had prospected it.

"Six dollars in the very first pan," said my father to me in a low, hoarse tone. I had never seen him so excited.

He worked like a slave all that first day and night, digging and washing the gold, and I worked with him, cold and stiff and only half-fed, for we hardly took time to prepare and eat our meals.

And then followed the weeks of hard labor, shoveling the sand and carrying water from the sea and washing the "dirt" — rock, rock, rocking our little machine and cleaning up every night many ounces of the shining dust. The new, clean-looking buckskin sacks we had brought from San Francisco and had given up all hope of ever filling were soon bulging and heavy with gold. We had not washed out one-half of our little strip of beach before it became apparent that we should soon have a fortune.

But in the midst of our exultation over our splendid prospects my father was laid low with fever. He had drank the evil tundra water, and in his overworked and weak state it had poisoned his system. I cared for him in our little tent on the sand, and procured medical service for him from among the many hundreds that came thronging to the golden beach. But at the end of a month he was still barely able to lift his head. The doctor told him that his only chance of recovery was to leave the place, and he offered to see him safely aboard ship and take him down to San Francisco with him, as he was sailing back to that port. The sick man was extremely loath to go, and for a time insisted on remaining, that he might help to clean up the fortune that

awaited us on the beach. But the doctor finally persuaded him that to go back home was the only wise course left for him. I saw the force of this reasoning and, much against his will, my poor, weak father was made to see it, too, though he groaned when he thought of leaving the fortune that seemed within his grasp.

"You can't stay here, Mr. Morning, and drink that water and live on pork and peans and canned stuff," said the doctor with a tone of authority. "They're almost enough to kill a well man."

"But the mine — we must wash out that sand."

"Oh, leave the mine in charge of this young man," said the doctor. "He's tough. He'll see it through and bring the gold home safely."

"Do you think you could do it, John?" asked my father, with just a little apprehension in his tone, which was natural, as it probably seemed to him that it was only the other day when he had whaled me for some childish folly. Still he must have seen what bulging muscles I was bringing to bear, shoveling on the pay-streak, and he must have seen that by this time I had learned never to fill the rocker too full nor to let the water splash out of it while it was in operation.

So it was decided that he should go back home and

be nursed by my mother and be given proper diet and attention. As soon as he sailed — it was the most depressing morning of my existence — I hired men and set to work constructing sluice-boxes, as I wanted to hasten the washing. I bought sea-water from a pumping outfit, and soon was cleaning up every night from my riffle-box four times the amount of gold that it would have been possible to wash in the rocker in a single day. In six weeks I had washed out the last shovelful of the pay-streak, and after settling accounts with my men and paying my water bill and other expenses I had left, as nearly as I could compute it on my gold scales, a little over $41,000 worth of dust.

And now on the morrow I would be aboard ship bright and early and off for dear old San Francisco, to surprise my good people with the wonderful tale of what our little strip of beach sand had washed out. There it was in that box in the landlord's closet — a fortune. Not a large fortune, but enough for me and mine for the rest of our days. And it represented to me more than the mere dust in the box. It represented four years at Stanford, a trip to Europe, a home-coming, a settling down to "the one honest business in the world," as my father had called that of mining, in which,

to still further quote my philosophic parent, "you robbed no man and profited by no man's needs, nor his ills, nor his contentions."

But the treasure was not yet safe in the San Francisco Mint at the time I lay there in my hard bed in the Golden North Hotel, and awaited the coming of the mysterious light-haired man who should occupy that other pillowless bed three feet from mine. When would he ever come? Perhaps he was an all-night prowler and was off after other people's gold, not knowing how near to his bed lay another and perhaps easier victim. With my hand on that particular and most comforting lump of the mattress which represented the five hundred dollars' worth of gold dust, I somehow grew a little easier of mind and at last dozed off.

It did not seem that I had more than dropped into slumber before I leaped up in bed, startled into sudden consciousness by the creaking of the crazy door. I did not say a word, but my hand involuntarily sought the cold barrel of my rifle, and my fingers remained rigidly fixed upon it while I heard the shuffling of a pair of feet on the bare floor, the closing of the door and a rustling of clothing. I hardly believe that I breathed

more than once during all this, but sat still as a post, staring out through the darkness.

My roommate — for I judged that it was he — struck his foot against the corner of my bed, and then I could feel his leg press the edge of the cover. Was he going to try to choke me to death, or stab me in my sleep, and then take the gold and the key of the box? Well, he should not have them without a struggle. He was so near to me now that I could hear him breathe. Suddenly my alert ears caught the sound of a sharp click. I did not fancy that sound in the least. It could be nothing less than the cocking of a revolver. So instead of being choked or stabbed, I was to be shot or threatened with a pistol. I pulled the rifle toward me. If it was to be too close range for firing my weapon, I could at least give my man the butt.

I heard a scratch and a match burst into a bright flame before my astonished eyes. Then it was the clicking of a metal matchbox that I had heard and not that of a revolver! My man saw the candle I had left on the small dry-goods box which served for a table. He applied the match to the wick, which soon flamed up, revealing the round and familiar face of Doctor Philip Quaritch, — of Doctor Quaritch, jolly, good-

natured Doctor Quaritch, — who had been the friend of our family ever since I wore kilts!

He was a ship's doctor, this old friend of ours, and nearly every time his steamer came into port — which was generally a matter of two or three months — he would come to our house and partake of the best cheer it afforded. Doctor Quaritch had known my father when he mined in Calaveras County in the early days. They had come out from the East as boys, and had shared a lot of hard luck together on the plains and in the mountains. At that moment of my mental discomposure I could not have named anybody that I should have been happier to meet than dear old Doctor Quaritch.

II

ADVICE FROM DOCTOR QUARITCH

"Well, well," said the Doctor, his round, blue eyes opening wide as he stared at me, sitting stock-still there, holding my rifle in my hands. "You wouldn't shoot me, would you, young man? Put your gun away."

There was no look of recognition in the startled eyes. The Doctor was gazing at me as upon a stranger. I thought, as I quietly slipped the rifle into its place at the head of the bed, that my face must have changed a great deal in the past year, and it occurred to me that a growing line of dark color on my upper lip — to which line I had given much careful attention — must appreciably have altered my appearance. I felt the blue eyes studying me curiously, while my blood was changing from the chill of alarm to the warmth of assurance. Suddenly the eyes blazed forth in full recognition.

"Why, John Morning!" cried the Doctor, in his great booming voice, grasping my hand and giving it a

regular milkman's grip. "Is it really you? Why, of course it is! I'd know the son of William Morning anywhere, by his father's big brown eyes and square lower jaw, to say nothing of that nose. How are you, John, my lad, and how did you get away up here?"

"I'm pretty well, thank you, Doctor Quaritch," said I, "and I'm awfully glad it's you. I thought it might be — well, I didn't know who it might be."

"So you were prepared, eh?" he laughed, glancing at the rifle. "But what are you doing here? I thought you and your father were in the Klondike."

"So we were; but we couldn't strike pay there, and so we came over this way."

While he sat on the edge of his bed, with his short legs hanging over, his face alight with friendship and his merry blue eyes agleam, I told him of our adventures and of the fortune we had made.

"It's too bad he took that fever," he said, referring to my father, his eyes full of kindly sympathy, "but it couldn't have been typhoid; probably only a malarial disorder — what our distinguished medical friend Shakespeare would call 'a distemper of the blood.' Wish I had been here. I might have seen what a ship's doctor could have done for him. But your good luck

in the diggings — that was fine. Let me congratulate you, John."

"Thank you," said I. We talked about the treasure for a while. "Are you still with the *Modesto?*" I asked, remembering the times I had accompanied him aboard that old steamer, as she lay along the musty docks. And at the mention of the name I could almost sniff the pungent odor of the drugs in the stuffy little stateroom, and see the rolls of bandages and the mysterious and evil-looking instruments in the little sea-chest.

"Yes, yes; still aboard the old *Modesto*," he said, picking up the black bag with the "R. N." marked upon it, and opening it meditatively, and, as I thought, a little awkwardly, which was explained by his saying: "This isn't my valise. It's one I borrowed from Mr. Nason, our first officer. These are his initials here. Nason is a mighty good fellow, and he sails in a mighty good ship. Yes, the *Modesto's* all right. Not much for speed alongside some of those new steel greyhounds, but she's staunch and steady, my son, and I like the feel of her deck under my feet better than that of any craft I was ever aboard of. Her machinery doesn't shake you all to pieces. Why, some of those boats make you feel as if you were riding on a camel that had

palpitation of the heart; but the *Modesto* is steady as a church."

"No doubt of it, sir," said I, with a slight feeling of duplicity, for I was mentally making allowances for the Doctor's strong attachment to his steamer, which I had heard at least one marine man along the San Francisco water front refer to as "the crankiest old tub on the Pacific." But men who sail often in a vessel are likely to come to have a strong affection for her, and the Doctor's remarks about his ship seemed quite natural to me, and full of a laudable loyalty.

The Doctor took his pipe from his bag and, lighting it, proceeded nearly to stifle me with prodigious clouds of tobacco smoke, which soon filled that close little room. When, at last, after much polite repression, I choked and coughed, he laid aside his pipe, ceased his yarning about his ship and raised the window sash about two inches from the bottom.

"A sanitary measure," he remarked, but I doubt if he would have admitted even that small allowance of oxygen (such is the contradictory nature of some of the wise gentlemen who have the world's health in charge) had I not shown signs of approaching asphyxiation. "Very sorry you're sailing to-morrow, John. What

vessel you say — the *Flying Mist?* Don't know her."

"She's a steam schooner of a peculiar rig," said I. "She has a very tall, slim funnel, almost as high as an ordinary mast, and it is used as a mast for the main-sail."

The Doctor looked at me with frank incredulity.

"Oh, no," said he, decisively. "Nothing of the sort. I have sailed about a good bit. There isn't any such craft as that afloat, my boy."

"All right, Doctor," said I, smiling and fanning the latest besetting and most obnoxious cloud of smoke away from me with my hand. "Just wait and see."

"Where does your *Flying Mist* sail for?"

"For Seattle. From there I go down by the railroad. It will be quicker that way, won't it?"

"Well, perhaps; but if you waited four days and went down by the *Modesto*, you wouldn't be much later. She'll take about twelve days to San Francisco, if there's the right kind of weather; and then you could go down along with me."

"I should enjoy that very much," said I, "but it would mean getting home in sixteen days. By sailing on the *Flying Mist* to-morrow I shall arrive in ten days."

"Well, only six days' difference. What's the rush?"

It is hard for a man who is never in a hurry to appreciate the burning haste of a youth anxious to get home with a box of treasure. But some of the things he said at that time were well remembered by me afterward.

The *Flying Mist* was evidently a strange, irregular sort of craft, so the Doctor thought, if she really did blow smoke through her mast. Men who would sail such a vessel ought to be treated with suspicion. And even if a safe landing of the gold were effected at Seattle, the extra transfer of it to the railroad involved an extra risk. If it were to go aboard the *Modesto*, where he knew the purser as well as he knew his own name, there would be no extra handling save from the dock to the Mint, which transfer, in civilized San Francisco, was safe enough. To wait and sail with him would be the better way.

"But my passage is paid," said I, with a strong note of finality; for I did not wish to wait for the sailing of the *Modesto*, although I should have been glad of the Doctor's company. "I paid it yesterday to Captain Transome, and I'm afraid I'll have to go in his vessel."

"Very well," said the Doctor, in the same tone he would probably have used in giving up a patient with a

fatal illness. "But remember, I don't like your *Flying Mist*. There's something devilish about this blowing smoke through a mainmast. Makes me think of Mephisto's doings in 'Faust.' I'm not as suspicious as many men who sail the seas, but you wouldn't catch me aboard of such an outlandish craft. I wonder they are ever able to ship a crew."

He picked up his pipe, as if he would like to exorcise some unseen imp by its smoke, but noticing that I was holding my head as near to the window vent as possible he laid it down with a sigh, said "Good-night," and was soon abed, and, though perhaps I should not record it of so worthy a man, snoring lustily.

III

ON THE LIGHTER MY BURDEN GROWS HEAVIER

Doctor Quaritch was still asleep the next morning when I arose early, dressed and went down to eat my hurried breakfast. I thought it best not to disturb my friend with my adieus, so I left a note with the landlord, saying "good-bye," and telling the Doctor that I hoped to see him soon in San Francisco.

With my rifle over my shoulder, I followed the wheelbarrow in which my treasure-box was being transported to the beach. Everyone in the crowd along the street recognized the nature of the freight in the barrow, and once I overheard the remark among the miners:

"He's rather a young chap to have charge of all that dust."

"Looks like he knew how to take care of it, though," was the reply.

I suppose I did look rather grim and formidable, with my set face and my hard grip upon the barrel of

the rifle. I confess, however, that while I should not have been loath to level my weapon at anyone who might seek to rob me of that precious box, pressing the trigger would have been a matter very little to my taste. But as everybody I met was civil enough and respectfully turned aside for my wheelbarrow load of gold, there seemed to be no need of any really hostile demonstration on my part.

Soon we reached the beach where the lighter lay. Beyond the flat, dark, little craft, which was bobbing on the low waves just out of reach of the white surf, was a world of unquiet, chilly water on which the sun —hanging rather low over the blue Bering in these early autumn months — glinted as upon a surface of steel. There was a harsh, cutting breeze astir and the air was wonderfully clear, bringing the little bristle of masts and funnels in the offing within ready reach of the eye. I could easily make out the tall, lean stack of the *Flying Mist*, and wished that Doctor Quaritch might have been there that I might convince him of the fact that she blew smoke through her mainmast.

It was rather heavy wheeling in the sand, and my man breathed hard as he pushed upon the handles of the barrow. I had thought to have him wheel the

treasure-box up the long gang-plank and to have it deposited on the deck of the lighter at once; but the lighterman — a rough-looking chap in blue overalls and blanket coat, and with a grayish, stubbly face — shook his head.

"For the *Flying Mist?*" he asked. "You'll have to wait till the Captain comes."

"She's to sail at ten, isn't she?" I asked, "and it's nine now. Can't I come aboard with my box and see that it is safeguarded?"

"Your treasure?" he sniffed, insolently. "How much d'yeh s'pose yeh got in that there box? 'Nough to buy a farm? Jest because yeh got a little dust an' a gun yeh needn't think to hurry or bully me."

"I don't wish to hurry or bully anybody," I said with rising heat; for the fellow's bad temper provoked a quick resentment in me, "but I want to see this gold safely aboard the schooner and into the purser's hands."

"Guess the Captain's the only purser aboard the schooner," he said, grinning and biting off a chunk of tobacco from a huge plug he held in his hand, "an' yer gold will be jest as safe on the beach 'till he comes as if it was on the lighter. I've got my orders an' yeh can't come aboard now. Dump yer box on the beach and

stan' over it with yer gun, if yeh wanter; but," he added, with a bantering tone not at all appreciated by me, "I don't know whether yeh can handle a gun — might shoot some innercent passenger by mistake."

A few of the passengers who had collected near the plank and were enjoying the colloquy laughed loudly at this. They took a large interest in the dumping of the treasure-box into the sand, where it lay solidly enough, just beyond the reach of the last ripple of white water that ran up from the low waves. I paid my man his dollar and felt singularly lonely and moody when I saw him trundle his wheelbarrow off up the beach. I sat down on my box, my rifle across my lap, and my feet working nervously in the sand. Some of the *Flying Mist's* passengers — there were not above a dozen in all — strolled near me, one or two at a time, and asked me what I considered impertinent questions about my gold — whether it belonged to me or whether I was guarding it for another person; whether I didn't think I was too young to be taking care of so much dust, and whether I shouldn't have help to see it safely aboard.

"It's too bad they haven't got a regular shipping company to handle such freight," remarked that one of my inquisitors for whom I felt the least repulsion. "I

hear the A. C. Company will open an office here next week. If you had waited you might have shipped with them."

"Oh, the gold's all right," said another man who had just come up. "Nobody'll bother it. This is an honest camp."

These latter words were spoken in a soft, smooth voice, quite gentlemanly in tone and very acceptable to my ears in contrast with the harsh accents of the other men. But as I looked up at the speaker I cannot say that I was drawn to him. He was neatly dressed in a quiet tweed suit and wore one of those soft, wide-brimmed hats so much affected by Alaskan miners in the summer time, only that this hat, instead of being soiled and battered like most of them, was clean and neatly dented in its four sides. Yet the smoothly shaven face was not one to inspire confidence. The mouth and nose were regular enough, but in the matter of vision there was a pronounced and what seemed to me sinister irregularity. In short, the man lacked an eye, his right peephole being entirely closed. Now, there is no doubt many a highly respectable and good-natured gentleman going about with but a single eye; but, perhaps through some defect of my nature, such a

person is always repellent to me unless he is able successfully to conceal the loss by wearing a glass substitute for the missing orb of vision. The man who stood before me boasted no such substitute, and, in spite of his steady smile, there was something so abhorrent to me in the sight of that drawn blind in the window of his soul that I could hardly look at him without a shudder.

"Ah, my lad," he said to me very pleasantly, "you've got quite a burden there. Do you think you can get it safely aboard ship? I'm sailing down the coast myself, and so is this gentleman here with me; and if we can be of any service to you, just let us know."

He pushed forward through the crowd a small but very straight man, with a round head on which was a blue golf cap. This man had a pink face and a very red nose. He wore a dark-brown sweater and loose trousers which accentuated the shortness of his legs.

"Yes," said the pink-faced man, "I'll be glad to help you. I've had the care of gold dust myself, and know what a nuisance it is."

"Thank you," said I, shifting my rifle so that the butt of it rested in the sand between my feet, "but I'm getting along all right. As soon as the Captain comes

I can go aboard the lighter. Then if you want to lend me a hand with my box I shall be glad of your assistance."

"Nome is a great place," ventured the pink-faced man, nodding toward the town. "Strangest mining camp I was ever in, and I've been pretty much all over the coast. Everybody is jumping everybody's claim now. My friend here has written some verses on the claim-jumpers. Maybe you'd like to hear them."

I was not in the mood to have poetry read to me, and particularly by a one-eyed man, but the poet produced his little manuscript from his inside coat pocket and read his verse with great gusto and an indescribable sing-song, while the other passengers gathered about. At the close of the reading of the jingle — for it was hardly more — there were some strong notes of assent from the crowd.

"Pretty good — that sizes 'em up great," said one miner. "They run me out all right — they were too many for me."

"The poetry is all right," said another.

"Ain't it good?" asked the pink-faced man, addressing me. "And it's dead easy for him to write such things. He just dashes 'em off like it was no trouble

at all. He's got lots of other pieces that he wrote, and he knows all the poets by heart — Shakespeare and Tennyson and Bryant. It's a great thing to be a poet, I think."

"Yes," mused the one-eyed man, folding his manuscript,

"'The poet in a golden clime was born,
With golden stars above.'

I wrote quite a number of war poems when I was with Roosevelt in Cuba. There's where I lost my eye," he said, turning to me. "It was a splinter from a shell thrown while we were storming up San Juan Hill. The opening stanza of one of them was pretty keen, I'm telling you. It began:

'When the sickening soul of silence swoons in sobbing
seas of sound,
And the greedy guns are grumbling, throwing grapnel
o'er the ground.'"

"Isn't that word 'shrapnel'?" I suggested.

"Well, 'shrapnel' or 'grapnel' — it's all the same," said the poet. "'Grapnel,' though, is more alliterative. I'm great on alliteration."

"Yes, I see you are," said I, smiling, and just a little weary of the one-eyed man and his poetry.

The pink-faced man was quite sociable. He did not tell me his name, but he told me quite a bit of his history, and particularly that which related to his adventures in the mines. While he was talking the one-eyed man stood by, adding a word now and again. Whenever I chanced to look up at him, which was not often, as the creep which the sight of his closely lidded eyehole gave me was a most disagreeable sensation, I saw that he was gazing intently at my box. That glittering, penetrating eye of his seemed sharp enough, in its black keenness, to bore through the fir wood and through the tough leather, right into the midst of the dust. I wondered, as I glanced at him, if he were sifting out and assorting in his mind those bright little pinhead grains and bullet-sized nuggets which had been my particular delight as they lay in the gold-pan at cleaning-up time. I remember that once I looked up sharply and questioningly at him, full in that evil eye of his, and he no doubt saw irritation and suspicion glancing from my own eyes, for he turned suddenly to his "partner," as he had called him, and spoke hurriedly of a matter quite foreign to the subject of treasure.

My Burden Grows Heavier

I pulled out my watch for the fiftieth time, and my impatience was vast and all afire when I saw that it was eleven o'clock and the Captain had not yet hove in sight. The passengers rearranged their baggage, tightening the straps and cords, and walked up and down the sand, and the crowd of beach idlers came and went. While my one-eyed inquisitor and his friend were talking together and still standing near me, the master of the lighter broke through the crowd and appeared with a long, stout hempen line to one end of which was attached a white buoy about as large as my head.

"Hitch this to yer box, son," he said, in a milder tone than I had yet heard him use, and with a friendly gleam in his eye which showed that he was not a bad fellow after all.

"That's a good idea," remarked the poet, before I had time to say a word.

"Nobody spoke to you," gruffed the lighterman.

"What's it for?" I asked, referring to the buoy.

"To mark where yer box falls overboard."

"Overboard?"

"Yes, I mean if she should happen to go splash off the boat," the lighterman explained. "Better let me

hitch her up. I know how better'n you. We don't generally tie 'em on till the stuff 's aboard; but the Capt'n's late and when he comes there'll be lots o' lively jumpin' 'round, an' I might fergit or somethin'. You throw a hitch like that — see — an' then over this way — twicet aroun' to make sure."

He hitched and wound the rope about the box, one end of which he lifted with a grunt, for the compact little mass hugged the sand as if it were the top of a sunken post.

"She *is* heavy, isn't she?" said the lighterman, as he tugged and tilted, with what seemed to me a growing respect for the treasure he had before referred to so disparagingly. After tying the last of a complex and seaman-like system of knots, he said: "Guess we better git her aboard, after all. It's ag'in orders, but I'll stand fer it. Yeh've paid yer passage, ain't yeh? Well, then, I guess it will be all right. Bill!" he called, "Bill!"

A great, rough, sailor-looking fellow, whose hands were freely tattooed in blue and red and whose eyes wore a sleepy look, came from the lighter, and the two of them lifted the box and carried it aboard. I followed, nodding to the one-eyed poet and his friend in

exchange for over-polite bows and smiles from them, and walked up the plank to the deck of the lighter with a feeling of relief that was quite restful after the strain of waiting ashore.

"Look here, young feller," said the lighterman in a deep-breathed, throaty undertone as I dropped my rifle butt on the box where it lay amidships of the flat-boat and stretched one arm comfortably. "Do you know why I went out with that there line, an' why I brought yer box aboard? It's on account o' them chaps you was talking with. They ain't no good. That one-eyed feller is Pete Slattery, that used to deal faro at the Monte Cristo saloon till they run him out fer false play; an' his side partner is a crook, I know, though I ain't seen much o' him. They ain't no good. I saw they was a-takin' too much interest in yer box, so I fetched it aboard here, out o' their way. Don't have no truck with ary one o' 'em. They ain't no good."

"But he was in the Cuban War," said I, "and lost his eye there, so he says."

"That there eye was lost in a gamblin' row over in Juneau — that's where it was lost," said the lighterman. "Don't have no truck with such trash, my boy."

I thanked my new friend heartily and forgot all his former insolence, which I now set down to his naturally uncouth ways. He evidently had no real intention of injuring anyone.

Looking out over the blue waves to the *Flying Mist*, which lay a mile to seaward, and noting how the masses of water rose and tumbled, I could appreciate the advantage of the line-and-buoy device. The deck of the lighter being perfectly flat and smooth, it would be a simple matter for Neptune to rock the craft heavily and get my gold.

"Once," said the lighterman, "we lost a box that had sixty thousand in it, going off to the *Caroline Stevens*. She just slid right off the boat and down to the bottom an' nobody never seen her ag'in. Ever since then we've hitched buoys to 'em. It's a good plan if yeh don't want the sharks to be a-buyin' fancy store clo'es with yer gold."

"But the owners of the lost dust," I asked, "didn't they recover anything from you?"

"Recover? I guess you don't think we take anything like that, here in this wild place, except at owner's risk. That's understood. When a reg'lar shippin' company gits in here it will be different, but I'd like to

know who's a-goin' to hold us responsible, as things stand, an' what court they're a-goin' to git jedgment in? It 'ud be like tryin' to collect back dues from them gulls a-flyin' over there. Of course, you could put in yer claim," he said, grinning, "jest as them fellers did; but it's owner's risk here, every time, an' you'd have to take it out in claimin', I guess — eh, Bill?"

Bill nodded sleepily and grinned prodigiously.

"I guess that's what," said he, with as much conviction as he seemed capable of expressing.

I lapsed into a thoughtful mood. The risks attending the transfer of gold to vessels in the stream seemed out of all proportion to the toil and trouble involved in the process of taking it out of the mine. I had heard it said that the gold dust in the beach sand had all been given up by the sea, and now that the sea seemed so eager to get back its treasure, a miner was lucky if he landed any of it safely in his home port.

"The Captain," I asked, "is he ever going to come?" For I was now more impatient than before I had heard the story of the loss of the gold. I wanted to see my box safe aboard the *Flying Mist* and out of the reach of the covetous landsmen, on the one hand, and the shoalwater sharks on the other.

"Oh, he'll be along," said the lighterman, rescuing his tobacco plug from the hands of Bill after that individual had made a desperate attack upon it with his teeth. "It's any time to-day, you know, and the tugboat won't come along until I set the signal."

"Any time to-day!" I exclaimed in dismay, "and we were to start at ten."

"Don't fret, sonny. He'll be here before dark. He'll want the tide, yeh know."

"That's right," said Bill.

"There's big attractions up town," said the lighterman.

"That's right," said Bill.

"Monte, roulette, wheel-of-fortune, and plenty of gin."

"That's right," said Bill. "That's right."

I groaned and looked about with large unrest and irritation.

IV

IN WHICH I AM RELIEVED OF MY BURDEN

I TURNED toward the beach. The crowd there had thinned perceptibly and had lost the one-eyed man and the man in the dark-brown sweater. Some of the passengers had wrapped themselves in great-coats or blankets and were lying in the sand, fast asleep. Others sprawled or sat about, talking and reading, and a few were strolling up and down the shingle, idly, and, as I regarded it, all too good-naturedly, considering they were so belated by the stupid master mariner, who, I began to suspect, cared little for his craft or the fate of the people who were to risk their lives and treasure in her. I heard a cheery voice among the crowd — Doctor Quaritch's beyond question. He came down to the edge of the wet sand, while I walked to the after end of the lighter. By his side was a grinning little Japanese, who was carrying the black bag.

"Hullo, John!" called out the Doctor. "I heard your *Flying Mist* hadn't sailed yet, so I dropped down

on my way to the Sand Spit, where some friends of mine are camping. Guess you struck a pretty slow boat."

"She's slow at starting, anyway," I confessed. "But you can see her funnel now, Doctor," I added, smiling, "and you can make out for yourself what it's like."

The Doctor took a pair of *pince nez* glasses from his waistcoat pocket, and, adjusting them, stared hard across the water.

"Nothing of the sort," said he, slowly. "There ins't any such rig as that afloat. Nothing of the — well, bless my soul!"

A little curl of dark smoke had lifted from the top of the mainmast, which now showed plainly in the clear afternoon sunlight as both mainmast and funnel.

"Dashed if that doesn't beat me!" And he gave a roaring laugh, his round stomach shaking. He stood for a few minutes staring at the vessel, and then, saying good-bye to me and wishing me a lucky voyage, he moved on up the sands, the Jap following him, and both of them pausing now and again while the Doctor turned his eyes upon the *Flying Mist* as upon the rarest sight he had ever witnessed.

I went back and sat down upon my box, glad of the

break which Doctor Quaritch's coming had made in the monotony of waiting.

The breeze over the blue Bering cut in harder than ever. I had been wearing mukluks, but had exchanged that warm foot-covering for a pair of new calfskin shoes, so that, to add to my other discomforts, my feet were cold. From time to time I had to rise and stamp about the little deck. I had kept a sharp eye open for the coming of the Captain, looking across the beach to where the white tent-cloths filled and fluttered in the stout sea breeze. I was weary of the sight of those dirty-white tents and of the flimsy shanties of the miners and of the litter and filth all about them. I yearned to be off for home. If I could safely have been set down among the tall, smoke-browned brick buildings of Market street at that moment I should willingly have given one of those eight buckskin bags of gold dust. But there I was, still waiting. The low, dull Arctic sun sank into the icy Bering, and the sharper chill of night came to further beset my powers of endurance. At last I heard one of the passengers shout derisively:

"Here comes Captain Bright-and-Early, and what a load he's got aboard!"

A tall hulking figure, moving slowly and uncertainly

along the sands, had appeared around the corner of the nearest shanty, accompanied by four or five others, and as they drew near I recognized my one-eyed friend, whom the lighterman had told me was Pete Slattery, and the little pink-faced man who wore the dark-brown sweater. Both of these worthy gentlemen were very loose-motioned and were muttering brokenly.

I glared at the late-coming skipper sullenly, my patience worn to the thinnest possible edge. It seemed to me particularly odious and insolent of him that after all our waiting he should appear in such an offensive state.

"Get aboard everybody!" he shouted, as he reeled up the plank, assisted by Bill and the lighterman. "Signal for your tug, Sandy," he commanded. "What's that you say? Tide turning? Of course it is. What's the odds? We can steam out all right — all right!"

I had observed that Slattery and his friend had been keeping close to the Captain and that they seemed to be on excellent terms with him. I wondered if they were not partly responsible for his condition. During the embarkation of the passengers and their effects the two partners were laughing and joking loosely with the Captain, and their mirth was all the more hateful to

me when they pressed upon him a long, black bottle which, I was glad to see, he persistently refused, though with the utmost good nature.

"Sorry, gents," I heard him say, "but I know when I'm down to my Plimsoll line. It's good stuff, I know, but I've got to get a steamer out of this crazy port, which is no port at all, and bucking a turning tide at that. So I'll have to beg off, though I'm glad to have had your jolly company, which I'll always remember — always remember."

When the man Slattery came aboard the lighter the sleepy Bill seemed to be more wakeful. I saw Bill having a few words with the poet behind the tall pile of baggage. To this interview I paid but little attention at the time, and it could have lasted but a few minutes, for the master of the flatboat, who had vainly been signaling for his tow, suddenly came around the baggage pile and told his mate to run up the beach and see if he couldn't raise her. Bill went away and soon came back, and I saw the lights of the tug gleam over the water, through the gathering murk. At last I was to be relieved of the long ordeal of waiting.

The tug's line was made fast, and I heard her wheeze violently. Glancing about among the passengers, I

did not see the one-eyed poet or his companion. It could not be, I thought, that they had of a sudden given up the idea of becoming passengers on the *Flying Mist*. As my eye ranged about in search of them, Bill interposed his burly form between me and the baggage pile.

"I'll have to move you and your box a little further over," he said, with more politeness than I had deemed him capable of exhibiting. "You're in the runway here."

I made no protest, but I observed that in shoving my box a "little further over" he placed it in a position which I deemed dangerously near the edge of the lighter.

"Oh, you needn't worry about that," said he, in tones meant to be reassuring, for I had grasped the box to prevent his moving it any farther. "It can't go overboard. It sticks to the deck too close for that."

"But there's no railing," I insisted, "and it might slide off. The sixty thousand dollars went over the side, and —"

"Oh, that's a fairy tale," sneered Bill. "He tried to scare yeh. Didn't yeh see him tip me the wink?"

Seeing that I could make no headway with the obdurate Bill, I looked about for his master, to whom I thought to appeal; but the lighterman was away for-

ward, while I was well aft, and I did not dare to leave my gold to go and speak to him. The sea was not rough, there being only a light wind now and a few surges. There was really not much cause for apprehension regarding the safety of the treasure. So I stood leaning against the baggage, feeling the grateful motion of the slow-going craft as she was towed nearer and nearer the *Flying Mist*.

Looking back at the lights of Nome, as they twinkled along the beach, it did not seem such a desolate place as it had during those waiting hours. After all, the camp had treated me well and had given me a fortune. I could not help having a little friendly feeling for it.

Not far astern I could hear the "put-put" of a gasoline launch, which seemed to be following us. I wondered for a moment if it could contain belated passengers for the *Flying Mist;* but this, I thought, could hardly be the case, considering the tardy start which we were making. What seemed rather strange to me was the fact that the launch showed no lights. Still, as we were in waters where port regulations were vague and loosely applied, it did not matter much.

As we were towed a little farther out we were swept by a sudden blast of wind. The lighter careened

quickly, my side of the craft rising high. At the same time there was a shock as of the striking of a wave.

"That was a hard one!" I heard a passenger call out. "How I love one of these crasy flatboats!"

"Likely to turn turtle any minute," said another passenger, with a gasp.

As the little craft heeled over on my side, I heard a commotion forward, where some of the topmost baggage of the hastily thrown together pile had fallen on the deck. I turned to look ahead in the darkness, and heard the lighterman swearing and the Captain bawling out orders. At that moment I heard a "chug" in the water, and, turning quickly, my eye did not catch the precious square object it had held in view all day long. The legs of the cumbersome Bill were, I thought, obscuring my sight of it; but as they were quickly withdrawn, the man starting forward with a "What's the matter, there?" I saw at a glance that my treasure was gone. The "chug" I had heard was made by the falling of the heavy box into the water.

"My gold is overboard!" I shouted to Captain Transome. "Stop her — please stop her!"

The Captain stood within ten feet of me and his face was in the light of a lantern that was sitting on the bag-

gage pile. I saw him blink unconcernedly and then stare stupidly as I called out again:

"Captain, Captain, my gold is overboard!"

He swore a blood-curdling oath and called the lighterman.

"What about this?" he asked. "Man says he has lost his gold overboard." His speech was thick and almost incoherent, while his tone was full of indifference. But the lighterman was all sympathy in an instant.

"Bill," he shouted, "signal for a stop!"

In those first breath-breaking moments of my terrible loss it seemed to me that it took the villainous Bill half an hour to get his lantern and make the signal; and when he did so there was no response from the tug.

I heard the quick "put-put!" of the launch and instinctively I felt that the presence of that night-cruising craft was in some way connected with the loss of my treasure. I turned quickly to the lighterman.

"Your man Bill," I cried, "pushed my box overboard, and those fellows who are following us in the launch will try to get it. I'm going to take the small boat towing behind there and see that they don't rob me. Will you come and help me?"

"I can't," he said. "I can't leave till she stops.

And don't you take that boat. The lighter will stop in a minute, as soon as they git our signal."

"Yes, and by that time my gold will be stolen. They'll see the buoy, pull up the line and make away with the box."

I ran aft, in a fever of excitement, my rifle in my hand, and hauled in the rope of the small boat hurriedly.

"Leave that boat alone!" yelled the lighterman, running after me. But I sprang in over the bow, untied the line and fell astern rapidly.

The lighterman yowled after me in the darkness, but I paid no heed to his calls. Seizing the oars, I rowed like mad toward the spot where I could hear the gasoline engine "putting" and purring. I rightly divined that this would be the place where the watchful eyes of the scoundrels who had been following us would have spied the white buoy floating on the surface of the dark water. My little boat was tossed about upon the waves, but I pulled steadily. I had been nursing my muscles with the mining shovel and they were hard as wood; and, being handy with the oars, I made the little craft fly toward the launch. As she rose on one of the waves, I saw a light flash out within two hundred feet of me. There was the launch and in her were two men

hauling on a line over the side. I yelled at them lustily, but they paid no heed. Now they pulled at something heavy — my box of a certainty — and lifted it into their boat.

Immediately I heard the sound of the engine "putting" and whirring, and as my boat fell into the scoop of the dark sea, I could do nothing but pull at the oars and shout.

When my craft lifted again and I could see the light of the launch, I raised my rifle and sent a shot singing over it, and then another and another.

"Bang! bang! bang!" The sounds, in that great expanse of sea, seemed but toyish and trivial in their volume, and as for the effect upon the men in the launch the firing counted for naught.

The light went out suddenly, and as I could see nothing of the men in the boat nor even the outline of the craft, there was little use of further shooting. Indeed, I was sorry I had shot or shouted, for I might have pulled in nearer before the light was extinguished, when, at closer range and being so well armed, I might have commanded the situation. Now there was nothing left but aimless and futile rowing in the direction which I blindly judged the launch had taken. As for

the lighter, she seemed to have left me to my fate. Far over the water I could see her lights and those of the tug proceeding out to sea; but my interest was no longer in any way connected with her or with her men, though I own I should have liked to see the ruffianly Bill for a brief moment and square accounts with him in some way. All that I strained forward to now was to detect and confront the poetical Pete Slattery and his pink-faced friend.

V

BACK TO THE GOLDEN NORTH

I PULLED ashore alongside a big lumber lighter which made a breakwater for me, else I might have had great difficulty in landing. As it was, I had to wade in ice-cold water over my knees. So, in drenched disgust and with my thoughts melting dizzily into each other, I hastened to the board shanty in which dwelt Gus Clarke, the chairman of the Committee of Safety, which was at that time all the rough camp afforded in the way of public officers for the detection and punishment of crime, unless one counted the detachment of soldiers who idled about the place.

Gus Clarke's cabin was dark and he was sound asleep when I knocked harshly and with intense anxiety, arousing him and all his dogs, which made a tremendous fuss just inside the door. Soon I saw a light through the little window and heard the voice of Clarke, whom I knew very well, cursing and quieting the dogs. But the brutes set up such another hubbub when the

door was opened that he could not make out what I had come to tell him. At last, after kicking the noisy animals all out of doors, he heard my story, told with a quivering excitement akin to despair, and was instantly sympathetic, though not so resourceful as I had hoped.

"It's too bad — too bad, John," said he, stroking his shaggy beard. "Forty thousand dollars in dust! That's a big loss. They worked it slick, didn't they? Let's see. What can be done? You say you think it was Pete Slattery, but you don't know. Pete's a neat hand, and not above such a game as that. He has the mug for it, and was crooked at cards, they say, though I ain't heard of his liftin' any dust before."

"The little, round man with the pink face and the red nose — the man who wore the dark-brown sweater," I suggested, my words running together in my anxious haste to offer something on which instant action might be taken. "Do you know who he is?"

Gus Clarke, assuming an official air, pulled his beard and thought, while my wet feet nervously tapped the floor.

"No," he said, after a few minutes, "I don't know as I ever seen him. Must be a cheechako."

DR. QUARITCH

By "chechako," he meant new-comer. But this speculation, as well as those which he further offered, was of little assistance to me in my burning impatience to get something done toward detecting the robbers and regaining my lost treasure.

"I think you'd better report all this to Captain Walker in the morning," said Gus Clarke, "though it ain't likely the soldiers can do much for you. You see, we are working this Safety Committee on the q. t. for the present and not many people know about it. We've got some pretty sharp men in it, and they know a thing or two. My opinion of the soldiers guarding this here camp is that they're a lot of doughheads. Still, they might help you some. But you can't do nothing to-night, John — not a thing. Better get back to the Golden North and get your feet dried out and go to bed. In the morning I'll call a meeting of the Committee and see what can be done."

"But by morning they'll have my gold packed clear over to Topkok, and I'll never see it again," said I, bitterly, fearing in my drooping heart that I had seen the last of the eight buckskin sacks with the "J. M." stamped upon them. Perhaps by this time the gold was being transferred to other receptacles, all marks of

its identity destroyed, and it was being "packed" on dog-back to some far-away place.

"Oh, no," said the chairman of the Committee of Safety very sagely, "the only way they can get out of Nome City with that gold is to take it aboard some vessel, and they won't try to do that to-night."

"Why, they might have gone out to the *Flying Mist*. They were friendly with the Captain. They may have been in league with him."

"Onlikely, my boy, very onlikely," said the judicial Gus Clarke. "I know Captain Transome and he's square as that table, though he does gin up a little too heavy once in a while. It was them and their liquor that kept him back until after dark, so they could have the box throwed overboard; but they wouldn't try any game of runnin' off with it on his schooner. He wouldn't stand for it and they know it. Your gold is here in the camp somewhere, and I'll hunt it up for you to-morrow if it's to be found, and land that chap Slattery and his pal in the calaboose — that is, if it's them that done it, and you seem pretty positive it was."

"And you'll get started bright and early?" I insisted, loath to give up all opportunity of a night search for the gold, and yet convinced after a fashion that Gus

Clarke would do his best to aid me as soon as I should come around in the morning.

"Sure," promised he.

"And set the other members of the Committee at work hunting it up?"

"Sure."

I bade him "good-night" very kindly and went away. It was late, but I could not yet go back to the hotel. I was too full of the dreadful sense of my loss. I was hoping, also, that a lucky chance might aid me to stumble upon the robbers that very night. As I strode feverishly along the crazy, creaking sidewalks of the stinking streets of the town, past open gambling dens, aflame with lights, past dance-halls where gaily dressed girls smiled and beckoned at me, I peered into this and that place of sin, in the vague hope of catching sight of Slattery or his companion, and at each failure in the search my depression of spirits was something extremely difficult for a young and generally buoyant nature like mine to bear.

How could I go home empty-handed and tell my father that I had lost the gold? How could I own to him that the fortune for which he had risked so much and had come so near to his death to lay hold upon,

had utterly vanished almost before my sight, while I was powerless to prevent its loss? Blind, unreasoning self-accusation held me to the rack in that first hour of wandering. Had I been a little more vigilant, the fellow Bill might not have had his opportunity to push the box overboard. Why had I let him shove it so near to the edge of the lighter in the first place? It was true, as Gus Clarke had seen from my recital, that the man Slattery and his companion had kept the Captain ashore in some drinking resort that they might delay him and thus take advantage of the darkness. Why had I not suspected something? Why had I not been more alive to the situation and the peril? When I had noted that they did not stay aboard the lighter it had been childish of me not to have suspected the very plot that had been carried out. How easily, and neatly, and completely they had victimized me!

And then a wave of self-pity swept over me. How much more wisely would any man have acted under the circumstances? Was not the whole affair most unusual? Who had ever heard of such a robbery — of gold being thrown deliberately into the sea to be fished up again by the thieves? And the man Bill—who could reasonably have suspected him in the part he was

playing? He was one of the crew of the lighter—the whole crew, so far as I could see—and the trusted servant and agent of the public. Who could have suspected him?

But of what avail would be all the explanations I might make to my father as to the loss of the gold? He was, as I have said before, exceedingly strict in his dealings with others. I would rather have been responsible to any other man alive. Explanations! Why, I had often heard him say that he never dealt in explanations himself, and wanted no man to explain or apologize to him.

And to such a man, looking at him for a moment wholly aside from the natural compassion and affection that I must feel for a father who loved me in spite of all my faults — to such a man I must go home and say, "The gold that you worked for, starved for, sickened and almost died for, is lost!"

In those first dazed hours I did not think of my own share of the stolen gold, nor of my wasted labor. I could afford to lose time and treasure. I was young and the world lay all before me; and though I had built mightily upon the fortune that had come so quickly I could work and regain it. But to the good folk at home the blow would be terrible

Again I thought of the infamous Bill, and as I did so it seemed to me that by going down to the lighter, which, no doubt, had returned from the *Flying Mist*, I might get some sight of the rascal and possibly capture him. All this time I had been carrying my rifle, though I had not often been reminded of it, as it was a light weapon. Its presence on my shoulder was quite comforting, however, as I strode down the beach to the place where the lighter had been stranded with the other shore-lying craft. But when I found the flatboat in the darkness there was no sign of life on or about the square little hulk. So I walked back toward the Golden North, away from the sound of the melancholy surf, the voice of which seemed doubly sad to me, staggering as I was under this heavy stroke of misfortune.

The warmth of the big stove in the tavern and the lingering food smells that haunted the little dining-room, which was also sitting-room, public room and office all in one, reminded me of how miserably cold and hungry I was, for I had eaten nothing since morning and my feet were still wet and cold from wading in the surf.

The landlord, who was still out of bed, although it was nearly midnight, was greatly surprised when he

saw me. I refrained from telling him of my loss. He would hear of it soon enough. I merely told him that I had not taken passage in the *Flying Mist* after all. The good man fetched me some cold boiled beef, a loaf of bread and a cup of hot coffee, which I attacked ravenously.

"You can have the same bed you had last night, John," said he, turning to attend to some other late-comers. "You know the way up. Turn in whenever it suits you."

I was now dried, warmed and well fed, and, although not a bit sleepy, I thought it best to retire and get as much rest as possible for the day of hard detective work that lay before me in the morning. So up the rickety stairs I mounted and walked to the door of the little box of a room which I had thought never to see again. My turning of the handle brought forth a lusty "Who's there?" And in an instant I knew by that booming voice that Doctor Quaritch still kept the incommodious lodging we had shared together on the previous night. I stuck my head inside the door and announced myself.

"Goodness me!" was the Doctor's greeting. "It's you again, is it, John Morning? Light the candle.

Then you didn't get away after all? I'm mighty glad of it. Hated to see you set sail in that funnel-masted thing. Now you can go down to San Francisco with me."

I struck a match and looked about for the candle, finding it on a chair near the head of his bed.

"But, Doctor," said I, as the candle-wick blazed up and I took the hand he extended to me from under the shoddy blanket, "I've met with a terrible loss. My gold is gone — stolen!"

"No! How in tunket did it happen?"

"They threw it overboard and then fished it up before I could reach them."

I sat down on the edge of my bed and told the sorry tale of the robbery.

"Well, well," said the Doctor, at the close of my narration. "That beats all. That's the worst I ever heard. But there's a chance yet — you may get it, though it's doubtful — mighty doubtful. The soldiers here are not likely to be first-class detectives, and your Safety Committee can hardly hope to cope with such shrewd criminals."

"I'm afraid they're not much good," I owned.

"You'd know that one-eyed chap again, of course,

if you saw him, which you may never have the chance to do, and the other rascal."

"Oh, I'd know him, too, and Bill, though Bill was only a tool."

"Yes; they must have hired him to push the box overboard. Well, now, my boy, go to bed and get to sleep. You'll want to be pretty active to-morrow. It'll be a busy day. I'll help you all I can, and the Jap, too, though he doesn't count for much."

I went to bed and lay very still, so as not to disturb the repose of the good Doctor Quaritch. But I doubt if either of us slept above an hour or two. When I did drop off I was wrestling with Pete Slattery, whose one eye became a gigantic searchlight and dazzled me so that I was blinded and dazed and had to let him go.

VI

GUARDING THE BEACH

We were both early astir in the brisk, biting air of the Arctic morning, going down to the lighter to see if aught might be learned of the iniquitous Bill. I never knew the surf to sound so dismal or the briny breath of the ocean to be so chill and discomforting as when we reached the lone lighter, lying black and wet there in the wave-washed sands. In places the foam was crisply set in icy bubbbles that crackled under our feet.

There were few people on the beach and no one about the ugly flatboat. We waited there a little while in the cold, stamping our feet to keep them warm. Just as we were about to give up the watch for the time the lighterman walked briskly down the sands, all bundled up in his blanket coat and his white breath hanging about him like a wraith.

When I ran up to him eagerly and inquired as to the whereabouts of Bill, the lighterman shook his head.

"Bill's quit the country — lit out last night and left

me in the lurch to git this blamed boat back here all alone. I'm awfully sorry you lost your gold, my boy, but you shouldn't 'a' took that boat."

"I'll see that you get it again," I promised. "But where's Bill gone?"

"South," was the short reply.

"South?"

"Yes; sailed on the *Flyin' Mist*. She didn't git away till two or three o'clock this morning, I guess. Somethin' wrong with her machinery, or else the Captain didn't want to buck the tide after all."

"Do you know if any other boats went out to her?"

"No; we was the last one."

"Are you sure?"

"Well, of course I didn't keep a lookout all night, but I'm pretty sure, just the same."

"How do you think Bill got away? They must have wanted to leave him ashore, after what I reported about his helping to steal the gold.'

"Oh, the Captain didn't take him knowingly."

"How then? Did he stow himself away?"

"That's what I think. He didn't want to make himself too numerous on deck, you can bet on that. But he was waitin' all the while for that one-eyed feller to

come aboard. And they just sailed away with him. He must feel rotten cheap by this time."

When we passed down to where the Doctor stood on the sands he made sharper queries, based on his nautical knowledge, but nothing shaking the ugly fact that Bill had wholly escaped us and had gotten away on the *Flying Mist* could be learned.

"They fooled him good," said the lighterman when we had fully discussed the robbery and Bill's connection with it, "an' it serves the cuss jolly well right. He allus was a-shirkin', no-account chap, but I didn't think he'd jine a gang o' dust-lifters like them."

"So you think he was really in with the other fellows?" remarked the Doctor.

"Why, it's only what I sispicion, yeh know, but it stands to reason, don't it? The critters that pulled up the dust told him they'd jine him in the *Flyin' Mist* an' sheer the gold with him. So as soon as the baggage is off he goes an' hides away on the schooner until the lighter goes ashore, expectin' all the time them fellers would come out in their launch an' bring the gold an' sail away with him. But the lunkhead got left. He might 'a' knowed they wasn't goin' to go an' divvy up with him, an' if he'd had a grain o' sense — which he

never did have, as far as I seen — he might 'a' knowed Capt'n Transome wouldn't stan' fer that kind of a deal, even drunk as he was. The other fellers was sharp. They're hid aroun' the camp somewheres waitin' a chanst to git the gold aboard o' some vessel; but they can't git it off on my lighter—you kin bank on that, gentlemen."

On inquiry from the honest lighterman, we found that two vessels would be sailing in the afternoon, and I determined to hang about the beach with as many soldiers and as many officers of the Committee of Safety as I could get to help me in the search for my stolen treasure.

I went to the army barracks and found Captain Walker, who had charge of the detachment stationed near the camp.

"I'll help you all I can," said the Captain, when I told him of my loss, "but I doubt if anything can be done." He detailed three of his men to make a search for the robbers, and the word was passed among all the soldiers of his company to keep a sharp lookout for the rascals.

I rejoined the Doctor at the Golden North, and he and I went to Gus Clarke's cabin. Clarke was there with two other members of the Committee, discussing

the robbery. These two were directed by him to inform the others and be on the lookout for Pete Slattery and the pink-faced man. It was not long before the whole camp knew of my loss, and I was stopped many times in the street by sympathetic acquaintances, who wished to condole with me and to suggest the possible hiding-place of the robbers. Many of the miners scouted the idea that the gold was still in the camp. Some wise oracle among them had insisted that the treasure and the robbers must all have gone in the *Flying Mist*, and the majority adhered to this theory. But Gus Clarke and his men made a faithful search about the camp while the Doctor and I, together with Yohara, the Jap, lay about the lighters.

In the afternoon, two hours before the sailing of the *Robert Dollar* for San Francisco, four men of the Committee of Safety were on hand at the lighter and closely scrutinized each passenger that went aboard, as well as his baggage. My heart leaped when I saw a treasure-box of about the same size and shape as my own taken aboard and tied with a long line and buoy. The gold was in the charge of a big, burly Swede, who protested violently when a close inspection was made of it by the Committeemen.

"Ay tank you don't got any rights to coom a-muddlin' mit deesen bokes," he said, angrily, shaking his white hair. "You don't got any rights. I vait two hours to get me dis bokes on deesen boats, and I don't vant no mans muddlin' mit it."

When the inspectors saw the markings, one of them said:

"It's Lindbloom's. He's one of the biggest miners up on Anvil Creek. It's all right, my friend," he added, in pacific tones to the Swede. "We're only doing our duty."

And the vigilant officers certainly did all that might reasonably be expected of them. But I was not satisfied. I could have wished that every trunk and package brought aboard might be opened and its contents explored, that my gold might be found and restored to me.

Little Yohara, who was keeping close watch, astonished us all by madly springing upon a tall passenger as he stepped upon the lighter's plank to go aboard. The Jap grasped the man by the tail of his long, loosely hanging parka. The passenger protested, and used violent language while he tried to shake off the closely clinging Jap; but the little fellow had a grip like a bull terrier, and would not let go.

"What's the matter, Yo?" asked the Doctor. "Whom do you think you have got?"

"Gol' lobber, gol' lobber — see!" he blew out between his short breaths. "See, he have disappeared his bad eye behind that-a thing."

We looked and saw that the captured passenger wore a black blinder over one of his eyes; but the man was not Slattery.

"Let go of me, you little heathen!" shouted the innocent stranger, not relishing the attack nor the laughter of the crowd.

"Yes; let him go!" I commanded. "He isn't the man."

But Yohara looked inquiringly at the Doctor, and would not relax his tenacious grip upon the long-tailed parka until his master had recovered from the attack of laughter — in which his red face grew redder than ever — and shouted at him to desist from his overzealous efforts to detain the man, who was writhing and shaking himself and calling out: "I'll disappear youreye, you little rascal! And you'll never see out of it again!"

"Gangway! gangway!" shouted a man carrying a big trunk; and Yohara, covered with confusion, slunk back to the Doctor's side.

Soon all the passengers and their luggage were aboard,

the tug's whistle blew and the lighter was towed out through the surf, the angry man in the long parka shaking his fist at the Jap by way of adieu and the Swede giving vent to uncouth and obscure mutterings.

We had no better luck with the *Emily Holden*. Her passengers sailed after as close an inspection as we had given those of the *Dollar*.

"I guess they ain't a-goin' out to-day," said Gus Clarke, who took an active part in the second watch. "They'll be laying low anyway. I didn't think it would be any good spying about here, but of course it was a part of our game. Hank James has arrested a feller on suspicion. He's in the lockup. You might go and have a look at him John."

I fairly ran to the calaboose, but when I saw the prisoner I was again disappointed. He was not one of the men whom I suspected of the robbery. He was released, and after making loud and intemperate threats of prosecution for false imprisonment, he went his way. He was such a surly fellow, and cursed me so roundly for being the cause of his arrest, that, as I looked after him while he vanished down the road, I was sorry that we were not able to keep him over night in the calaboose as a sort of reminder to him to sweeten his language.

VII

THE WHITE BUOY BOBS UP

"PENETRATION! penetration!" repeated the Doctor after we had done another hard day's work of unsuccessful thief-hunting. "That is what you and I lack, John, in this detective business. If we were only as shrewd as some of Wilkie Collins's heroes. But I own I never was much of a sleuth, and I'm afraid our friends of the Committee are only good-natured amateurs. One first-class Pinkerton man now would land those fellows in jail, for I think they're right here in this camp, hiding away somewhere, waiting for a chance to levant."

We were standing on the little porch of the Golden North, looking out over the sea, along which a cold moon-path ran gleaming to the south.

I said nothing, for I had been working early and late in this depressing business, and could feel the subtle poison of fatigue creeping through my chilly frame.

"I'm afraid it's no use, my boy — no use. They're too sly for us. But there's no good wailing over it.

Let's go in and have as good a supper as this elegant caravansary can afford, and then go to bed."

We went to supper, where the Doctor ate slowly and with considerable gusto. For there were roasted ptarmagin and what he called "rare old stout," though I had to take his word for that, as I did not know the taste of liquor. I nibbled nervously and was glad when the meal was over. The sense of my loss grew upon me as the prospect of recovering the gold dwindled from hour to hour. It was a relief to see the Doctor arise from the table and go to sit before the fire in the empty office. He viewed my sour face from the standpoint of a man who had just drank a bottle of stout and is preparing to enjoy a well-stuffed pipe.

"As I say, my boy," he said, scratching a match on the stove, "you musn't look at this business so sadly. You know (puff) we're all likely to loss (puff), that is, (puff) those of us who have anything to lose. Now, I never in all my life had half as much money at one time as you had in that box, and I think I'm just as well off. Rich men don't sleep well. They have bad livers, too, or have to be operated on for appendicitis or something. Of course, a little money's all right; but just think — you might have speculated with that gold of yours and

got to be a millionaire. Then where would you be? Right in the insomnia class, with all manner of high-priced complaints, and with a lot of land-shark doctors trying to get your money away from you."

"I don't sleep as it is, Doctor," said I, "so I couldn't be any worse off in that way than I am now."

He looked at my jaded eyes, but instead of sympathizing with me, he said bluffly:

"Well, young fellows like you don't need a lot of money, anyway. They're better off without it. Why don't you take to the sea? *That's* the life. You could be a quartermaster or a purser or something on some good ship like the *Modesto*. I tell you, you sleep on the sea — 'rocked in the cradle of the deep,' you know. There's nothing like it, my boy, nothing like it."

As we went to our room I moved my head sadly from side to side and dreaded the getting into bed, where I knew I should toss about and think and think of the lost gold, and plan and plan for its recovery.

"Would you be kind enough to give me a dose of something to make me sleep, Doctor?" I asked.

"An opiate? Nonsense!" he grunted. "What does a healthy, well-nerved boy want of anything of that sort? Do you take me for one of those doping

doctors? I don't give medicine except in cases where I really have to. I know what's better for you than medicine. I've got a cheap copy of Boswell here, and you just read away at that, while the candle burns, and I guess it will send you off to sleep in an hour or so, at the most. If it doesn't, just blow out the light and lie there in the dark and imagine you're out in an open boat, drifting. Don't let your eyes close as long as you can keep 'em open. Nature is sometimes a little perverse, you know, and if you try hard to keep your eyes open in bed she will shut them for you very soon."

The Boswell took me far away from the scene of my anxieties, and I followed where it led along the dingy streets of old London until I was lost in their mazes and did not hear the Doctor blow out the light. Nor was I alive to any of the external sounds. In the morning I awoke refreshed and with renewed hope.

"Now, if you had taken an opiate," said the Doctor at breakfast, "you might have been as heavy as lead this morning and you wouldn't have felt like eating. All you needed was to cut the cable from the wharf you'd been moored to so fast, and that was what tiresome old Boswell did for you. Heigho! I've been

through all that. There was a time I couldn't sleep. That was when I was working in a big hospital, years ago, and had case after case to operate upon. There is nothing a man can do that uses up his nerve force so fast as operating. A good many say they are schooled to it, and all that, but I notice that the 'butchers,' as we call the hardiest of the surgeons, are very often men who take a great deal of stimulant to keep 'em going. Of course, that's a false backing, and they don't last long — they soon cave in. Sleep? Why, I've seen the time after a hard day in the operating-room when I could no more sleep than I could fly. I've sat up all night and read or walked the floor. But I didn't take any opiates. No, sir! They're the last resort. I got so bad, though, that I had to give it all up and go away to sea. It did me a world of good — that first voyage of mine. I had often advised patients to go to sea, but had never been there myself. I got to like it so well that I stuck to it like an old salt. I got a ship's doctor's berth on the old *Ocean Queen*, and was in her when she was wrecked down near Melbourne in '67. Then I got several places on other vessels, and finally on the *Modesto*. I've stayed with her now so long that I don't know what it would seem like on any other boat.

We've got a fine man for a Captain — as good as gold. You ought to know Captain Head."

"I think I met him once," said I.

"Did you? Then you met as good a sailing-master as you'll find aboard of any steamer that ever left San Francisco," said the Doctor, warmly. And he went on to tell me some of the exploits of Captain Head in storms and tight places, which narration showed me that the *Modesto's* master was certainly a man of resources.

"I'm awfully sorry, John," said the Doctor at last, "but I'm afraid I can't be with you for the next couple of days. You see, we sail Saturday night, and I've got some shore business to attend to. A friend of mine down in California wants me to look at a claim of his up on Reindeer Creek. I'll see you Saturday. Hope you will have found your gold by that time and will be ready to sail with me."

"Maybe I shall," said I, "and I'll be very glad to sail with you if I do."

I went over to Gus Clarke's cabin after breakfast. Mr. Clarke gave me a mysterious look and dived under his bunk after a tangle of tackle, which he drew out and held up before my eyes as he said:

"Did you ever see that before?"

It was a white buoy with a long line tied to it. I looked at it with a thrill of expectancy, as if my box might be attached to the part that still dragged under the bunk. I was disappointed when a movement of Gus Clarke's arm twitched into view the cut and frayed end of the bare line.

"It looks like the very buoy that was attached to my box," said I, thoughtfully.

"The lighterman says it's the same one. He has only three or four, and they are all numbered. See — this is number two." He pointed to a small black figure on the side of the buoy.

"Hi Means found this," said he, "in a deserted shanty down on the Spit, third house beyond the ferry. Now I think this shows sure enough that that there gold was brought ashore and not taken in the *Flyin' Mist*. If they had 'a' shipped it out to the schooner they would have had no further use for this here thing and would 'a' chucked it overboard. But, you see, they wanted to keep it tied on, for fear of some accident that would send it into the water again. So they jest brought the whole business ashore with them. Don't that sound reasonable?"

I nodded assent, though I was not much impressed by the argument, as it seemed productive of nothing that would bring my lost gold nearer to me.

Gus Clarke went on to say that the cabin where the buoy was found had been occupied by an old man who owned one of the little ferry-boats that plied across the narrow Snake river. But the man had disappeared, leaving nothing in the cabin but an old rusty camp stove and a pair of worn-out overalls. The buoy, with the rope wound carelessly around it, had been found in a corner. Whether the ancient ferryman had anything to do with its presence there was not apparent. I went with Gus Clarke to the ferryman's cabin, and we poked about under the loose flooring and tore out some of the lining in the effort to find something that might give us a better clew. Our patient search was not rewarded. Inquiry among the miners of the Spit as to the occupant of the cabin gave us nothing further to work upon. At the ferry they told us that the old man had been gone a week and that nobody had been living in the cabin in the meantime. They had not seen anyone enter the place, though it would have been an easy matter for a person to come and go in the night without observation.

It would have made an old detective smile to see how I clung to that buoy, the one remaining object that related to my lost treasure. During the whole of my careful inquiry I came and went along the beach with that white object closely hugged under my arm. Toward evening, however, when I saw that no good could come of carrying it about, I took it down to the lighterman's station and handed it over to him. It was his property, and I had sadly concluded that it would be of more service to him than it could ever be to me. In fact, in my hopeless state, I began to wish that it never had marked the place where the treasure fell overboard. For then the villains could not now be enjoying the fortune with which I had counted upon doing so much.

VIII

A GLIMPSE OF THE POETICAL PIRATE

NOTHING came of my inquiries of the next day. I walked over the tundra hummocks to Anvil Creek on a wild-goose chase after a one-eyed man who had been reported to be up that way. Tundra walking about Nome is hard work. You step from one of the "nigger-heads," as the grass clumps are called, to another, sometimes springing over awkward spaces of water and mud, and on occasion losing the shaky and treacherous foothold and being bogged down over your knees.

After making one of these slips I felt a prickly sensation in one of my heels and soon found myself favoring the left foot, though I had but a vague sense of lameness. I limped into camp at Anvil and found my one-eyed man to be an innocent German who was shoveling gravel into a sluice-box, unconscious of having been the cause of the hard tramp of an amateur sleuth over the boggy tundra.

I ate dinner there, telling no one of the reason of my

visit to the camp, and limped back to Nome, a distance of over ten miles. My heel and the back of my ankle gave me such pain by the time I reached the Golden North that I was glad to see the round, smiling face of Doctor Quaritch above the supper-board.

"Lame?" he asked, as I limped upstairs with him after supper. "Let's see."

I took off my boot and stocking when we reached our room, and he felt of the heel and ankle with gentle fingers.

"Tendon Achilles strained, my boy. No wonder you limped. You come aboard ship with me and I'll fix you up. We sail to-night, you know. Wish you were going with us."

We went off to the *Modesto* in the moonlight in the steamer's boat, Doctor Quaritch, Yohara and I. I was glad of an excuse to be with the Doctor as long as I could, and to say "good-bye" to him at the last possible moment, for I knew I should be very lonely when he should be gone. Soon the hull of the big vessel lay before us.

"She's pretty high out of water, isn't she?" remarked the Doctor. "We brought up a big cargo of machinery and supplies for the miners, but there isn't anything

in the way of freight to go back, and I guess we won't take on ballast until we get to Dutch Harbor. That's on Unalaska, in the Aleutian Islands, where we get our coal."

We went aboard the *Modesto*, and in his little stateroom amidships the Doctor bathed my foot and wound a long piece of sticky plaster band around the ankle and under the heel, crossing it over the instep like one of the sandal laces you see in pictures of ancient footgear.

"Be careful of that foot for a few days, John," he cautioned, "and it will be all right. What's that? Eight bells? Well, we'll be pulling out of here in a little while."

"Then I must get ashore," said I. We walked to the ship's ladder and stood for a few moments looking down on the dark little lighter as it rose and fell alongside. I was grieved to lose the Doctor, and as I looked ashore to where the camp lay in the solemn moonlight, it seemed more dismal to me than ever.

"Awfully sorry you can't come," said the Doctor, taking my hand. "I don't see why you can't do it. I don't think there's much chance of your ever getting sight of those pirates again. They know what they're up to. No doubt they've made away safely by this

time. Besides, you're lame. It won't do that foot any good to be tramping about on it. If I were you —"

"No," I interrupted, shortly and rudely, with strong determination not to be tempted home until I had done all I could do to find the lost treasure. "No, Doctor; please don't ask me. I've got to catch those thieves — I've got to get that gold. I couldn't go home until I had exhausted every chance there might be of success. Not but that I should enjoy sailing home with you. Nothing would suit me better. But under the circumstances —"

"All ashore!" rang a vibrant voice.

I said "Good-bye," and turned to step down the ladder, when the Doctor called out:

"Hold on a minute, John! I'm going to run down and get another strip of that plaster for you, so you'll have a fresh one to put on when this gets old." He trotted away, and I stood leaning against the rail, looking incuriously at the passengers as they moved about in the chill night air, some of them stamping their feet and beating their arms against their sides to keep them warm, for it had come on quite cold. Three or four men went down the ladder at the ship's side and got aboard the lighter.

Of a sudden a figure stole past me in the dim light — that of a man in a dark parka, the collar of which, being turned high, muffled his face, while a bandage about his forehead concealed his brow and shaded one eye. The other eye, however, was clearly visible and flashed brightly before me.

"Who is that man?" I demanded of the nearest passenger, as the figure dodged back quickly and, as I thought, furtively, into the crowd along the rail.

"What man?" was the reply.

"The one with the bandage around his head."

"I don't know his name. I heard it was a feller 'at got hurt in a blast over at Rock Creek. Miners takes lots o' chances, don't they?"

But I made no response. I was dazedly thinking of that one bright eye.

"Is it he? Is it he?" I was asking myself over and over, trying to help a vague impression to deepen from doubt into certainty. "Is it Pete Slattery? But it can't be. He wouldn't venture aboard here where he would be likely to be recognized unless he felt sure of his disguise. But is it the man?"

I was all in a whirl when the Doctor came running back, breathing hard.

"All ashore!" yelled the vibrant voice a second time.

"Well, good-bye!" said the Doctor, seizing my hand again.

What external intelligence I possessed was merged into a mute hand-grip. But all my real consciousness was concentrated upon the fleeting and baffling vision of that burning eye.

"Good-bye," I said, with intense preoccupation, and stood stock-still.

"There's nothing the matter with you, is there, John?" asked the Doctor. "You aren't ill, are you?"

"No," said I; "I'm all right. Good-bye!" I seized his hand again in my confused abstraction. "Good-bye!" I repeated, and yet I did not move.

"All ashore!"

"Can it be — can it be the man?" I was struggling with the uncertainty of the impression, commanding it and yielding to it by turns.

"Ain't yeh comin' ashore, young feller?" called out the lighterman from below. "If yeh be, yeh'd better git a move on."

I limped down the steps to the lighter's deck, and stood near the bottom stair when one of the lines was cast off. The tugboat whistled shrilly. A man ran to

loosen the last line, and while he was doing so and the space between the flatboat and the steamer had grown a few inches, my vague, harassing doubt flashed into sudden conviction, and, giving myself up to a wild impulse, I sprang at the steps, grasped the side rails and drew myself up over the hazardous, widening water-space.

"What's the matter?" called an angry voice from the lighter. "Don't yeh know which way ye're goin'?"

"What's the matter?" echoed the Doctor, as I sprang upon the steamer's deck.

"Matter?" I repeated, not caring to confide my secret to any who might be within earshot. "Matter? Nothing's the matter, only I take back all those 'good-byes.' I'm going to sail with you."

"Good!" cried the Doctor, almost embracing me. "Mighty glad to hear it."

"Up with the ladder!" commanded the first officer.

I looked down at the lighter as she drifted away, her tug chugging harshly in the quiet night air and her men calling out rude farewells to their friends aboard.

A hoarse, deep-toned whistle boomed out over the steamer's deck. There was a gathering groan of machinery and a throb — throb — throbbing down

below. By a strange and sudden turn of fortune there I was on my way to San Francisco, in the same craft with the man — or, at least, one of the men — by whose agency such harsh vicissitudes had been visited upon me. Off for San Francisco, as I had set forth before, and now under what different and bewildering circumstances! But here at last was hope. One of the pirates — and, perhaps, another — was within reach. Well, they should not escape me. And the gold? My spirits rose, my senses were all subtly alert. If they had brought it aboard it should not long remain in their thievish hands. I should have it again and sail back with it to my anxious father — sail back in that very ship every throb of whose giant heart was saying, "Home — home — home!"

I took Doctor Quaritch aside and told him the true reason why I had so suddenly decided to stay aboard the *Modesto*.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed, lifting his eybrows in astonishment. Then he whistled low. "But you must be dreaming," he added. "The man wouldn't have dared. Well, yes; he might have disguised himself and come aboard in a small boat, but not on the lighter, for it was well watched. We must look into

this at once. I'll tell Captain Head." He started up. Then he sat down again. "We musn't be in too great a hurry," he said. "Let's think. Suppose we begin a little investigation on our own account. I'll go and see the purser. You'd better come, too. You'll want to arrange for your passage. I have an extra berth in my stateroom. Better come in with me. You might fall into bad company," he said, his blue eyes twinkling. "And, seriously speaking, you can't tell what trouble you may have if your piratical Pete Slattery is really on board."

"Thank you, Doctor; I'll be glad to accept your offer," said I, "and my baggage won't clutter up your room, for I haven't any."

We went to the purser's cabin, and as that functionary and the Doctor were on the best of terms, there was no trouble in finding out all that was to be ascertained regarding Pete Slattery in that quarter. Of course the name was not on the passenger list, and, so far as the purser knew, there was no one-eyed man on board.

"To be sure I haven't had time to make any close observation as yet," said the purser, smiling, "but I can go around with you in the morning on pretense of examining berth-checks, or something, and look over

the first-class passengers. There aren't more than a couple of dozen. Your man will probably keep close to his room and pretend seasickness, so as not to show himself any more than is necessary."

"But he's disguised," said I.

"That may be," said the purser, "but if he's aboard, you can find him out somewhere."

"He probably doesn't know you're on the ship," said the Doctor to me. "The cold air out on deck drove nearly all of 'em in before the lighter got away, and, besides, your man was doubtless anxious to get out of sight. He will not be expecting to see you aboard, and in a day or two will be less anxious about concealing himself."

That night, as I lay in my narrow berth in the Doctor's stateroom, I thought of Gus Clarke and the Committee of Safety and also of Captain Walker. I wondered what they would think of my disappearance. I determined to write to them as soon as I reached San Francisco and let them know I was still alive.

I was up and out early in the morning, looking for Pete Slattery and his companion. I lingered in the saloon and in the smoking-room, and out on deck, peering about eagerly. Before nine o'clock I had seen all

but four of the cabin passengers, and there was no one-eyed man among them.

At ten o'clock the purser went with me into some of the staterooms, and I had an opportunity of seeing seasickness in various stages, but caught no glimpse of the man for whom I was so eagerly searching.

"They couldn't have taken first-class passage," said the purser, as we sat in the Doctor's stuffy stateroom.

"Well, it's not likely they'd travel in the steerage," surmised the Doctor, "with all that gold in their possession."

"No, it isn't," said the purser, "but you can't tell. Maybe they thought they could put up with the steerage a couple of weeks for the sake of keeping out of sight as much as possible."

"Their names wouldn't appear on the steerage list," remarked the Doctor. "For of course they have taken false ones — if they're on board at all, which I'm not so sure of; for this young gentleman caught only a glimpse of his man, and might easily have been mistaken."

"No," I insisted stoutly. "I am sure it was he. I have fixed his eye in my mind. There can't be any mistake. He's the man, and I'm going to find him before

we get to San Francisco, if I have to search this ship all over."

"That's the way to talk," said the Doctor, smiling. But I could see that he was only half convinced after all.

IX

IN THE STEERAGE

PROFESSIONAL duty called the Doctor to the steerage during the afternoon, and I went down with him to look about for the gold-thieves. I had already seen most of the steerage passengers. There were about fifty of them, chiefly men who were going home "strapped" and dejected after their profitless journey to the Arctic. They had used up the last of their "grub-stakes" and were barely able to secure the poorest return passage.

I had seen those men on the forward deck, where they huddled together, with their hands in their pockets, looking over the flashing brine with spiritless gaze — the most depressed set of men I had ever looked upon. But Slattery had not shown himself on deck. He was probably lurking somewhere below. I had thought that the finding of him and his pink-faced companion might prove a difficult task, as they could have stowed themselves away so securely somewhere in the vessel's

hold as to escape all the prying eyes that might be searching for them.

But when Doctor Quaritch and I went down into the steerage, and I sat aft near the starboard corner, while the Doctor made an examination of his patient, I looked into the dimly lighted angle, and there, at a table, playing at cribbage and smoking their pipes, sat Pete Slattery and the little pink-faced man, as cool as you please.

The poet still had his head bandaged in a way to conceal his blind eye, but the pink-faced man had made no attempt to disguise himself, probably relying upon the fact that he was unknown to the miners aboard the vessel.

Without the long parka and its high collar, which he had worn the previous night, it was easy for me to recognize the form and the face of Slattery, and I wondered if he really had thought of deceiving people by his attempt to conceal the loss of his eye. It might have been the bandage was merely intended to aid the poet in getting aboard in the night, when he had thought that any sort of disguise, however slight, might safely be relied upon. Once aboard and settled down in the steerage it may have been that he was a little more care-

less as to his identity being discovered. He must have deemed it reasonably certain that no one aboard the *Modesto* would take as much interest in him as the soldiers and the Committee of Safety who were on the lookout for him ashore. But to find me aboard must have been something of a surprise. It occurred to me, as I stole cautious glances at him, that he could not fear me so much in the ship as in the mining camp, where the crime of dust-robbing was one of the most heinous a man might commit, and was often punished most severely, even on the slightest evidence against the supposed offender.

As soon as the Doctor was done with his patient, I hastened to apprise him of my discovery. He glanced at the men and then looked away.

"Don't let them see you paying so much attention to them," said he, "or they will take alarm. They may not know that you really suspect them. If you can throw them off their guard it will be better. And remember — you have no proof that they stole your gold."

I saw the force of this counsel, although my fingers were tingling to seize upon the slim neck of Pete Slattery and choke out of him a confession of the robbery

and the whereabouts of the stolen treasure. It now seemed to me doubtful that the rascals could have brought the gold aboard. They might have exchanged it for paper money, in which case I should have little chance of recognizing it, after all.

The Doctor and I sauntered along the steerage deck, and on nearing the corner where the card-players sat I stepped casually up to them and gave what I intended for an incurious glance at the one-eyed man. He did not see me for a moment, for his good eye was on the further side. His partner, however, was quicker to note my presence. He started and dropped some of his cards on the floor. He gave a slight cough, and Pete Slattery's one eye looked straight at me and with as little trepidation as you could imagine. He must have seen at a glance my look of full recognition. Yes, he certainly was a cool customer — the coolest I ever have seen in all my journeyings.

"So you changed your mind," he remarked, with a smile and an offhand tone that I thought would have been the despair of a professional detective, though I must admit that a smile that lacks an eye is a poor affair and not in the least assuring. "You didn't sail in the *Flying Mist*, after all. You changed your mind."

"Yes," I replied, finding it extremely difficult to be civil to the villain, though it were the better policy for the time; "and you changed yours, too, didn't you — you and your friend?"

"Oh, did you think we were going to ail in that crazy little craft? No, sir-ee; we hadn't the slightest notion of it. We waited ashore until the *Modesto* was ready to sail. I wrote three poems while I was waiting. Want to hear them? One is entitled 'The Alaskan Moon.' It is the best."

"Why are you wearing that bandage?" I asked.

"Oh, I caught cold, and it settled here," he replied, tapping the cloth over the place where his lost eye had been.

He fumbled in the inside pocket of his coat and produced some little dirty-white pieces of paper, covered with pencil scrawls.

Meanwhile, the pink-faced man regained his composure enough to say, by way of explanation:

"Why, even if we had intended to do it, we couldn't have gone in the *Flying Mist* anyway."

"Why not?" I asked, all on the alert. "She wasn't crowded."

"I know that, but you see people has to have money

to sail in her — all first-class passengers. Here we git steerage."

"Which is cheaper," put in the poet, "and more suitable to the circumstances of poor, stranded miners."

"So you were stranded?" I asked.

"Yes. I had to apply to a friend of mine to buy our passage tickets for the *Modesto*."

"But your friend Bill," I could not help throwing out. "He sailed in the *Flying Mist*, didn't he?"

"Bill?" The single eye burned keenly, as if it could look me through. "What bill — hotel bill?" he added, trying by this cheap pleasantry to overcome the effect which he must have felt his stabbing eye made upon me. "I do not know what or who you have reference to, my friend. But here's my poem, 'The Alaskan Moon.' May be you and your partner would like to hear it."

I hesitated. I was burning with impatience to do something that should force these pirates to the point which I wished to have settled as soon as possible, and was in no mood to hear his cheap doggerel.

"Yes, read it," said the Doctor, who, as I afterward understood, seized this opportunity to gain time

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to study the rogues. "'The Alaskan Moon.' That ought to be a bright subject for a poem."

"Well, sir," said the poet, addressing the Doctor in very humble tones. "If you will excuse the faulty rhymes. You know I just dashed off this little piece and haven't taken time to fix it up as it should be."

He read the verses. There was a long string of them, and to me they were very tiresome; but the Doctor did not seem to be bored. In fact, he commented on the sentiment quite pleasantly.

"Ain't that all right?" asked the pink-faced man, addressing the Doctor, whose smile of encouragement seemed to reassure him.

"Why, the idea is good," replied the Doctor, good-naturedly. "I'm not saying anything about the poetry, mind you, for I'm no judge of that. But the idea of the moon getting its cold glitter from the northern ice-fields is all right."

"I thought it was pretty fair," said the poet, proudly, "though not as good as some I've written. I'm glad you like it. Appreciation is what a poet needs, you know. Many a poet has suffered for the want of it."

"That's so," said the Doctor, with a side glance at me. "That's so. And it's true of a good many other things

besides poetry. How did you come to be stranded at Nome?"

"Oh, the beach claims was all taken up," said the pink-faced man, replying for his partner, "and we didn't have no money to buy anybody out."

"Well, there were the tundra and the creeks," suggested the Doctor.

"Yes," said the poet, "but it takes capital to work on the creeks, and the tundra is very uncertain. We could not afford to buy the costly machinery to thaw out the ice, and all that. But we may return. We're going below to try to raise money, you know."

"And, meantime, all you can do is to play cards and write poetry," remarked the Doctor, with a smile of good-fellowship that incensed me, so ill applied did it seem in this place.

"Yes, I've got two or three pieces started. May be I can sell 'em when I get below, and raise a little money that way. Don't you think 'The Alaskan Moon' would go well, set to music?" He reproduced the dirty-white sheets and seemed anxious to read the jingle again.

"It might," said the Doctor, moving off. "Good-day, gentlemen. I must go and see a patient on the upper deck."

We passed along out of the steerage, the Doctor quietly alluding to the poem in a way that would have been very amusing to me at another time. As to the meter, he remarked, when we were out of hearing of the poet, "I'm afraid some of the feet need plaster bands on them, like the one you are wearing. How is your foot to-day, John?"

I could hardly reply decently. I was out of patience with my friend that he should have been able so calmly to placate the rascals and then walk away discussing matters other than the one that touched me so closely.

"Well," he replied at last, when on reaching his stateroom I asked what he thought of the situation. "It looks involved, my boy. Your poetical pirate is either very deep or very harmless, I can't tell which. On a superficial examination, I should diagnose his case as that of a worthless bummer, a cheap wit and a very bad verse-maker. I suspect that there is a twist somewhere in his mental processes. Whether he is really a thief or not, and the thief that helped to make away with your gold — that's another matter."

"But, Doctor," I began, much annoyed by his coolness, "I'm sure —"

"You are no more sure that those men stole your

dust than you are of the depth of the water immediately under you, or of your precise latitude and longitude. But we may be able to get some sort of assurance of their connection with the robbery, though you must admit it barely stands to reason that men of that ilk would be in the steerage, smoking cheap tobacco, when they could be in the best stateroom, smoking two-bit cigars. You'll have to hold yourself in, my boy — hold yourself in, and lie low and watch very cautiously. Something may turn up before we reach the Golden Gate."

I ascertained from the purser that the poet and his partner had taken passage under the names of J. R. Trust and George Somers. It seemed to me that the name of Trust had been chosen by Pete Slattery to inspire confidence in the minds of those whom he might meet aboard and to offset the sinister appearance of his evil eye.

X

A HEAVY TRUNK

HAVING the run of the ship, because of my intimate friendship with the Doctor, there was hardly any accessible place aboard that I did not venture into or upon. I liked well to stand upon the bridge in the clear, white sunlight, and look across the waste of white, tumbling waters, and smell the good, clean salt smell of the sea.

No water is so blue as that of the Bering. It is of that intense azure that makes the wave-tips seem whiter than on other seas, and it lends to the sky an extra tint of its own color.

And I loved the dark waters of the night, when the phosphorescent gleams against the steamer's side shone out against the white foam, and the moon-path lay along the sea. It was then that Yohara, who served as a pantry-boy aboard ship, would come on deck by invitation of the Doctor, to whom he owed his position, and for whom he served as porter ashore. The little

Jap would sing the weirdest songs — "night poems," he called them — greatly to the entertainment of the passengers. Dressed in his native garb, he would do a sort of grand opera performance in Japanese all by himself, flourishing a wooden sword which he would pull out and thrust into his belt, clasping the handle while he recited poems which he afterward interpreted in his queer English.

Those first days of the voyage were calm enough, and I should greatly have enjoyed the being abroad on the early autumn seas, where the air was brisk and not cold, and where no hint of the fogs and mists that often prevail in those latitudes obscured the vision which could reach afar. But the thoughts of my lost treasure and of how to recover it were almost constantly in my mind. It harried me sadly to think that nothing was being done toward the positive detection of the guilt of the men who called themselves Somers and Trust. I felt like going to Trust, telling him that I knew his real name, charging him with having stolen my gold, and demanding the restoration of it. But whenever I hinted at any action of this sort to the Doctor he was ready with his cool caution of awaiting the turn of events.

A Heavy Trunk

I paid several visits to the steerage, and once, when I was in the corner by the bunk of Somers and Trust, I observed nobody about. The two worthies had doubtless gone on deck, and the coast was clear for an inspection of their luggage. This consisted of four pieces — three satchels, a telescope basket and a small, trunk. I lifted each of the satchels and the basket to test its weight. None of them was very heavy. Then I looked closely at the trunk in the dim light. It was of leather, but not covered with canvas as such trunks are usually encased. Besides the ordinary straps it had running about it, crosswise and endwise, a small, strong chain, secured by a heavy brass padlock. This lock was in addition to the regular trunk lock, which seemed strong enough for common purposes. On one end of the trunk was painted in black, "J. R. Trust, San Francisco." I looked at the lettering carefully. Though the trunk was rather an old one, the lettering seemed strangely new.

If this strongly fastened and evidently precious piece of luggage belonged to Pete Slattery, *alias* "J. R. Trust," it certainly had not been long in his possession. He had probably purchased it just before leaving Nome. One question burned strongly within me: Did it con-

tain my gold? I bent over the trunk, seized it by the handle nearest me and was about to test its weight — in fact, I did give a stout tug, which, however, did not raise it from the steerage floor — when I heard footsteps approaching me, and, straightening up immediately, I stared into the faces of Messrs. Trust and Somers.

Always the more nervous of the two, Somers seemed harshly to resent my intrusion, and I thought that Trust's one eye gleamed with momentary malevolence, but he became at once friendly enough.

"Oh, it's you, Mr. Morning!" he remarked very blandly. "Did you come down to hear that poem of mine on the 'Humpbacked Whale'? I've got the last verse done, you know. It ain't quite so comic as I thought I'd make it. In fact, it's a little sad towards the end, where the whale loses his lady-love."

"Read it," said I, remembering the Doctor's forbearance under a similar infliction, and calming myself as best I could in my flustered state.

He read the miserable doggerel, at the end of which, seeing that something was expected of me by way of appreciation of the rhymes which he had ventured to call comic, I laughed, though I could not have told whether the thing was amusing or otherwise.

"You find it funny, after all," remarked Trust. "Well, perhaps it is. Ah, here's Fishley."

A stubby, sailor-looking fellow, with a singularly sour face and greenish eyes, whom I had had pointed out to me as the third officer, came forward.

"Mr. Morning," said Trust, "let me introduce my friend, Mr. Max Fishley."

The third mate held out a stumpy paw, on the wrist of which was a blue-and-red lady, with long hair, probably intended for a mermaid.

"Glad to know you, Mr. Morning," he said, in a voice that seemed not at all pleased.

I had seen Fishley with Trust and Somers two or three times before on the forward deck. It had seemed to me that they had become very friendly on short acquaintance, though that is nothing remarkable aboard a steamer, and particularly one like the *Modesto*, where there appeared to be a certain laxity of discipline, which even my unaccustomed eye did not fail to detect.

"Want to hear the 'Humpbacked Whale'?" asked the poet of the third officer.

"Yeh-ah," was the reply. "It's a new one, ain't it?"

"Composed last night," said the poet, musingly,

"while I was tossing on the bosom of the deep and wholly unable to sleep."

"He rhymes nat'ral, don't he?" said Somers, with evident pride in his friend's poesy. "Jest as nat'ral."

Trust read the verses again. At the conclusion of the reading Max Fishley shook his head.

"I don't like them sad pieces," he said. "You oughter make it end different."

"There you are," said the poet. "One laughs and the other weeps. That's the way of it. You never can tell how poetry will affect people."

I did not stay long in the steerage, but bustled away to tell the Doctor what I had learned. I was disappointed when I heard him say:

"Oh, you can't tell anything about that. They rig up their baggage all kinds of ways. Trust may have bought the trunk with the chain on it from some poor, stranded gold-seeker who had taken it up with that rig, thinking to bring it home full of dust."

"That may be," said I, "but the trunk is only a small one, about so high, and it's heavy as lead. I gave one end of it a jerk just as those chaps returned. It's awfully heavy."

"Is that so?" said the Doctor, changing his tune a

little. "Well, of course there might be gold in it; but you only lifted one end, and not fairly even then. So you don't know as to the weight of it. A well-packed trunk is a deceitful thing when it comes to guessing at its weight. This one may be filled with some gaming machines belonging to your poet. He's a gambler, you know. Or may be some of the other man's mining apparatus is in it. You take a gold retort, and scales and pans and things like that, and they weigh, you know."

"But couldn't we have the trunk searched? The Captain could order it done, couldn't he?"

"Yes, if there was any charge against the men, I think he might, though I'm not certain. We ought to be a little surer of what we are doing. I'm afraid you're letting your suspicions run away with you."

"But if we search the trunk we might get the proof," I insisted. "Nothing could be better proof than finding the gold there."

The Doctor smiled.

"Of course, said he. "Nothing could be better proof. But I'm sure the Captain would rather wait until we get to San Francisco. Then the search could be made officially and by the proper authorities. Still,

if you insist, we'll search it. I know a way that it could be done without our being much committed."

"Shall we do it right away?" I asked. "Don't you think it would be better to search it right away?"

"Not while they're down there watching it, for suppose we don't find any gold in it. That would be a little awkward. Better wait our chance. You hang around in the steerage as much as you can and watch them and the trunk. On the first opportunity, when they're on deck and out of the way, we'll go down there with Mr. Nason, the first officer, and I guess a good big bunch of keys will settle the question of what's in that trunk in short order, unless the lock is a peculiar one. But I shouldn't like to break it open, until we know a little more. I have seen the folly of hasty actions of that sort. We might get into some scrape. You see, when it comes to ransacking other people's property the same rule holds good on the sea as on the land. Better be a little cautious, my boy, and go slow."

I did not fancy the delay. I was all for going down and seizing upon the trunk then and there, but I consented to the Doctor's plan, and watched and waited about. But Somers and Trust did not seem much in-

clined to take the air together. If Trust went up on deck, Somers stayed below, and when Somers wanted to relieve his nose of the steerage stinks, Trust would remain, as I fancied, on watch.

My silent comings and goings in the poorly lighted steerage seemed barely to be observed by the two men. Sometimes Somers, when he caught sight of me, appeared a bit suspicious, but Trust was always bland and affable, greeting me cordially. Being the deeper rogue of the two, he was, as I saw him, better capable of dissembling any anxiety he might have felt because of my visits. I came to understand that, if I were to gain anything by my vigilance, I must be more alert and less conspicuous.

XI

THE BULKHEAD DOOR

So one evening, after I had paid the suspected men a visit, I bade them an impressive good-night and made rather a noisy exit from the corner where their bunks were situated. Having reached the middle of the steerage, I took off my shoes and slipped quietly back to a place near the pirates' corner where I had seen an empty berth. Into this I dropped, pulling the bed-clothing closely up about me, not without some natural repugnance, to be sure, although the sheets were evidently clean enough. With the end of the upper sheet pulled well over my head, I could lie and peep out toward the place where Trust and Somers were quartered. I could hear their voices droning over their interminable cribbage, and could smell the tobacco smoke as it was wafted down the steerage.

The rolling motion of the old *Modesto* had been increasing for some hours, and I could hear the waves thumping hard along her bows. Occasionally there

would be a hard swash, and in the intervals the wind piped shrilly up above. The warm air down below, with the buzzing of the voices and the heavy roll of the vessel, in what seemed to my vague and lassid sense to be a gathering storm, must have had a drowsy effect upon me, for I found myself fighting sleep as I had never fought it before. Remember, I had had many wakeful nights up to the time of coming aboard, and even yet I had not been getting more than half of my share of sleep.

I dozed, and awoke to the sound of a hearty laugh from somewhere forward. Then there came the wheezy notes of an accordion. Two or three times a great swash, harder than the others, would break through my dozing state, and I would start up and look back at the pirates' corner and listen. But I did not hear anything but the whistling of the rising gale, which, strange to say, helped me back to slumber, although my will was all against it.

I must have slept a couple of hours when I felt a cold draught of air floating over my bed. Some one down the aisle of bunks sneezed, and there came a cough or two. And then there was the banging of a door aft and the draught was suddenly shut off.

I got out of my berth and stole back to the corner of Somers and Trust, and peered about in the half darkness, but could not see or hear anything of them. They were not there. Again I heard the banging of the door. This was an unusual sound, and could come from but one of two quarters in the after part of the steerage. The banging must have been caused by the port or starboard bulkhead door, which was no doubt open. I had taken careful note of the internal arrangements of the steerage, and I was sure my conclusion was correct. I passed to the nearer of the two doors, the one on the starboard side, which, as the Doctor had told me, led into one of the steerage wings. As I neared the door I could hear a curious hollow sound, which I had not heard before, and it seemed that I could more distinctly note the effect of the heavy sea upon the steamer.

For a time I stood and listened to these and to certain strange sounds coming from the after part of the vessel. It was evident to me that some one had opened the door to the steerage wing and had left it open, and that the motion of the ship was swinging it back and forth.

I struck a match, and saw that this was really the case. The heavy iron door of the bulkhead at the end of the steerage way was ajar, the dogs and bolts having

been drawn, and the big padlocked bar that I had often noticed there was slipped aside.

I had been curious about the construction of the steamer, and the Doctor, who was quite familiar with such matters, had told me much about her, so that I knew that behind that bulkhead door was the wing in which were the coal bunkers, and that after this was the main freight-hold between decks.

I struck another match and glanced about at the empty berths of Somers and Trust. I looked at the trunk, which stood near by, and, as it no doubt still remained locked, I peered about for something with which I might smash in its top and get my gold. Luckily for me, as it chanced, I could find nothing to serve as a tool for that purpose. I struck match after match, and looked carefully at the trunk. One detail I noticed—the brass chain had been slipped off the cover and was lying to one side, the hasp of the padlock being opened and the key being in the lock. But when I tried to open the trunk I found it securely fastened. It occurred to me to lift it again, and, taking hold of a side handle, I raised one end quite easily. Whatever the weight was that had made the trunk so heavy before, it was not there now.

In that moment I made sure in my own mind that my gold had been in the trunk and that it had just been removed. If not, then why the loosely lying chain with its open padlock? Why the midnight movements of the men from the deserted berths? Why the open door of the steerage wing?

I was full of the sensations of the discovery and madly eager to ascertain more — to find out where my gold had been taken. The pirates, I was satisfied, had removed the gold from the trunk and were hiding it somewhere aft, either in the steerage wing or in the freighthold beyond.

Not recking what I did or for a moment fully sensing the fact that I was alone and unarmed, I tiptoed quietly through the bulkhead doorway, and along the dark, narrow wing, by the great coal bunkers, pausing from time to time and listening. As I passed aft I could hear more plainly the curious noises which I have spoken of before. They came more harshly to my ears, but were as mysterious as ever.

I found that the door at the after end of the long wing was closed, but soon perceived that it was merely held in place by a block of wood on the other side, for the bolts and dogs were all drawn. When I pushed

upon the door it yielded gently, and I passed into the dark and chilly air of the great empty space between decks, blank darkness all about me. It seemed to me that I was now nearer the sea, or at least could more distinctly note its effect upon the vessel. As the ship rolled violently to one side, I heard strange swishing, crackling and crashing sounds proceeding from the after part of the vessel, down below somewhere. These sounds were so loud, so strange and so startling as to make me leap in fright the first time I heard them. When the ship heaved over on the other side there was a repetition of the racket — swis-s-s-s-h! rus-s-s-sh! crash-s-h! — mingled with a low roll and hubbub that frightened me more than ever. In the lulls between these uproarious and half-deafening noises I heard certain grating sounds coming from the after part of the vessel down below. These gratings were scarcely audible above the fierce swishes and crashes, but they finally came to me as the sound of a saw. The order of these noises came at last to be almost regular in succession: First, there would be the long-drawn swish and rush, followed by the violent crash, then the thin grating of the saw, which would be drowned by the thudding hubbub.

When I had, to a certain degree, overcome my awe of these mysterious sounds, I proceeded very cautiously, feeling uncertain of my ground. Of a sudden I stood before a great, softly lighted square that lay along the freight-deck. I crept to the edge of the square, which I knew must be the open hatchway running down to the lower hold. I got down on my hands and knees, and looked into the hold. Away aft I caught the flare of a candle-light, but when I gazed strainedly down I could see nothing that might have immediate reference to human life, save some black shadows. These I watched until I saw they were moving along toward me, with the light. I rose and stood shivering in the damp, cold place, uncertain what to do. Then, during a lull in the other sounds, I heard a foot strike the lower round of the hatchway ladder and a deep voice, which I recognized as that of Max Fishley, said:

"Well, it's safe enough now. Nobody would ever think of looking for it there."

"That's right," I heard Trust say, "but how will we take it ashore when we get into port?"

"Oh, leave that to me," said the third mate. "I know how to do that business up in shape. I've smuggled too much loot ashore to be bothered with a job

like this. It's dead easy. Only you musn't be in too big a hurry, and if we have to go into quarantine, why —"

"Quarantine?"

"Well, you never can tell."

"But I'm afraid you'll —" began Somers, and the rest I did not hear, for a terrible grinding noise came from the after part of the steamer, mingled with a ripping whir. This ceased suddenly.

"Lord, how her screw is racin'!" said the third officer. "It's a nasty night. There's a high sea runnin' an' I guess Cap'n will want me on deck. The louty old porpoise is pilin' on the watches pretty thick."

I heard the feet on the ladder rounds again, and dodged back through the bulkhead door. With chattering teeth I ran along the wing, through the forward doorway and out through the steerage upon deck. I had to battle with a stiff wind, which nearly knocked me off my feet, and I thanked my stars that my ankle was strong enough to walk upon, though it was still lame and a bit uncertain.

When I reached the Doctor's stateroom, my friend was not in. I looked about for him and found him with the Captain, on the forward deck by the quarter-

master's house. My impulse was to run up to them and tell them both of my discoveries then and there — to say that I suspected that my gold had been taken from the steerage and hidden away somewhere in the lower hold, and to charge the third officer with complicity in the matter. Of course, I did not know that these were the facts, but I could not rest until something should be done. I wanted the trunk broken open at once, and if the gold were not in it — of which I now felt positive — I wanted a search made of the lower hold, where the treasure had probably been secreted.

But as I reached the spot where the two officers stood, my awe of the Captain, who represented to me the monarch of our little world afloat, reasserted itself. I probably should not have hesitated, however, had it not been for the fact that he seemed in deep concern. He would put up his night glass and peer anxiously forward into the dun masses of clouds that were racing down toward us, and then look at an instrument before him and shake his head.

"Is it going to be much of a storm?" I heard the Doctor ask as I stood near at hand, but as wholly unobserved as if I did not exist for them.

There was no answer for a while, but alternate contemplation of the sky and of the instrument.

"The glass is falling pretty fast," the Captain said at last, as if speaking to himself, "and I don't like the looks of those clouds. There's dirt in 'em or I'm a Dutchman. I wouldn't care so much, only we stand so high, without any freight or ballast, and we're being driven away to the south of the Aleutian Islands."

"Is that so?" asked the Doctor, anxiously. "Then we shan't make Dutch Harbor for several days."

"Not for a week, if this thing keeps up. I tell you, Doc, I don't like it. There's dirt in that black mess out there — the rankest kind of dirt. You know, we're pretty well north and it isn't exactly the right season for it, either, but we'll be in the biggest kind of luck if before to-morrow morning we ain't bucking a typhoon."

"But I thought —" began the Doctor.

"I know what you thought — that typhoons only blow along the Chinese coast. That's right. But storms get misplaced sometimes, just like other things; and you know that where we are sailing now, away south of the Aleutians, and driven over here by those east winds, we're not so far from Chinese waters as you think. Of course, it may not be a regular typhoon,

and I wouldn't report it that way, because those smart Alecks of the hydrographic office would have the laugh on me. But if that black mess out there ain't a typhoon it's the best imitation of one I ever saw. Hold on! I'm going to get Sing up here, and ask him what he thinks of it."

He stepped aside and called down a pipe, coming back after a minute to say to the Doctor:

"The trouble about these storms is they last so infernally long."

"And they're hot stuff, too," said the Doctor. "I'd hate to be out in a sailing vessel where you couldn't do a thing but lay to and let it drive at you. Do you remember the *Albert Deane?* That was a terror, wasn't it? She lay on her beam ends all one night and lost half her crew. But of course nothing like that could happen to the *Modesto.*"

Sing, the Chinese cook, came on deck, his loose white blouse and trousers ballooning in the wind. The Oriental looked the picture of humility in the presence of the master of the *Modesto.*

"Sing," said Captain Head, pointing to the dark moving mass, "what you think of him? You savve him?"

"Oh, him tai-fung," said the Chinaman, quickly, and with nervous awe. "Him no good — makee ship go chop-chop. Him makee tlee-piecee stick up thaia," he said, pointing to the foremast. "Habee too muchee plenty w tah all ova deckee. Velly bad, velly bad!"

"All right, Sing; you can go down. Now, what did I tell you?" said the Captain to the Doctor. "But of course you can't report it that way. All you've got to do is to buck through it and get out alive, if you can."

"But the old *Modesto* —"

"Oh, she's stanch enough — I ain't afraid of that. That isn't what I'm worrying about, though she would be better off if she sat snugger into the water. It's the coal."

"What about the coal?"

"Jim tells me there ain't enough, even of screenings and scrapings, in his bunkers to run her four days more."

"Whew!" whistled the Doctor. "How did that happen?"

"Well, you know them plaguey old owners — what drivers they are — they thought it was better to fill her up with high-priced freight for Nome, and take chances, than it was to give us a show for our lives with a few

more tons of coal. Thought I was a barnacled old fool because I suggested that we leave out a little freight and bring up something to run her with. That's the way they are. They think that it's all like San Francisco Bay up here, and that you can dodge in anywhere and coal up. Wish I had Densmore and a couple more of 'em up here, facing *that!*" He pointed toward the "black mess," as he called it, and gave a curious laugh, in which there was not a spark of mirth.

The Captain aired his views on the subject of owners while the wind scudded over the forward house and buzzed in the stays, making noises that reminded me of the sounds proceeding from paper-covered combs at the lips of stout-breathed schoolboys.

Glancing about of a sudden, the Doctor spied me, where I stood to the leeward of a big, staring ventilator, uncertain of my right to break into this serious talk. Although what I had heard about the storm was unpleasant news, it did not destroy the scent of the amateur sleuth, and I was all for speedy action, whether we floated or sank.

"Hullo, John!" said the Doctor, "shouldn't you be in your berth?"

"Yes," I replied. "I know it's late, but I want to

tell you something, and the Captain may as well hear it, too, for it concerns one of his officers."

I told them what I had seen and heard between-decks.

The Captain was furious, but his fury had no reference to my stolen treasure.

"Bulkhead doors open!" he raged, "and in this gale! By the great horn spoon, I'd like to know who did that and what for! As if there wasn't enough to think of, with a big storm thickening forward." He leaned over and touched a bell. "I'll see what Mr. Fishley's got to say about this. It's enough to make a preacher curse. Bulkhead doors open at all hours of the night and in a sea like this!"

The Doctor called me away. We went aft to the stateroom, and there I rehearsed what I had learned. He was deeply interested, though I could see he was nervous about the storm and the other troubles aboard ship.

"We'll go down in the morning and have a look at that trunk," he said. "Mr. Nason will go with us and we'll have his authority for opening it. I'm sorry now that we didn't search it before and all the rest of their baggage; but to tell you the plain truth, my boy, I

thought your suspicions about these two men were altogether too strong, considering what you had to go upon. And nobody ever heard of such a thing as gold-robbers in a steerage anyway. They were pretty slick to play poverty, and cover up their robbery in that way."

I remarked, with some satisfaction, that the Captain seemed to be rather angry about what his third officer had done.

"Yes," said the Doctor, "but I'm afraid that that part of your story isn't going to stick. Fishley will square himself with the Captain. He's a pretty smooth article, is Fishley. Then, too, there is a chance of your having been mistaken."

"Oh, yes," said I, "though I am about as sure of what I have told you as I am of being aboard this ship."

"Aural idiosyncrasies are something that have to be allowed for, you know," was the reply. "There were all kinds of noises down in that hold, according to your report."

"Yes. What do you think those terrible crashing and smashing sounds were down there?" I asked.

"Let's see," meditated the Doctor. "What could it have been?" He thought for a moment. Then his

face brightened into a smile. "Why, I'll bet a dollar it's Stetson's bottles."

Stetson was the purser, but I had not heard of his bottles before, so I looked inquiringly at the Doctor.

"You see, Mr. Stetson thought to make a little 'spec' up at Nome. Everything is high there except empty glass. He had a chance to get four thousand beer bottles for half what they're worth in San Francisco, so he bought the lot. They cost him about eighty dollars. It wouldn't pay him to crate them at the prices they were charging for such work, so he just had them laid down in the lower hold, loose, not figuring on how we'd roll if a storm came up."

"That was it," said I. "Breaking beer bottles, rolling about in a place like that, would have made precisely the sounds I heard."

"I guess they've all gone to smash," laughed the Doctor. "You see, my boy, the folly of wild speculation. The purser has lost his eighty dollars, for there won't be a whole bottle left when we get through this storm, and he will have to pay extra to have the splintered glass swept and taken out of the hold. I hope—" he began, and then broke off. "But of course it's all right."

"What's all right?" I asked.

"Well, you see, my boy, we've got a dead man down below in that same hold, and I don't think he's stowed away very tight."

"A dead man?" said I, raising my eyebrows.

"Yes."

"I didn't know about that."

"Few people aboard do know about it. He and the beer bottles are every ounce of freight we've got aboard. I hope his box won't get broken while we are pitching about so. The men aboard this ship — I mean the crew — are regular cranks for superstition, so the Captain had to have that dead box made big and square instead of long and narrow, to fool 'em. He smuggled it aboard as reindeer skins; otherwise those foolish galoots might have left the ship at Nome — every mother's son of 'em. They were bitten by the gold fever, as it was, and some of 'em got away, but we made up the number by stranded chaps picked up on the beach."

"But Nome isn't exporting any reindeer skins," I said, laughing. "Wouldn't the crew have suspected the deception?"

"Not they. They're a little dull about some things,

though they're bright enough when it comes to handling the steamer. But if that box should break open, you couldn't get one of 'em to touch it for love or money."

Under ordinary circumstances I should have dreamt of the dead man that night, and should have shivered at the thought of him tossing about in the empty hold, with the beer bottles smashing and crashing all about him. But my thoughts were all of the gold, and of the fact — for it seemed to me assuredly a fact, after what I had seen and heard — that my precious dust was hidden away down in the depths of the ship. All that need be done now, so I fancied, was to make a careful search for it, when it doubtless would be unearthed and brought safely upon deck.

I planned that I should take the most scrupulously watchful care of it this time, until it should be safely deposited in the purser's hands.

XII

THE "TAI-FUNG"

THE next morning we were in the teeth of the "tai-fung." The poor *Modesto*, with so much of her great hulk exposed to the storm, staggered along over the seas like a drunken man. She heeled over from side to side, drove her nose into the watery hills that piled up before her, and, with her stern well out of the sea, she strained heavily, while her screw raced like a windmill until she settled down again.

The racing and grinding of the propeller made the Doctor very nervous at breakfast. Each time he heard the sound his eyebrows would knit darkly.

"I don't like this at all," he said once, when the shaft ground so harshly that the *Modesto* shivered all over like a wet dog. "I was in the old *Rio* when she bucked a typhoon for six days off the coast of China, and was blown seven hundred miles out of her course. Sometimes I thought she would rack her engines all to pieces. But the *Modesto* is a clever ship. She'll get through

where any of 'em will — you can rest assured of that."

"But is this a typhoon?" I asked.

"Of course not," said the Doctor. "But, as the Captain says, it's the best imitation you could possibly find, and Sing insists that it is a 'tai-fung,' which is the same thing. I hope the business end of it doesn't strike us. If it does you can't tell what will happen. But the *Modesto* will go through all right. You needn't fear for her, my boy."

Nevertheless, I knew that he was worried. I hated to broach the question of searching for the gold just then, but he thought of it himself.

"Guess we'd better get Mr. Nason and see what we can do about finding that dust of yours," he said, "though it isn't the best time in the world to go ransacking a ship"

"I know," s. i, "that the officers will all be needed for duty now, fo. the storm is on pretty hea·v·· but if one of them could possibly spare the time —"

"We'll see, we'll see," promised the Doctor, shortly. "Great Scott! I wish that old propeller wouldn't grind so. Come along, my lad," he said, more cheerfully, "and we'll see where that gold is. It's too bad we didn't search the trunk before they got the stuff out

and hid it. Perhaps I was a little over-cautious. You get that way as you grow older, you know. I took risks enough at your age."

As the "business end" of the storm seemed to hold off and there was a little season of lull in the lashing wind, I felt less backward about pressing the matter of the search, and so we finally started forth. Mr. Nason, the first officer, could spare but a few minutes, he said, to go with us, but he was very obliging. We passed forward and down into the steerage, where the frowzy passengers were being racked in the agonies of seasickness and storm-panic, and passed through to the place I have alluded to as the pirates' corner.

The effect of the storm was visible in Somers' face; the pink of his cheek had turned to an ashy grayness. Nor was the cool Mr. Trust any too full of assurance at that moment. Both men evidently shared the fright of the other steerage people.

"Gentlemen," said Mr. Nason, "I'll trouble you to open this trunk."

"Sir," said Trust, forgetting his fright in the new excitement of this pointed demand upon him and his thievish partner, and his one eye giving forth a malignant fire, "sir, you have no right. I will not submit

to the indignity, for that's what it is, and you know it."

"We'll see about that," said Mr. Nason.

"But you musn't touch it."

"Mustn't I?" repeated the first officer in a tone of contempt.

"No. What do you want to get into it for, anyway?"

"That's my business," said the officer, curtly.

"But you have no right," insisted Trust, in a tone which I recognized as that of the bluffer. Looking at him closely, I could hardly believe that he really cared whether his trunk was opened or not. But he must needs make this righteous fuss about it for reasons of his own. "The trunk is my private property."

"What of that?" said the officer. "I see you've got it pretty well locked up — with all this chain and things. Hand me the keys, please."

I had been watching Trust's face, but now I looked at the trunk and saw that the chain, which had been taken off the night before, was securely fastened about the trunk again.

"The keys, sir," demanded Mr. Nason, stretching out his hand to Trust.

"I don't see why —" began Trust.

"Well, then, I'll tell you why," blurted out the officer,

angrily. "You are suspected of robbing this young man of his gold, you and your partner, and I want to see if you haven't it in your baggage. If you don't open it up at once I'll open it for you." He held up a small, keen-edged hatchet. "Come, quick, now! I have but a moment to spare. Hand 'em out!"

Trust produced a bunch of keys, and fidgeted with them for a moment. Finally he stooped down, unlocked the trunk and opened it wide.

"Look, Mr. Inspector," he said. "Search all through. You'll find no gold there."

Mr. Nason threw some clothing and other things out of the trunk, and ransacked it thoroughly, top and bottom.

"No gold here, gentlemen," he said, turning to the Doctor and me. Then he commanded, "Let the rest of the baggage be opened." Which was done, without revealing an ounce of the stolen treasure.

"Now," said I, looking straight at the defiant Trust, "we have determined that the gold is not in their baggage. I hardly expected to find any of it here. Suppose we search the lower hold, where I am confident they have hidden it."

Trust's eye fell before my gaze, and the poor creature,

already unnerved by the storm, cowered before me; but he rallied and managed to bluff out:

"What do you mean?"

"I mean," said I, "that you and your friend there and Mr. Fishley took my gold from the trunk last night and hid it away in the lower hold."

"Oh, come, Morning," said Mr. Nason, with fretful impatience, "Fishley's denied that he ever touched the bulkhead doors, as you reported. Besides, he was on watch and couldn't have got down here, even for five minutes. You are mistaken, really mistaken."

"Then he deserted his watch," said I, emphatically, not heeding the Doctor's warning glance, "for he was here and the bulkhead door was open. I saw it and heard him and these men in the lower hold."

"What a smart youth!" said Trust, regaining confidence because of the first officer's attitude in the matter. "What have you been eating to make you so bright? Why, Somers and I turned in at nine o'clock last night and weren't out of our bunks until this morning."

"It doesn't sound reasonable," said Mr. Nason, hastily, "and I haven't time to search any further for your gold, anyway. Besides, I wouldn't open

those bulkhead doors now if you'd give me all your treasure."

A terrible blast struck the *Modesto*, and there was a crashing noise up on deck that must have been from a great wave washing over her.

"Do you hear that?" said Mr. Nason. "You can't expect me to be opening up bulkheads while *that's* going on."

He turned quickly and walked out of the steerage, the Doctor and I following him.

"It's no use thinking about the treasure now," advised the Doctor. "They can't do anything with it — to hide it in another part of the ship, I mean — until after we're out of this storm."

"When do you think that will be, Doctor?" I asked.

"There's no telling. If we get sucked into the storm center we may be carried along with it for a week. But she'll ride it all right, my boy, never fear. Only I wish we had some cargo aboard, or ballast, or something. Your gold down in the hold there is pretty heavy, but it doesn't seem to keep us steady; and the broken bottles and the dead man are not settling us very deep in the water either." He said this in a half-quizzical way, and I wondered if he really accepted and believed what

I had said about Fishley and the two other gold-thieves, or was only humoring me as he would any poor creature whose mind was affected by the loss of his fortune. I had counted all along upon the Doctor's friendship and good-will. Was I about to lose them when it came to the pinch? Just at that moment there seemed to be nobody in the ship who really sympathized with me, after all. In a gloomy, depressed mood I walked away to the steward's room, where I sat for an hour or two, trying to fix my mind upon a story in a magazine, but tormented out of all appreciation for the tale because of the blasts and swashes with which the storm was punishing the old *Modesto* for her temerity in venturing out upon the open sea so poorly equipped for buffeting wind and wave.

As the gale cut in over the white wave-tips and the ship heeled over under the tremendous pressure, a sound would go up as of a wail amid all the roaring and humming. Then there would be a great shock, as a wall of water would heave itself against the side, together with a tremendous shiver and a sound of rattling stays. In the intervals between blasts, the rain fell in great pelting swirls.

So far as any independent motion was concerned

the steamer seemed to have none whatever, being tossed about by the will of the storm and sent scudding here and there. It seemed to me that in the course of an hour we would change our direction half a dozen times. When I spoke of this to the Doctor, while we braved the storm on the deck for a little while, he smiled and said:

"It seems that way, doesn't it? But we're driving southwest as fast as the gale can carry us. We can't steam worth a cent in all this weather. The changing directions, as they seem to you, are due merely to our heading up against the wind now and again when it blows a bit too stiff. We shouldn't have to do that if we sat down farther in the water, but as it is —"

The wind blew the rest of his words away, and we scurried back to our stateroom.

For three days the "tai-fung" toyed with the *Modesto*. Once or twice she seemed ready to give up the struggle and sink to the more peaceful lower waters. But she rode out the storm on the fourth day and the wind quieted down. The sea was still running high, but it was now flecked by patches of bright sunshine. The air was warm and had a soft feel in it. We had been blown away down the North Pacific and hundreds of

miles out of our course, but the passengers who came smiling up on deck seemed happy in the consciousness of having outlived the storm.

The Doctor and I were standing on the forward deck, and I was urging upon him that we should go below and search the hold for the treasure, when of a sudden Mr. Nason, who was standing by with his glass to his eyes, said quietly to the Doctor:

"Have you seen that craft out yonder yet? I picked her up right after luncheon, and the Captain and I have been watching her for an hour. Seems like some derelict. I don't exactly understand her."

XIII

WRECK OF THE "FLYING MIST"

I LOOKED to the westward, where Mr. Nason pointed, and saw a small black craft about half a mile away. Her decks were all raked clean save for a tall, bare stick of a mast.

"When I first picked her up," said the officer, "I thought I saw a puff of smoke above the top of that mast, but I haven't made out anything of the sort since. I could hardly believe my eyes at the first, and the Captain scoffed at the idea, but when he looked sharply he saw it, too."

"Why," said I, "she must be the *Flying Mist.*"

"That's what she is," affirmed the Doctor, speaking to Mr. Nason. "Didn't you see a strange craft with a funnel mast — a steam schooner or something of that sort — lying up there off the Nome coast?"

"I didn't notice her," said the first officer, "or, at least if I did, I didn't see that she had a funnel for a mast. So that's the *Flying Mist?* I've heard of her

— the *Flying Mist.* Well, she doesn't look as though she'd fly much farther. She's all logged down, and I suppose the fires are out of her furnaces by this time."

"You don't mean that she's sinking?" I cried.

"But she is, though, and her crew must have deserted her early this morning after the wind went down. I guess their chances were about as good aboard her as they were in the boats. Hold on! I think I see signs of life on board. Yes, there's a couple of chaps there forward of the house, and they're hailing us!"

By shading my eyes with my hands, I could make out two dark figures that seemed to have just come upon deck. One of them was waving something white.

"That big fellow looks as though he could take care of himself," said Mr. Nason, screwing down his glass. "But the other I don't make much of. Seems weak and limp. Mr. Fishley, get a boat ready there."

A boat was swung from the davits.

"I think," said the Captain, coming up, "that we'll steam down a little nearer. We can keep to the leeward of her and take 'em off easier. It isn't quite the kind of sea I like to send out small boats in."

We headed down to leeward of the *Flying Mist,* where she lay with the waves washing her decks, but

before we got near enough to take the men off we saw the little craft's bow rise in the water, her stern settling rapidly, and down she went, her bowsprit showing for a moment above the waves and then disappearing from sight, leaving nothing but the blank, open sea where the little schooner had been so gallantly fighting for her life.

I shuddered, and I saw the Doctor shudder, too, as he gasped:

"My God! She's gone!"

A few pieces of wreckage now appeared on the surface, and clinging to one of these I saw a man. I clutched the first officer's arm and called out excitedly:

"See him — see him! Can't we save him?"

"We'll try, my lad," said he, coolly, to my mind not nearly so much affected by the sight of the struggling man as he should have been. "Lower that boat, Max."

"Lower away!" I heard Fishley call to his men. He was sitting in the stern of the little craft himself and had four brawny fellows to man the oars. Little as I had reason to like the third officer, I could not, in spite of myself, help admiring him as he sat there, swinging down to the surging waves which would have daunted the heart of many a hardy seaman. Soon the boat was

tossing upon the rough sea, so that more than once the oarsmen fanned the air with their blades, while the spray dashed over them. But in a few minutes they had rowed to the side of the man, who clung to the wreckage, and had made fast. After repeated pullings and haulings, they managed to get him into the boat, where he lay flat after his struggle with the waves.

When the boat was pulled up and the rescued man was taken in over the side, I stood near at hand, and it so chanced that Somers and Trust, who were also near, were, with me, among the first to see the rescued man's face. All three of us stared very hard, and I heard Somers smother a groan while he said under his breath:

"Gee, Pete! What d'ye think o' that?"

"Oh, it can't be!" said Trust. "Yes, it is, too!"

"Yes," I repeated, "and you thought you were well rid of him, didn't you, after you fooled him by sending him to wait for you and the gold aboard the *Flying Mist?*"

For the rescued man, who, so far as we knew, was the only survivor of the wreck, was none other than Bill of the lighter — the rascal who had pushed my gold overboard.

"What are you fellows doing here abaft the steerage sign?" gruffed the Captain to Somers and Trust. "Get back where you belong. We want room here. Doctor, will you tend to this man? Fix him up if there's anything the matter with him."

The Doctor had Bill taken into an empty stateroom, where he cared for him. Bill soon revived, and told the story of the wreck. He said that when the great gale struck the *Flying Mist* she strained badly, and, the caulking being old, some of the seams near her stern opened, making a nasty leak. The pumps were kept going, but the schooner made water from hour to hour, and all through the terrible storm, while masts were falling and rigging was littering the deck, the vessel kept settling, little by little. After the storm had abated the men aboard feared the danger of the ship going under at any moment. Some of the passengers were wild with panic. To make matters worse, Captain Transome took to his liquor so heavily that he seemed hardly to know whether he was afloat or ashore. The first mate was very nervous, and kept constantly urging that every one should take to the boats. Bill, being an old sailor, did not like the prospect of such a course, and tried to dissuade the mate from his evident inten-

tion, which was to lower the boats at once and not wait for the storm to further abate.

"It was the worst kind of craziness," said Bill, reflectively, as if he still saw the tragic situation. "The first boat they lowered was swamped, and the dozen o' men in her was soon a-throwin' up their hands an' a-grabbin' at things that wasn't there to grab at. Every man of 'em was lost. But that fool mate got the drunken Captain an' the rest o' the passengers into the next boat — that is, all except me an' a sick feller that got overlooked somehow down below. I wouldn't go in her, an' told 'em they was idiots for tryin' it; but they pulled away, an' I bet a dollar they're safe at the bottom now.

"It was three hours before the *Modesto* hove in sight. I thought the schooner would stay afloat a couple o' hours longer, an' I was at work makin' a raft when the steamer came along. But gee! the old thing went down all of a sudden. Never see anything to beat the way she dove under. I was sucked down with her, an' I jest give myself up for a goner when I begun to rise. As soon as I got my snoot above water I grabbed a stick of something — I don't know what it was — and then the boat came out and picked me up. But you'll

never see that drunk Captain an' the other fellers in that boat — they're gone, as sure as guns."

"No doubt of it," said the Doctor. "How do you feel now?"

"A little better, but not much good yet," sighed Bill, wearily. "I got knocked in the head somehow when we went down — right there."

The Doctor examined a great purple bump behind Bill's ear.

"Oh, that'll be all right in a few days," he said, reassuringly. "I'll bandage it."

He bound up the man's head, the patient inconsiderately trying for a moment to fight him off. Then the Doctor said:

"Keep quiet here now, and I'll send you in some broth in about half an hour."

During the entire recital of Bill's tragic story I had kept in the background, and he had not observed me. He seemed to be suffering much pain, and kept his eyes closed most of the time. I was glad that he had not seen me, for I might the better plan what should be done regarding him. I was determined he should not escape punishment for his crime in despoiling me of my gold.

PETE SLATTERY

I went about that day feeling rather light and gladsome. For whatever other misfortunes had befallen me, I was in a position to rejoice that I had not taken passage in the *Flying Mist*.

When I told the Doctor who the rescued man was, and how much concerned Trust and Somers were when they saw him hauled aboard, he was greatly interested.

"This means trouble," said he — "trouble for those steerage pirates, and possibly trouble for us. It's a mighty curious thing that they should all get together here on the *Modesto* — all the men that were in the conspiracy against you."

"This man Bill," said I, "can't he be arrested as soon as his head is well again?"

"Certainly. I'll see that he doesn't escape when we reach port."

"Don't you think, Doctor, that we should be searching the lower hold? We ought to be able to find the gold down there somewhere. I am confident that it was hidden there by those robbers, working in collusion with Max Fishley."

"You may be right about Max being in with them," said the Doctor. "I never had much use for him and his green eyes. But it does seem almost past belief

that a trusted officer of a ship like the *Modesto* should be up to such infernal doings. I suppose these things begin with smuggling and gradually lead up to robbery."

"Can't we get started on our search in the hold?" I asked, impatiently.

"Now the way to do that," planned the Doctor, "is to go to the Captain, lay the whole matter before him, and get him to detail three or four men under Mr. Nason. Then we can go down with some chance. Otherwise, if the gold is hidden in the hold, as you think, those fellows and Fishley — if he is really in with them — will not hesitate to give us a side dig with a knife, if they are lurking about. Down in a dark hold with a cutthroat like that one-eyed rascal is not the kind of place I am seeking, unless I'm well reinforced."

"Of course, you know best," said I. "But can't we get started?"

"And I have feared for you and kept something of a watch on their actions," he went on. "You ought to be very careful about being in any place alone with them. They might easily tumble you overboard some dark night."

The last words came from the Doctor without any

reference to what I had just said. They were not reassuring words, but I thanked him for the warning, and told him that it should not be thrown away upon me. Then I asked him if we could not go to the Captain at once.

"No," was the reply. "He's asleep just now — so Nason just told me — trying to make up a little of what he lost these past few nights, I guess. It was a terror, that storm. I was never in one that knocked a ship about so. Let him sleep. He deserves it."

I made several suggestions that might aid in a solution of the matter without the help of the Captain, as I did not wish to wait until he should waken. I fretted under the loss of time, and even went so far as to risk the Doctor's displeasure by going to Mr. Nason and asking him if he would not let us have the men to go along and make the search of the hold.

"No," said he, very shortly. "I can't do it. The Captain wouldn't like it without being consulted; and, my boy, if you want to know my opinion of this affair of your little bag of dust, I must say that it has caused me trouble enough already. Mr. Fishley has — but you don't have to know everything that passes between officers. If the Captain says that such a search must

be made, why of course it's all right; but I hope you understand now how I feel about it."

"Well," said I, very respectfully, though I was not a little wroth because of what he had seen fit to say, "you know your duty of course, sir; but about the gold: It isn't a little sack — it's eight sacks, and they contain over forty thousand dollars."

"That may be or may not be," said the ruffled officer. "It seems likely, doesn't it, that a mere boy like you should have all that gold in his care? I know Doctor Quaritch says it's all right; but he's a good-natured, easy-going man, who's not hard to take in."

I walked away with rising heat. It was an hour before I was cool enough to contemplate the situation calmly. I thought vaguely of going to the second officer, Mr. Lovell, and enlisting his aid. But it occurred to me that I should be getting things mixed up worse than they were. It was plain that Mr. Nason had been listening to Max Fishley, and that officer had convinced him that my pretensions concerning the gold were all false. It was evident that, while matters were run rather loosely aboard the *Modesto*, there was sufficient harmony among the officers not to make them very suspicious of one another's actions. I could do

nothing about the gold just then; so I went down into the saloon and talked with Yohara. He was full of the unhappy incident of the wreck, and asked question after question, some of which were difficult to answer.

The Captain woke about noon and ate his breakfast, after which the Doctor and I went to his cabin. The Doctor did not immediately begin upon the subject of the search for the treasure, preferring to lead up to it in a quiet, politic manner. He spoke of the weather, and remarked upon the smoothness of the sea, which had calmed wonderfully in the past few hours.

"Oh, the sea's all right," said the Captain, with furrowed forehead, "and the wind's all right, but I'll be jinged if I know how we're going to make San Francisco with only one day's coal. You're pretty wise, Doctor," he went on, with a little satire in his tone, "and may be you can solve that problem."

"I confess it beats me," owned the Doctor, "but let us hope we shall have the good luck to fall in with some steamer."

"Yes, and be towed in for salvage, and have to pay all she's worth to some pirate with a strict eye to business. What would the owners say to that? No, siree-

bob! She's got to work in some way. If we had coal, we could make port in five days easy enough. We are only about seventeen hundred miles out."

"Wouldn't Seattle be quicker to make than San Francisco?"

"Oh, we could get coal at Victoria before Seattle; but do you know where we are? That infernal 'taifung,' as Sing calls it, has blown us away down the Pacific. Honolulu or San Francisco is about a standoff just now; and I prefer San Francisco. You know we're chartered for that Philippine trip and must be in port by the first of the month. This is the 22d. Eight days are all the time we've got."

"Well, Captain, I'm awfully sorry, and I know you don't like to be bothered about such matters just now, but I wish you would let three men go down in the hold with us and Mr. Nason, and find this young man's gold."

"Oh, wait till you get to port, whenever that'll be," said the Captain, in the worst humor I had ever seen him display. "If the gold's down there, it'll keep. There's no use bothering about it. There's nothing in the hold but a lot of busted beer bottles, a dead man, and maybe a little dunnage. And that yarn about

Fishley. Say, young man, did you *see* him down there?"

He turned upon me suddenly and crossly, and my eyes fell before his angry gaze.

"No," I began, "but —"

"Of course you didn't — I knew you didn't."

"Captain," interposed the Doctor, "this boy's father is a friend of mine, and he has lost his gold. It has been stolen from him and secreted aboard your vessel. It seems to me —"

"Oh, Doctor!" groaned the Captain, "haven't I got enough troubles of my own without all this? Wait until we get to port."

"But I feel responsible to this young man's father."

"Can't help that. Go 'way and let me alone!"

The Doctor's face fell as this rude speech was uttered.

"I'm sorry I bothered you," he said.

"So am I," was the short rejoinder.

We turned and slowly left the cabin. When we were just abaft of the mainmast we heard a gruff call:

"All right, Doctor! Tell Nason I say it's all right!"

XIV

SEARCHING FOR THE TREASURE

From despondency I was quickly uplifted to joy. It was clear that Captain Head was not such a disobliging commander after all.

"Oh, he's all right," said the Doctor. "He means to be agreeable, but he's terribly worried just now about the fix he's in over the coal. I don't see how he's going to get out of it, myself; but he's an awfully lucky mariner, and something will no doubt happen to straighten things out for him."

Mr. Nason was not pleased at the idea of the search, but he went along readily enough. It came to me that what had ailed him before was a part of the Captain's complaint — the anxiety over the shortage of coal and the uncertainty about reaching port. In fact, the situation was made quite plain to me by what the first officer said in reply to a question from Doctor Quaritch about the matter of the charter.

"You see, the owners have contracted this ship for a

voyage to Manila, and we have to be in San Francisco by the first or they'll lose big money. Forfeiting a charter amounts to something in these days when American steamers are in such great demand for the island trade."

"That's so," said the Doctor, "and I hope for the sake of everybody concerned that we may be able to pull in on time."

"But I don't see how it's going to be done," said Mr. Nason, shaking his head.

We went down into the steerage, which was nearly deserted, as most of the passengers were sunning themselves in the balmy air on deck. Somers and Trust were among those who remained below. They were down in their corner playing their cribbage and smoking. You may be sure they took very little interest in their game when the six of us — the Doctor, Mr. Nason, three stalwart deckhands and myself — appeared before the bulkhead door, and, without in the least regarding them or the anxious looks they gave, began to slip the bolts and bars.

"That's strange," said the officer, when the great iron door swung open and the dank breath from down below came up to us where we stood in the steerage

wing. "I never opened one of these doors after it was closed for several days that it didn't stick to the rubber gasket in the jamb."

The Doctor looked at me with large significance, but said nothing. I knew he was being convinced of the truth of my statement that the bulkhead had been opened but a few days before. Mr. Nason led the way through the long wing.

"That looks pretty tough," said he, glancing at the coal bunkers. "Every blamed one of 'em on this side is empty as an old oyster-can."

"It's a sorry state of affairs," said the Doctor. "Too bad there isn't a coaling station somewhere near at hand."

"It's about the worst place in the whole Pacific to look for a chance to coal up," said the officer. "I don't know what we're going to do."

He lighted his lantern and proceeded down the wing to the door which led out upon the freight-deck. As the other men all carried lanterns, that the search might be a thorough one, there was plenty of light inside. Save for a little heap of dunnage, there was nothing to be seen in the great cavernous hold between-decks. This dunnage, as I may remark to landsmen readers,

is only a miscellaneous lot of old pieces of lumber, long and short, thick and thin, which is used to wedge between the boxes, barrels and crates containing the cargo, that it may not shift while the ship is in motion.

We reached the hatchway in a few steps, and descended, one after another, down the narrow slender iron ladder into the lower hold. I was the last one down, and, being in the shadow for a moment, I stumbled into a litter of refuse lumber.

"There's quite a lot of dunnage aboard," observed the first officer. "But I guess it will be pretty well cleaned out in the next few days."

"Why?" asked the Doctor.

"We've got very little coal, and we've got to burn something, haven't we? There's only three or four thousand feet of the stuff, and it's nothing but Oregon pine and California redwood, but it ought to keep up steam for a day or two. What's this?"

His feet had crunched upon a crumply mass of broken glass. "Oh, Stetson's beer bottles!" he laughed. "Great snakes! How they went to pieces in that gale!"

All over the after part of the lower hold bright crumbs of shivered glass gleamed in the light of the lanterns.

The sparkling bits were strewn thickly in some places, but in others there was but a thin sprinkling of them. Our boots ground upon them as we moved along.

"Not the best place in the world for a bare-footed nigger," remarked Mr. Nason. "Wouldn't it be a joke if we left this stuff for the Filipino freight-handlers to walk on? What have we here?"

He bent over and picked from the floor an old bandana handkerchief, looked at it and cast it aside. I gathered it up again, hoping that in some way it might afford a clew. We all searched about the dirty, glass-bestrewn floor of the hold, and the lanterns were held high to see if the gold might not be secreted behind some of the angle-bars, a complex system of which served as braces to the inner side of the ship. One of the men found a loose plank in the floor of the forward part of the hold, and this was lifted in the hope that the treasure might be hidden below it. But there was nothing there except a little reeking bilge. One of the crew who was farther aft than the rest of us gave a startled cry and ran back over the glass flakes, dropping his lantern on the way.

"What's struck you, Tom?" asked Mr. Nason, sharply. "Have you seen a ghost?"

Tom breathed hard several times and gulped a little before he could say a word.

"No; 'tain't no ghost," gasped he at last, "it's a real live dead man, sticking his head through a box and asking what's the time o' day."

"Sho!" said Mr. Nason, "you're off, Tom. You and Pete and George pile up that dunnage back there while the Doctor and I look at your dead man."

The three seamen went forward, while the Doctor and Mr. Nason crunched over the glass. I followed my friends and heard the first officer say quietly to the Doctor:

"I'm sorry that man found the box, which must have broke open in some way while being tossed around in this empty hole. I'm sorry he found it, for you know what a lot of fuss these chaps make over such things at sea. That dead man was one of the richest miners in Nome. Too much whiskey and tundra water took him off, and we've got to take his body home to his widow or there'll be no end of trouble. But these chaps may chuck him overboard now on the sly, so that we can get safely into port."

"Yes," remarked the Doctor, "they'll be laying all our bad luck to him."

"Don't you know," said the first officer, reflectively, "there may be something in that old superstition after all. Now, take our case: We've had the worst kind of a storm, and are blown away off from our coal station, and — Good Lord! That was enough to scare a man, wasn't it? His head *is* sticking out. That's true enough."

I fell back, and looked the other way. I had a terror of dead bodies and would never willingly look at one. Not that I was in the least alarmed, for I was not. I did not share the superstition of the members of the crew as to having dead men aboard ship. But my repugnance for any such gruesome sights — and particularly that of a body in a battered box — was unreasonably strong. So I kept back, with my face turned away; but I could not help hearing what the first officer said:

"Doctor, this looks like an ugly job, but I guess we've got to stand it. This man's got to be put back into his box, and I suppose we've got to do it. You don't mind such things though, do you?"

"Well," said the Doctor, "I can't say I relish them very much, but I'll help. Better send for a hammer and some nails. It's just the end of this thing that's come loose."

Tom was sent into the engine-room and returned with the hammer and nails, which Mr. Nason was obliged to take from him at a respectful distance from the box. While the Doctor and the first officer worked away at their gruesome task, and the men piled up the dunnage, I searched about the hold for the hiding-place of the treasure. Soon we were all occupied in the hunt again, and in the course of an hour it seemed that every square foot of the flooring of the lower hold had been carefully looked over two or three times before Mr. Nason, who stood away aft in the run of the ship, called out:

"Come here, Doctor! This may be the place."

Doctor Quaritch went aft and I followed closely at his heels. Mr. Nason had set his lantern on the floor and was looking intently down at a rough little panel in the planking about a foot square. The panel was made by two indistinct saw cuts. There was none of the broken glass in the run of the ship, so that the saw cuts were not covered by dangerous fragments.

"I can't tell whether it's old or new," said Mr. Nason, closely scrutinizing one of the cuts. "If it's new they've rubbed dirt and tar over it to cover it up. It's a neat job anyway. Looks as if the plank was cut through on a level with a very fine saw."

I was trembling with excitement, and, producing my pocket knife, I scratched at the dirt in the cracks.

"Looks as if it had been cut lately," said the first officer, when I had scraped some of the tarry filth away from the joint. "Bring the ripper, Tom."

The long, slim ripping iron, which looked like an attenuated, flattened cold chisel, was brought and inserted into one of the cracks.

Just then I heard a succession of quick, nervous gasps behind me, and, looking back, I saw the anxious face of Somers dodging out of the circle of light. There was another figure beside him, sneaking behind the deckhands, and this figure I took to be that of Trust. My first impulse was to resent their unauthorized presence there, but after all that I had suffered at their hands I was a little revengeful, and it came to me in a flash that here was the best kind of revenge: If the gold were now to be uncovered before their eyes and they should see me and my friends take possession of it, I should enjoy the spectacle of their defeat and chagrin as much as I should to see them clapped into irons, which act of justice would no doubt immediately follow the recovery of the stolen treasure.

"They have hidden the gold between this plank and

the skin of the ship," said the officer. "There is no bilge under this part of the flooring."

It was several minutes after the insertion of the ripping iron, which was used as a lever to pry up the plank panel, before the stubborn, well-nailed wood gave way and was lifted from its place by one of the men. But there was no gold in the hole. There was nothing but an empty space below where the plank had been, and extending down almost a foot to the skin of the ship, as the first officer had called it.

I was dumbfounded. I had made sure in my own mind that the treasure was there. The sawing I had heard in the hold, and the words I had overheard from the three men who had gone below on the night of the beginning of the storm, had made me confident that the rough panel had concealed the hiding-place of the stolen treasure. Not to find it there after all that search was a bitter disappointment to me. I got down on my knees and thrust my hand all about under the floor as far as I could reach, but the hand touched nothing but the cold, damp bottom of the vessel.

I was about to give up the search in despair when my eye caught the gleam of some bright specks at the bottom of the hold where the lantern light fell upon

them. I brushed these specks together. There was about a teaspoonful of them altogether. I held them close to the nearest light.

"The gold has been here!" I cried, "for here is some of it!"

All the heads of the searchers crowded closely about me, and among them the sinister one of the rascally Trust, to whom, however, I paid no attention, in the excitement of the moment, except to remark that he seemed to be very much disappointed about something.

"Yes," said Mr. Nason, examining the moist grains in my hand. "That's gold dust, all right. They must have spilled a little in taking it out. See that small nail there. Maybe it punched a hole in one of the sacks."

"So you think the gold was really hidden there?" asked the Doctor.

"It certainly looks like it," said Mr. Nason. "You take the shape of this piece of plank, and the careful way it was cut out, together with these grains of gold, and I think you've got to admit that gold was stowed away here, and within a few days, too, for those rubber gaskets worked altogether too easy to have been long sticking to that bulkhead door. That gold is hidden

somewhere aboard this ship, and I want you men," he said, addressing the hands who had been helping, "to keep a sharp lookout for it." Then he turned to me. "My boy," he said, "I was rather hasty in what I said to you this morning. I think now that you have told the truth in all except what concerns Mr. Fishley. You were mistaken there. It would be a good plan, I think, to arrest those steerage fellows whom you suspected."

There was a soft scuttering away down the deck, and I cried out to the first officer:

"There they go now! They have been lurking about here in the dark and have just run away."

"Well, they can't get off the ship very well," said Mr. Nason, "unless they jump overboard. We can secure them any time we want them, and I think that will be soon."

He picked up his lantern and passed forward to the dunnage pile, which he looked at for a moment thoughtfully. Then he turned to the hands.

"I think while you're down here, boys, you may as well carry some of this dunnage into the fire-room. They may need it before morning. They're scraping the bottoms of the coal bunkers, so Mr. Derrick says.

Take all you can carry. I guess by to-morrow the Captain will order the lot of it piled into the furnaces."

It was a strange sight, and one I had never thought to see aboard ship, this gathering up of loose lumber to make steam. But each man took his load and carried it forward into the fire-room. In the light of the engine-room door I saw in the arms of one of the men a lot of short blocks, and among them an object that struck me as oddly familiar.

"Excuse me," I said, going up to the man, "may I look at that thing you have there?"

"You mean this box?" said the man. He handed it to me, and I looked at it carefully.

The box was a small one, and the top was splintered a little, but on looking at the flat cover I saw painted upon it in black lettering, "John Morning, San Francisco."

"That's my box," said I. "Will you let me have it?"

"Your box?" said Mr. Nason, who had overheard me.

"Yes; the box that held the gold."

"Where did you pick it up?" asked the officer of the deckhand.

"It was a-layin' among the dunnage," said the man. "The other fellows picked up the top stuff and then I gathered this in. Is it the young gentleman's gold-box? Well, well!"

The other men laid down their burdens and gathered about to look at the box that had held the treasure.

"Never mind, boys," commanded the first officer. "Take your wood to the bunkers. Keep the box if you want it, Mr. Morning. I guess we'd better go up and look after those robbers in the steerage."

When we reached their corner, Somers and Trust were deep in their cribbage game.

XV

THE LAST POUND OF COAL

Trust growled furious imprecations when he, with his companion, was seized and brought on deck to be taken before the Captain. He declared that he knew nothing of the missing gold, and he glared at me with that one burning eye in a way that I shall never forget. Somers, who was thoroughly frightened, had nothing to say, but kept glancing about nervously as if looking for somebody. When he saw Max Fishley come along the deck he beckoned to him two or three times, but the third officer pretended not to see him.

All the passengers took a curious interest in the arrest of the two men, and they and the crew, among whom the robbery and the search had been freely gossiped, were full of kindly sympathy for me and execrations of the men charged with the crime.

Little Yohara's eyes were gleaming with interest. When he saw the arrested men marched forward along the deck, he came around in front of Trust and stared

up into his face in an odd and altogether Oriental way, as if taking note of every feature.

"I sink I have knowledge of the gentleman nex' times," said Yohara to me, "if he shall escape away again. I shall know his eye better, too."

"The lad thinks he's a born detective," explained the Doctor, smiling. "He's been reading a lot of those nickel detective stories."

Captain Head ordered Somers and Trust put in irons, as I had hoped. The Captain dispatched the matter in a jiffy, and then entered into a consultation with his first officer, at which Doctor Quaritch was present. Their talk, as I heard from the Doctor, had nothing to do with the arrest or the missing gold, which to them were matters of minor importance compared with the problem of getting the vessel into port without coal.

"You see," said the Doctor, when speaking of the matter, "we can't make any headway with our sails. They are small affairs, and are just about able to steady the steamer and that's all. Of course, if there were a gale dead aft of us we might be helped along considerably, but the wind is light and what little we have is not from the right quarter. The first officer recommends burning all the dunnage, those empty horse-

stalls on the forward deck and whatever else there is of unnecessary lumber aboard ship. I shouldn't wonder," added he, slowly and impressively, "but that before long we should be burning a lot of wood that is pretty solidly spiked down. I've heard of such a thing as gutting a vessel in order to get her into port."

"But perhaps we'll fall in with some other steamer before we have to do that," said I, hopefully.

"I don't know. You might sail all the way from the North Pacific down to San Francisco and not sight a single steamer. I've done that two or three times. It's an unfrequented part of the world's waters. There's nothing to bring a steam vessel up here at this time of the year."

"I was looking at the chart," said I, "and I don't see an island anywhere within two thousand miles of us."

"No. There's a great basin under us here, over a thousand miles wide and about as long. I'm told it's the deepest part of the whole sea. That may account for the intense blueness of the water."

We looked abroad upon the great expanse of deep color, for the beauty of which I should have had a better eye had not the thought of Max Fishley entered my head at that moment. I had felt aggrieved because

the officers would pay no heed to my charges as to his complicity in the robbery. But now it occurred to me that it was better he should be free from suspicion on their part for the present. He doubtless knew where the gold was hidden, and by closely watching him I might be able to discover its hiding-place. I said nothing of the matter to the Doctor, but walked away, and for the rest of that day and during the day following Mr. Fishley made few movements of which I was not apprised. To give the man full credit, however, I must say that I noted absolutely nothing suspicious in his actions. He had charge of the coal-passers and deckhands who were carrying the dunnage and the stall lumber to the fire-room.

The last pound of coal was consumed, and the *Modesto* was now being propelled through the water by means of steam generated by pine boards and pieces of scantling. This fuel lasted but a short time and drove us but three hundred miles nearer port. There were still over fourteen hundred miles of water to traverse, which, in a moderate going craft like the *Modesto*, meant nearly five days' sailing under the most favorable conditions.

The Captain complained of the slow movements of

the men, who were now ripping the cargo battens from the inside of the hold. He stormed about and ordered all hands down there — steward's men, pantrymen, freight-handlers, coal-passers, oilers and all the lesser officers — everybody save the firemen.

"Lively there — lively!" he kept calling. "We've got to keep those boilers hot or we'll run down to half-speed. Mr. Nason, keep 'em at the battens good and hard. We can't let up a minute. We've simply got to make port by the first."

The men flung at their work, ripping off the long battens with axes, adzes and other tools, and filing with their burdens into the hot fire-room, where the furnace doors were hardly closed for a moment at a time.

"More steam! Can't you get up more steam?" I heard the Captain calling down the pipe, and was near enough to catch the chief engineer's reply:

"The dashed stuff is too light, sir. The draught throws it out of the stack before it's half-burned. I've tried wetting it, but it's no good — no good at all. I can't get up any kind of pressure."

"Send Nason up here," bawled the Captain. "I'll do better than eight knots if I have to burn up the whole insides of her."

Mr. Nason came on deck.

"We've got to get up some steam somehow," said the Captain, calling across to the first officer before he was within thirty feet of him. "There's good wood in those masts and spars. Have 'em cut down, will you?"

"All right, sir!" was the reply, in as even tones as if the order were given every day of the year. And soon the axes rang on deck and down came the mizzenmast.

I happened to pass the cabin where lay the offensive Bill, with his wounded head. He was sitting up in his berth, looking about with grave interest.

"What's all this row about?" he asked, staring out at me through the open door. "What are they cuttin' away the masts fer?"

I did not deign to give a reply, and was just turning away when he recognized me.

"Hullo!" he cried, in his great gruff voice. "It's you, is it? What are you a-doin' aboard?"

"Attending strictly to my own affairs," said I, rather curtly.

"Oh, of course! But can't yeh tell a man what's up?"

"I might tell a man who was of a different stripe

from you," said I, "but I decline to give information to anybody who plays the despicable part of a thief."

"What d'yeh mean?" he snarled, reddening and looking particularly ugly with his head bandaged up and his eyes full of malignant fire.

"I mean that you pushed my gold overboard off the lighter for those rascally robbers to pick up in their launch."

"Why, my dear young feller, you're mistook — you're altogether mistook. I ain't shoved no gold off'n no lighter. I don't know nothin' about it."

"Your double negatives make the best possible affirmatives," I replied. But knowing that he did not understand that remark, I added: "I do not believe you. I am positive that you did it."

"Well, I s'pose yeh got a right to think anything yeh want, but I tell yeh, ye're a way off. If the gold went overboard it was on account o' the way the lighter swung."

"It was because of the way you swung the box," I insisted, "that sent it into the sea, and nothing else. But perhaps you'll be glad to learn that the men who made you go aboard the *Flying Mist* on a fool's errand are now under arrest. I mean Pete Slattery and his

pink-faced friend, who give their names as Trust and Somers on board this ship."

"Where?" asked Bill, unguardedly. "Not on board?"

"Yes; on this boat. They're in irons."

"Oh," he chuckled. "Good enough fer 'em! But," he added quickly, catching the idea that he was incriminating himself, "I don't know anything about 'em — not a word. I never had no truck with 'em."

I turned away of a sudden as I saw the coal-passers going by with pieces of the mast to be lowered into the fire-room. I went up to the Captain's cabin. He was sitting at his big table, a chart spread before him.

"Well, young man, what is it?" he asked gruffly.

"That fellow Bill, sir, that we rescued when the *Flying Mist* went down."

"What about him?"

"Well, he's the man that pushed my gold overboard from the lighter."

"Yes, I know. Doctor Quaritch has told me that already," he said querulously.

"But he's getting well."

"Glad to hear it."

"Yes, sir; he's getting well, and don't you think it would be a good idea to put him in irons, as you have done with Trust and Somers?"

"No; I don't," was the curt reply.

"But he's guilty — he's a criminal — and he stole—"

"I don't doubt it," said the Captain, petulantly. "But by to-morrow morning I'm going to set every mother's son aboard this ship, criminals and everybody — I don't care who — getting out stuff to feed the furnaces."

"The passengers?" I asked in wonder.

"That's what I mean — and I've got authority to do it. If any of 'em don't take to the work they'll be punched up until they do. I'll line 'em up on deck and turn the big hose on 'em — that's what I'll do."

"Oh," I hastened to say, "I don't doubt they'll all go to work very cheerfully. I know I shall."

"All right, my boy, and when we get to port your gold-stealers will be ready to be handed over to the police."

Next morning, much to the surprise of the passengers, they were all summoned on deck by the Captain and quietly told that the steamer had burned all her coal. They were asked to take off their coats and help

the crew tear out the superficial woodwork and cut it up for fuel.

There were some mutterings among the first-cabin men, who said they didn't want to work their passage when it was paid for already; but they took the tools that were handed out to them and proceeded to the task of demolition. Most of the passengers were willing and anxious to help. There were only three women aboard, and one of these — a buxom girl from Sacramento — insisted upon doing what she called her share of the work, but Captain Head would not permit her to help.

"Get at those after deckhouses the first thing, Mr. Nason," he ordered.

"All right, sir."

The first officer led the way aft and directed the attack upon the neat, white-painted woodwork. First, the doors were removed and slid down into the fire-room through a hastily constructed chute. Then followed the berth frames and the moldings. This was light work. But when the axes and ripping irons were cleaving and tearing the walls of the houses and the partitions, those of the passengers not used to manual labor perspired prodigiously.

"This is a sight I never expected to see aboard this ship," said the Doctor, burying the blade of a sharp axe into the outside wall of one of the staterooms, "and it's a sad sight, too. The poor old *Modesto!* I hate like everything to see them chopping her up."

"Yes," said I, prying off a piece of "tongue-and-groove," "but I suppose it's the only thing left to be done."

"They must burn up and destroy the ship," said Yohara, thoughtfully, bending over to pick up some of the splintered pieces of old lumber which lay on deck, "to voyage it into San Francisco. Yes, I am so very sorry, so very sorry — this beautiful ship! She must be all burn — all burn!"

"Oh, not so bad as that, Yohara," said the Doctor, reassuringly. "You see," he said, turning to me, "she's a composite steamer — they don't build 'em any more — and she's got lots of wood in her."

"Composite?" I asked, prying away at another board.

"Yes; iron frame and wooden hull. There's a lot of metal in her, but all her decks and sides are wood. There's a good deal to burn if they conclude to take up the planking and all, though that would take a great

lot of the stiffening out of her. But I'm awfully sorry to see this done — awfully sorry."

"Don't you think, Doctor," said I, "there will be a pretty good chance now of finding that hidden gold?"

"Yes," said he, reflectively, "and we ought to be working where we would be likely to run across it. It never would be hidden anywhere around on the hurricane deck, where all the passengers are. If it's found at all, it will be down below somewhere."

"I'm going to ask Mr. Nason if there's any ripping out going on down there," said I, "and if there is, I shall request him to assign me to that part of the job."

"Now if it was opium," said the Doctor, running on as if I had not spoken — a habit of his which never seemed impolite to those who knew him very well — "if it was opium, I'd know what to say about directing a search, for I've run on the China route, and I've seen it taken out from all sorts of places. The coal bunkers — they're likely places to find smuggled stuff in. But ours being empty to the last walnut of a piece, there wouldn't be any good looking there. I saw five hundred taels of opium taken out of one bunker by customs men one trip. And then there are the waste bins —they hide stuff in there; and just before getting into

port they'll put it in the ashes, and chuck it out of the ash chute into a small boat alongside. Oh, there's hundreds of places, when you think 'em all over, but the most likely place of all, to my notion, is down in the lower hold under that planking. I know we've looked about quite a bit down there already, but we haven't taken up any planks, except a piece or two. When those planks come up, if they ever do — though it's unsafe, to my notion, taking the stiffening out of the bottom in that way — you want to be on hand, my boy, with your eyes peeled. I'll be there, too. What you want to look out for is these dead-broke miners, coming home from Nome. They're just as likely to sneak your dust as anybody, and a little more so. When you think how disappointed they are, with nothing to show for all their season's work but an empty poke and a few frost-bites, you may understand how readily some of them would take the chance of getting hold of that dust and having something real big and substantial to take home."

XVI

"FINDING IS KEEPING"

I WENT over and asked the first officer about the work of "fuel-grubbing" in the lower hold.

"That will begin to-morrow," said he. "We are giving the crew half a day's rest while the passengers are at work up here. This is a light job and that's the reason the passengers were set to work upon it. Ripping up those heavy planks down there will be a tough job to tackle, and it will be a slow one, too."

"That's right" said Mr. Lovell, the second officer.

"We'll begin to work on it early in the morning," said Mr. Nason.

"What time?" asked the Doctor.

"Seven o'clock. If you and the lad want to work down there, as you seem anxious to do, I've no objection. But I should think that instead of a damp, dark place you'd prefer it up here in the sunlight and fresh air. Oh, yes; I know what you're after — you want

to find that dust. Well, I hope you may be successful, but —" and he shook his head.

"What are you going to do with your dead man, Mr. Nason?" asked the Doctor. "He's down there, you know."

"I guess I'll have to remove him temporarily from the lower hold before we begin work," said the first officer. "It would be paying him very small respect to have all that clatter going on so near him."

"That's true," affirmed Doctor Quaritch, "and then there are the men to consider, I suppose."

They talked awhile on this subject, which had so little attraction for me that I strolled away.

While amidships, I became much interested in the operations of some pantrymen who were trying to split an enormous butcher's block so that it could go into one of the furnaces. The block was of eucalyptus, or Australian gumwood. This wood is very fibrous, and when dried a long time it is excessively hard to split, being almost as tough as iron. The axe-blades that fell upon the smooth, hard top of the block rebounded without making the slightest impression. The men worked hard and perspired profusely, but could not detach a piece of the wood as large as a man's arm

"You greenhorns don't know how to do nothin'," growled Max Fishley, as he came along the deck where the block stood, it having been wheeled away from the cook's domain on a freight-truck. "Let me show yeh. Git a wedge, Jack, an' a big one."

A large steel wedge was brought from the ship-carpenter's shop, and Fishley quite ceremoniously stuck its point upon the middle of the block. After pounding the steel head for five or ten minutes with the back of the axe he managed to make it stand upright in the wood. Then he swung the axe hard, striking the back of it upon the wedge, which slowly entered the little crack he had made. But at the last blow, after he had puffed and grunted for half an hour and the steel had sunk almost out of sight in the wood, the crack had not been enlarged perceptibly.

"Go 'way!" he bawled to the men, on whose faces broad grins were now visible. "Go 'way!" he puffed, his face as red as a piece of flannel. "You're wastin' yer time here. This blasted thing wouldn't burn any way. It's like an old anvil. That's what it is—an old anvil."

He wiped his wet face, gave the block a kick, threw down the axe and hurried along over the deck, swearing uproariously, while all hands laughed.

"It's a little tough, even for such a smart man as Mr. Fishley," said one pantryman, chuckling.

"Oh, he knew how to do it," said another.

"Yes, he was wise."

"It's a wonder his cuss words didn't split it."

"Yes, he's a corker on the swear," was the remark made by a burly miner, "but that block'll never see the furnace unless they use a little powder in an auger-hole; an' I don't s'pose they'd do that aboard ship."

In the morning I was down in the lower hold with the other passengers and some of the crew under Mr. Lovell, the second officer. I was helping to rip up the planks. This was tedious work, as the first officer had predicted. In order to loosen and take up one of the soggy planks it was necessary to cut off with cold chisels the heads of the rivets or bolts that held them to the angle-iron. Where it was possible to do so, we would split the plank at the point where the rivet entered the wood and thus loosen it; but this was not done as a rule, for the blade of the axe would strike the rivet or the edge of the angle-iron below the plank and would dull the tool badly. As we had no time to sharpen axes, it was deemed advisable to keep their edges in good condition. The cold chisels and ripping irons were best

for the purpose of loosening the wood and were the oftenest used. The work was so difficult that it took an hour to remove the first three planks.

When the planks were lifted we saw that under them and on top of the concrete in the bottom of the ship was a mass of coal screenings, wheat and rotten wood bits, while scattered among this refuse were old Brazil nuts, pecans, and almonds. This ancient and musty litter was the siftings from former cargoes of the old steamer. The stuff had fallen through the cracks in the upper planking. I poked through the debris with a stick, hoping that the treasure might be hidden somewhere beneath the strange mixture.

I noticed that other passengers were poking, too, and scattering wheat and coal screenings all over the floor. But none of the searchers seemed to find that for which they sought. The broken glass cut the hands of the workers, and there was a good deal of swearing because of it.

When the anxious master of the *Modesto* found out what slow progress we were making he ordered more men to help us. I was surprised to see among the newcomers Trust and Somers.

"Captain sent us down here to join Mr. Lovell's

gang," said Somers to me, "but if I had anything to say about it, I'd be back where I was."

"You'd rather remain in irons than go to work?" I exclaimed in disgust. "And work such as this, too, so necessary to the interest of the ship and ourselves?"

"I don't see how it's goin' to benefit anybody to tear a steamer to pieces just for the sake of getting into port a few days sooner," said Somers, who was evidently not in a hurry to reach San Francisco now that he was under arrest. "And Mr. Trust here thinks jest like I do, don't you, Trust?"

His partner smiled an evil smile. Then his one eye regarded his mattock contemptuously. "They've given me the heaviest tool they could find," said he, snarlingly. "This mattock feels like it weighed a ton."

"I'll trade you my crowbar for it," proposed Somers.

"No, you won't," was the quick reply.

"Get to work there!" bawled the second officer, hastily giving each of the complaining men a harsh shove with his big hands. "This job is a good deal pleasanter than breaking rock in a San Quentin chain gang, where you'll be before long."

I saw Somers wince and grind his teeth as he grasped

his crowbar tightly and inserted it under the edge of a plank.

While the two pirates worked together, they had much to say in quiet undertones. When Max Fishley came down into the hold they regarded him with manifest displeasure and suspicion. They had nothing to say to him, and he kept aloof from them, though I saw him look at them very closely several times. Fishley went away after half an hour, and soon a curious change came over the two men whom I had believed to be in complicity with him. This was after they had had a further consultation in a corner of the hold when the second officer's back was turned. They seemed wholly to have changed their attitude toward the work in hand, for they now attacked it with surprising vigor. Whenever they were raising a plank or saw one lifted near them they would dart anxious glances beneath it, sometimes getting down and poking under it, just as I was doing at my end of the job. I puzzled over the change that had so suddenly been wrought in them, and spoke quietly to the Doctor about it. But it was as much a mystery to him at the first as it was to me. He could make nothing of it. Just before the dinner hour, however, he came over and said to me:

"*I* think I have it; and what happens in the next few days will prove I'm right. These fellows, Somers and Trust, have been fooled by Max Fishley — that is, assuming that he was in with them, which you insisted upon so stoutly — and *if* that is so, they don't know where that gold is any more than you or I."

"Well," said I, "how does that account for their not caring to go to work at the first when they might stand as good a chance as any of us to find the treasure and put it aside here somewhere in a dark corner?"

"I thought of that too," said Doctor Quaritch. "I thought that after Fishley had secretly removed the gold from the place where the three of them had hidden it, and they had discovered his duplicity while lurking about when we removed that floor panel, they had nearly despaired of ever seeing the gold again. After their arrest no doubt they gave up the game entirely, and may have planned to turn State's evidence against Fishley a little later. In the first hours of their release from the irons they could see nothing in this business down here but hard work, and that they did not relish in the least, as such fellows never do. But when they saw Fishley come prying about, it occurred to them that the gold might be secreted somewhere down here,

and that there was a chance of getting it yet and of making away with it. So they have gone to work, hammer and tongs, to discover the stuff."

"But in case they find it," said I, "what can they do with it? They can't take it off the steamer."

"I don't know what they may have schemed as to that; but they're very crafty and full of rascally resources."

I was much impressed by the Doctor's conjectures, and it pleased me to observe that his process of reasoning had almost, if not quite, convinced him of Max Fishley's complicity in the crime.

I thought that if these theories of the Doctor should prove to be correct, it was evident that Somers and Trust were altogether in the dark respecting the whereabouts of the treasure. As to this I was ready to rejoice. It seemed to me eminently just that the two villains should lose their loot. And as far as I could see I had as good a chance of getting it now as before. I thought that Fishley's visit to the hold must have been due to his anxiety over the treasure. He was, no doubt, so fearful that some one should find it that he could not keep at his post, which for the time was on deck, but had to be running down below to see what

was being done. In support of this idea of the third officer being worried about the work of demolition that might at any moment unearth the treasure, we had to observe that he came down again just before dinner, looked about carefully, and returned quickly to the upper deck. The Doctor looked at me significantly.

"If things weren't in the shape they are now on board this ship," he undertoned to me, "I'd have that man tied up and have the hose turned on him until he told where the gold was. But the Captain would think I was daft to propose anything of the sort, with all this rumpus going on."

And truly it was a chaotic condition of affairs that now obtained aboard the *Modesto*. I observed this more particularly as the Doctor and I were told off on a little dinner watch of half an hour when we grabbed and bolted a cold snack and walked about a bit on deck. Wherever we went, below or above decks, men with their arms full of splintered lumber were constantly running into us, as they swarmed toward the open space above the fire-room, where their burdens were slid down the chute to the hungry furnaces, which ate the dry stuff as though it were so much matchwood.

Chopping, ripping, tearing, rending and creaking

noises came from everywhere, as boards and planks were cut or pried off, and nails and bolts and rivets gave way unwillingly before the quick, insistent work of the destroyers, who ran about covered with sweat and dirt, bent upon their strange and unremitting toil.

Clouds of dust puffed out over the decks or lay in little wind-piled heaps abaft the ventilators and skylights. Strings of torn canvas, cordage, bits of splintered stanchions, boards and moldings were strewn about, and all over the hurricane deck lay gleaming crumbs of broken glass from panes that had been knocked from the stateroom windows and had been ground under the heels of the workers. Nearly every man aboard had been turned into a wood-grubber or wood-passer, and once I saw the Captain himself with a big painted board in his arms, walking toward the chute. But for the most part he seemed to be stamping the deck and roaring down through the pipe, "More steam! More steam! Can't you crowd on a little more steam?"

I grieve to say that his commands were interspersed with a great many imprecations that I am loath to record. But in trying times aboard ship little attention is paid to the language used by its master. It is to the

order itself, and not to the trimmings, profane or otherwise, that the men pay heed.

They told me that the fiercest swearing done by the good Captain was when he went down into the lower hold and saw the musty litter that still lay between the angle-irons.

"Why didn't somebody tell me about this?" he bawled to Fishley, while he pointed to the coal siftings and old wheat. "There ain't any brains on board this ship, I guess. Why, that stuff would burn like a house afire, and make some steam, too. Tell 'em to get boxes and freight-trucks and wheel it out, raise it to the upper deck and dump it down the chute!"

His orders were obeyed, and soon the dust flew up out of the chute in great clouds all over the deck, nearly choking the men, while from the fire-room came howls of protest.

"They're sendin' down glass an' gravel for us to burn!" was the loud complaint, for some of the fragments of the broken bottles were among the coal screenings and the wheat.

"Never you mind!" roared the Captain, when he heard the angry voices. "I'm running this ship, and I'm going to burn anything I like. Wet it down and

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dump it in; and if the dust chokes you, put wet gunny-sacks over your heads. It won't hurt you. I only wish there was more of the same stuff to burn."

"This is the saddest day of my life," said Doctor Quaritch, as he walked along the deck. "I never thought to see the dear old *Modesto* so dismantled. Why, she couldn't look much worse if she was one of those old hulks lying in the Oakland Creek. It's too bad — too bad."

He must have been deeply moved, for he let his pipe go out three or four times, and once he blew his nose very loudly.

Just before going below I chanced to be near some of the crew who did not observe me, and I overheard a few remarks that set my thoughts flying in another direction.

"There'll be a big bonus for the man that finds it," said a pantryman, prying away at a door-jamb.

"Of course the' will," said his mate.

"The young feller's easy. Whoever finds it will git one o' them eight sacks."

"I'd make sure of a couple of 'em," said another man.

"How'd ye do that?"

"Why, I guess I'd hold out two, or mebbe three.

He'd never know the difference. He'd think the other feller stole 'em."

"Are all the passengers on?"

"Yes, every one of 'em, an' they're all a-lookin' for it. Wouldn't it be great if you an' me should find it, partner?"

"That's right; and findin' is keepin', says I."

I passed along, my senses all alert and my hands clenched in impatience in which righteous anger played no small part. Here was a fine state of affairs. Every man aboard that ship — and not a few of them doubtless as unscrupulous as Somers and Trust — was eagerly seeking for my gold. Might not that explain some of the zeal that had everywhere been manifest among the busy workers who were prying off boards and planking? I could see them all peering under each piece of wood they detached — searching, searching for those eight bags of gold dust, and eagerly rushing to the next piece and quickly uplifting it. How they must begrudge the loss of time occasioned by carrying the torn-off lumber to the chute. What if the treasure should be pounced upon by one of those many disappointed miners, would it not prove too great a temptation for him? It made me shudder to think of the many ad-

venturers — men who had been mere camp-followers, leeches upon the lucky and the industrious — the gamblers, the monte-players, the sharpers, who were returning to a warmer climate for the winter season. These men would not hesitate to put into force the rule of "finding is keeping." Yes, the riff-raff, the rag-tag and the bobtail who had been mere idlers on the golden beach, and whom we had on board in plenty — "finding is keeping" would be a rule easy of application with them in a place where they had had to work so hard with axe and saw and cold chisel.

XVII

IN THE LOWER HOLD

I HURRIED down into the lower hold after the Doctor, cheered somewhat by my remembrance of what had been said about the unlikelihood of the missing treasure being secreted anywhere above deck. This seemed to me a logical idea, and as there were but two places where the work of demolition was going on at present — in the after deck-house and in the lower hold — I had for the time to concern myself about the lower hold only. On my way down I passed Max Fishley. He was waiting his turn to climb up the hatchway ladder as I was passing down. When I made out his ugly head below me I could not help thinking that it would be no great sin if I should let go my hold upon the ladder and plump down upon him with my heels. But such an act would serve no purpose other than the possible extinction of a rogue before his time. So I passed down and by him coolly enough, and was soon at work with Doctor Quaritch, cutting off rivet heads with my hammer and cold chisel.

But the new phase of the affair kept haunting me, and as I glanced about where the lanterns twinkled in the great musty hold, and many feet crunched the glass of the broken bottles, I could not help thinking that while all these men were intent upon the work of tearing out the planks and stanchions to supply the steamer with fuel, they were far more eagerly interested in the keen search for my eight bags of gold dust.

"That's no doubt exactly the way things stand," said Doctor Quaritch, when I told him what I had overheard and of my fears. "They're all on the lookout. It must have come from letting those deckhands help us in our first search down there. That was gossiped all about, of course. News like that travels fast on shipboard. We should have been more careful. I'll tell Nason."

He went over and whispered to the first officer. They held quite a conference, and when the Doctor came back he took the first occasion to tell me quietly that Mr. Nason had promised to keep a sharp eye on the workers, and that if any of the officers saw any one trying to carry out anything that looked like the treasure, he would pounce down upon him like a hawk.

"Speaking of the other officers," said I, "does he

still think that Max Fishley has nothing to do with the hiding of the gold?"

"I discussed that matter with him," replied the Doctor, "but he waved me off, saying that if we wanted to bring any such absurd charges against Fishley, we'd have to wait until we reached port."

"When," said I, bitterly, "he'll no doubt escape scot free, gold dust and all."

"Oh, don't worry about that, John," was the suave reply. "I guess Captain Head will do the square thing, as he sees it."

"I hope so," said I, "but there's so much going on aboard this ship beside the workings of justice, that I —"

"What have they got over there?" broke in the Doctor, stepping forward to where two of the passengers were examining some object they had taken from a newly made hole in the low casing that ran all about the hold for two or three feet above the floor.

"What is it?" I cried, rushing forward. A dozen others of the party of workers, among them Trust and Somers, were already about the passengers who had made the discovery.

"They've found the dust!" piped a shrill treble.

"They've found the dust!" repeated a deep-toned bass, and all hands sprang toward the place of the discovery.

The finders of the supposed treasure had undone a tightly tied package and were unrolling it at the command of Mr. Nason, who had immediately taken a lively interest in the discovery and had tried his best to keep back the curious crowd.

"Wal, all that there gold ain't in that little bundle," remarked one miner to another.

"No, unless that's all the' is left of it after goin' through the mill," said another.

There were a few minutes of suspense during which I worked my way to the side of the first officer and looked down at the object on which all eyes were bent. As it was unrolled it seemed to be a seaman's old blouse, and in its innermost fold the eager searchers were rewarded by the sight of something that gleamed in the lantern light. This something was held up to view.

"Nothin' but an old whisky bottle!" groaned one of the expectant crowd. "Jest an old dead soldier."

"Fall back there, men!" commanded Mr. Nason, "and get to work."

The men resumed their places.

"Mighty glad that blear-eyed Arizonian didn't find the stuff that time," I heard one of the passengers remark to a man at his side.

"So'm I. But if it had been it, he wasn't very smart. He could 'a' let it lay there a while and took it out when nobody was a-lookin'. He wasn't very smart."

This remark was very disconcerting to me. It showed that the doctrine of "finding is keeping" was too freely and fully held aboard the *Modesto* to assure the owner of lost treasure of any interest he might have in it unless he was capable of exerting an unremitting vigilance.

I felt sick and disgusted when I thought of how lightly my fellow-passengers treated my ownership of the missing gold. It seemed to me that between some of them and the pirates I had so strongly execrated there was but little choice.

By noon of the next day the lower hold had been entirely stripped of whatever it could afford in the way of fuel, and every shovelful of coal screenings and wheat siftings had been scraped from the concrete bottom.

I watched the men taking up the last plank, and heaved a deep sigh as I saw that on its removal I was no nearer than before to the recovery of my lost gold.

It might, I thought, have been taken out by thievish passengers or ship's men when no one was looking. I had worked and watched all night long, and had seen nothing to arouse my suspicions as to any one finding and making away with it. But the workers had come and gone, toiling in short shifts, and I could not see all that was going forward. When I communicated my fears to Mr. Nason, he laughed.

"Oh, they couldn't have taken out any of your treasure, John. It would be heavy and unmanageable stuff for them to handle without being noticed; and somebody would have reported them."

I was cheered in a measure by what he said. I asked him where the work would be carried on next.

"In the main freight-hold, between-decks," he replied, pointing his finger upward. "We'll hoist the wood up on deck and send it down the chute."

I was feeling weak and miserable because of lack of sleep. My hands, which had been cut in many places by the broken glass, were moist with nervous sweat, and my throat was sore from the effect of damps and draughts.

When the Doctor came down to work beside me between-decks, where the ring of hammers upon rivet

heads was already heard and planks were being pried up, I insisted upon his going back into the sunshine. He looked jaded and listless, and I felt guilty to think that his friendship for me had kept him down in the dreary lower hold so long.

"Well, I *do* feel a bit knocked about," said the Doctor, "and seeing that you insist, I'll go up for a while. I can swing an axe at that deck-house; and it might be," he added, "seeing that the gold wasn't found in the lower hold and may not be in this one, that it will be just as well to keep a lookout up there after all."

"You're right," said I, glad to think that his kindly interest in my affairs should find practical expression without discommoding him.

I do not know whether it was that the passengers and crew had learned the trick of it and could work with better expedition, or whether their lust for the gold had grown stronger, but the planks of the freight-deck on which they were now laboring were torn up much more rapidly than were the others. I am inclined to think it was as much due to one of these causes as to the other. I could see the eagerly peering eyes of some of the nearer workers as they held their lanterns under each plank that was being uplifted, and I knew what

they were seeking for there. I was kept under a severe nervous tension hour by hour as the work progressed. My eyes ached from the strain that was put upon them. My head was dizzy at times. Just how much of this sort of thing I could stand I did not know, but as I look back upon those harassing experiences now, I do not think that I stopped for one moment to consider what effect the loss of sleep and the never-ending mental perturbation might have upon me.

XVIII

THE HEAT OF THE GOLD-HUNT

It was rip and tear, clink and clank. Where the planks were short, as they were in some sections of the floor, there was a scramble of the workers to see who could raise the most of them. I saw one man lie flat upon the deck and run his long arm back under the flooring and move it all about, and I heard some of the passengers expostulating:

"That ain't fair!"

"Aw! He wants to hog it all!"

"Let up on fudgin' there, you!"

The man against whom all this was aimed rolled over and arose, and in the light of a lantern I saw his face. It was that of my worthy friend Bill of the lighter. During all the progress of the search, which, from the remarks I had heard, seemed to constitute one prolonged indignity to me, my blood had not boiled quite so fiercely as it did when I saw that fellow Bill there between-decks, and knew that he was so bent

upon finding my treasure. There were others, no doubt, just as anxious to find it as Bill, but not even the rascally Trust was as odious to me as the man who had so coolly and deliberately pushed my treasure-box off the lighter and sunk it in the Bering sea. It was, to my way of reasoning, the worst of all the offenses in connection with the robbery. I was on the point of speaking to Mr. Nason and asking him to transfer Bill to the work on the deckhouse, when Max Fishley came down and relieved the first officer, who immediately left the hold.

Mr. Nason had been very gentlemanly in his treatment of the passengers, but Max Fishley began ordering them about as though they were so many coolies. This they very plainly resented, but the green-eyed third mate had not discernment enough to note the effect of his bearishness upon the passengers. I felt that on the first occasion that might arise they would make matters interesting for Mr. Fishley.

Remarkable as it may seem, in view of the slow progress made in the lower hold, all the planking and lining between decks was removed in a day. This, I thought, was not in any way due to the officious supervision of Mr. Fishley, but to the in-

creased interest the passengers took in the search for the treasure.

As soon as it was apparent to me that the gold was not to be found between-decks the tension relaxed for a time, and when the passengers went on deck for a few hours' rest I lay on a heap of tattered canvas in a corner and slept soundly until I heard a call:

"All first watch to the forehold!"

Now I was in the first watch and it behooved me to be stirring, but I did so slowly enough. When I sat up and looked about me a scene of sad desolation met my eye. Over the bestrewn and littered deck I could see what remained of the ruined and despoiled after-house, and heard the crash of the axes, the grating of the saws and the clink of the hammers on the heads of the nail-cutters. My heart was heavy as I saw Doctor Quaritch walk wearily forward to where I lay, shaking his head and muttering mournfully.

"Well, John," he said, with a thin smile, when he saw me, "we're still over a thousand miles from port. At this rate it will take nearly all the woodwork on board to run her in. Isn't it a pity? Of course they can put a hundred ship-carpenters to work and repair the damage in a week, but still she'll never be the same

— never the same old *Modesto*. And have you noticed how she has come up out of the water? Why, a good lively gale now would lay her on her beam-ends like a log. How are you feeling?"

I told him about my sore throat, and he led me back to his stateroom and prepared a gargle for me.

"I suppose," he said, "they'll be tearing up this room before long. They're working on 31 now and this is 22. But perhaps something may happen before then — something may happen."

Through the open doorway I heard the call repeated: "All first watch to the forehold!"

"Well, Doctor," I said, "I must get to work again. Somebody will be getting that gold dust and keeping it."

"You're right," he said. "We mustn't let up, I suppose. But there must be at least four days more of this — four days more, unless something turns up."

As I passed along the line of doomed staterooms, and came to the end, where the work of demolition was in progress, I noted that the next room marked for destruction, because of its being nearest the one most lately destroyed, was the cabin of the second and third officers. As I paused near this cabin I saw a passenger

wrench the outside door from its hinges and start away with it toward the chute.

"Here!" yelled Max Fishley. "What are yeh doin'? Put that there door back."

"Why, I thought that everything went," said the passenger, returning with the door, "and this is next in line."

"I don't care what you thought," growled the third officer, with an oath. "You leave my cabin alone!"

"But Mr. Lovell said —"

"I don't care a little green apple what Mr. Lovell said. He's got no business to have my cabin tore down. Don't you see, I had that partition sawed off and left there? I want the other side sawed off, too. I want my room left jest as it is now."

There was a ripple of dissent among the passengers.

"We've given up our rooms," said one, "and are sleeping on deck in all that mess. And I should think—"

"I say I don't care what you think. Your thinkin' don't count for nothin' here," said the mate, contemptuously.

"Captain's orders," said Mr. Lovell, coming up. "Our room's got to be cut down with the rest of the house. I'm just as sorry to see it go as you are, Max,

but it wouldn't be fair to the rest to let it stand and cut down the others."

"Well, if it's got to go I want my own men to do it. I want ship's hands and not these haymakers. I got things in there I want taken out before the work is begun."

"All right," said Mr. Lovell, good-naturedly. "Only I advise you to be more respectful to these passengers. They're doing this to be obliging, and they're working very hard."

"Oh, I know and you know what they're workin' so hard fer. It ain't to keep the fires a-goin'. It's —"

"Oh, stow your jaw, old man!" called the second officer in his great, good-humored voice. "Begin on this next cabin, gentlemen," he said to the passengers.

Although I knew that Mr. Nason wanted all his hands down below, I was lax enough in my duty to slip back to the Doctor and ask him if he would carefully note everything that was taken out of the second and third officers' cabin. I told him I suspected from Max Fishley's actions that the gold might have been stowed away in there.

"It's unlikely," said Doctor Quaritch, "very unlikely, for Fishley must have taken fright after what

we reported of him to the Captain. He wouldn't keep the gold where it could be so easily found, in case he was actually charged with having it in his possession. But I'll keep a sharp lookout just the same. I think it's only the natural selfishness of the beast that makes him want to keep his cabin from destruction. He's that kind, you know."

As I went below, I brooded over the plain significance of the ironic remark let fall by Max Fishley as to why the passengers were working so hard. It emphasized the strong feeling of distrust I had already entertained. While there might be an honest man here and there among these disappointed miners and among the crew, I had reason to believe that the rule of the rogue that "finding is keeping" had been gaining steadily, until at the present time my chances for the recovery of the treasure were slimmer than ever.

The gold-hunt — for it was plainly little else — had been led on by all sorts of rumors and reports, among them one that made it clear that I had never had any just claim to the treasure; and it was argued that as it had passed out of my hands it was clearly the property of whosoever should discover it. I heard one report to the effect that the Captain had said the gold should

belong to the man who found it; and though this was at variance with the attitude of the other officers, it was accepted by nearly all on board, in their blind, unreasoning lust for the treasure.

It was clear that if the search went on long enough some one would lay his hands upon those eight bags of dust; and that these would be covetous, unyielding hands I made not the slightest doubt.

XIX

THE STEAM COLLIER

THE forehold of the *Modesto* was not large, as she was built at the time when it was considered best to stow aft as much of a steamer's cargo as possible, that the propeller might be left deep under water. The passengers and crew attacked the work with surprising vigor, considering their worn condition. Here, as in the after hold, I kept vigilant watch of the movement of the passengers while doing as much work as I could in providing fuel.

The eagerness of the searchers for the gold, built upon an ever-increasing cupidity, had become something feverish. The side of the forehold had been cased to protect some special freight that had been taken up to Nome in that part of the ship. This casing was composed of surfaced pine boards, six inches wide and one inch thick. The boards were simply nailed to a temporary wooden framework, and this lining structure afforded but slight resistance to the attacks

with the axes and other tools wielded by the busy workers.

I saw Trust, who had managed to exchange his heavy mattock for a light axe, ripping off the casing boards in a way that would have astonished some of his old idling, gaming friends; but Somers was not in the hold, and I wondered if he were bent on individual search in some other part of the vessel.

"There's no gold in here," I heard a man call out, as the last piece of casing was torn off with a loud creak. "If it's in the hold at all, it's under what planks there is left in the flooring."

But when, after another half hour, the floor planks were all torn up, the whole crew concentrating their energies on the last one and darting quick, anxious glances under it, there was a call of "What's the next place, Mr. Nason?"

"The steerage," replied the mate, shortly. And there was a rush to that part of the vessel, which was near at hand.

My throat was now aching again, and I started for the stateroom to make a new application of the Doctor's gargle. Beside a piece of torn canvas that had been stuck up by some of the passengers for a night

shelter I saw Trust and Bill. I crept up behind the canvas and lay there listening, in the hope of hearing something to my advantage.

"And the next time yeh git anybody to go in with yeh on a lay like that there," came in angry tones from Bill, "lookout yeh don't git somebody like me that can put yeh out o' business, if he wants to, in three shakes. Some men will stand a lot o' foolin', but nobody ever fooled me more'n oncet, an' they allus was sorry they tried it even then. Sendin' a man off on a schooner to wait for you to bring aboard —"

"Sh!" cautioned Trust. "You musn't talk so loud. We're in deep enough already."

"Yes, you an' Joe is, an' I'm derned glad of it."

"Well, you're no better off. You'll be landed along with us if we ever get to San Francisco. The boy has told the Captain who you are."

"The devil he has! How d'yeh know?"

"Oh, I've got ways of getting inside information."

"Yes, but that third mate — he's fooled you good — that's what he has," chuckled Bill. "He's too many for you, ain't he now? He's got the stuff hid away from yeh. You'll never see it, nor red-faced Joe neither. Your game is played, an' yeh got what was a-comin',

didn't yeh?" he went on tauntingly. "But if that there kid blabbed about me I'll chuck him over the side, jest as I did his box. Say, look here, Pete, on the square now, did you put up that there job on me? Yeh might as well own up — ye're done for anyway. Did yeh put up the job?"

"No, I didn't — honest Indian," said Trust, deliberately, with falsehood sounding in every note. "Joe lost his nerve at the last moment. He wouldn't run the launch out, and I didn't know anything about handling her. So I couldn't get aboard with the stuff."

"I wish I could believe half you say," said Bill, "but I don't. You never ring true. But your game is up now. You'll never git them hooks o' yourn into that there gold agin. Fishley's got it stored away where nobody will find it — that feller used to be the best opium smuggler on the *City o' Peking*, an' you can bet he knows how to stow things away safe out o' sight an' git 'em ashore on dark nights. You might as well give up — you'll only blister them neat, ladylike, gambler hands o' yourn for nawthin'."

"But what are you searching so hard for yourself?" asked Trust. "You're right in the general hunt with the rest. They're all looking for the gold."

"I know that, but it's jest a kind o' pastime with me. I ain't got no notion o' findin' nawthin'. But I can't hardly help lookin' when everybody is so anxious-like an' up an' at it all the time. But I'm glad Fishley's fooled yeh. It serves yeh right. Yeh'll git about fifteen years for this, that's what yeh'll git; an' I'm glad of it."

Bill turned and went away to join the fuel-grubbers in the steerage, and as Trust followed him, with a slow and thoughtful step, I dodged out of my hiding-place and got my gargle. Soon I was on my way to the steerage. Now all along I had had hopes of the steerage. It was true that most of the berth-frames and odd stanchions had been removed already, but there still remained the flooring and some casing in a superficial after-partition that was independent of the bulkhead.

I ran to the corner that had been occupied by Somers and Trust, and chopped away at the floor there, looking about closely for any sign of a panel such as had been discovered in the lower hold. Trust, together with his mate, who had rejoined him, devoted his energies to a corner farthest away from the one they had slept in, and paid no attention to the work begun in their old corner.

This was rather a disheartening circumstance, for had the gold been hidden near the place where their berths had been, they would surely have burrowed about that quarter. I had toiled hard, despite the fact that my axe-handle had become splintered a little and was hurting my hand at every stroke. I paid closer attention to the two pirates and became at last thoroughly convinced, by the way they worked and by the looks in their faces, that they had not the slightest notion of the actual whereabouts of the treasure. Like myself and the others aboard, they knew that the gold was in the ship, but where to find it was another matter.

Relaxing my vigilance for a while from sheer weariness, I asked Mr. Nason to excuse me, and went up on the hurricane deck, where I lay for a moment near the great naked square in the painted canvas, where the after staterooms, the smoking-room and rear house had stood. The *débris* that littered the deck had become a general mass that lay helter-skelter, its fag-ends of canvas and cordage whipped by the winds and twisted fantastically. I stretched out for a quiet hour of rest near a little knot of passengers, and was lying flat on my back looking up into the blue tenuity of the sky, when the breeze shifted a bit, bringing down some of

the smoke from the funnels, and instantly an intolerable stench greeted my nostrils. I sprang up and cried, "What's that?" to the man nearest me.

"I don't know," said he. "Ain't it awful? Smells like burning grease."

"They're throwin' a lot of oleo into the furnace," explained another passenger.

"What's oleo?" I asked.

"Oleomargarine."

"Then we must be somewhere near port," said the man I had first addressed, closing his nose with his fingers. "They wouldn't burn up provisions if they wasn't near port."

"Oh, no; we're six hundred miles out yet, so the Captain says; but he swears he's goin' to run her in in the next two days, if it takes all the burnable stuff there is aboard. He's got to do it. They've piled in all the lubricating oil they dared to use. Now they're burnin' that stinkin' oleo."

"Well, bull butter ought to make steam all right."

"You bet it will."

But going forward I learned from the second officer that there had been only a few hundred pounds of oleomargarine burned — all that could be spared — and

that the last of this fuel had just been thrown into the furnaces.

"We're chucking in a lot of hams and sides of bacon next," said he. "Chow will be short on our last day out. But bacon-burning don't bother me, for I never touch pig in any shape."

"No," observed the Doctor, coming along, "it isn't the best kind of food, but men working as hard as these are on this ship ought to have something in the way of meat. Speaking of eating, I'd like to have my legs under the table at the Palace Grill just about now."

"Wouldn't I though!" exclaimed the second officer. "If we have good luck we'll be in by to-morrow night."

I saw the squat little figure of the Jap coming along the deck with an instrument in his hand. It looked something like a zither.

"That's his yo-kin, as he calls it," remarked Doctor Quaritch. "It took him nearly a month to make it." He took the instrument from the boy's hands as he came up. "See how ingeniously it's constructed."

Mr. Lovell and I admired the neat workmanship of the yo-kin, which was flat and made of wood, prettily painted over with a brave show of decoration. Instead of strings the yo-kin had wires of various lengths,

which the cunning Jap had taken from broom-handles, and twisted around neat hardwood thumb-screws.

"What are you going to do with this?" asked the Doctor of Yohara. "It's no time to be playing it on deck. If the Captain saw you with it he'd make music for you."

"Oh, I no going play now," said the Jap, sadly, shaking his head.

"What then?"

"I putting it into chute."

"The dickens you are," exclaimed the Doctor.

"Yes, I sinking it burn very well — make good fire for the ship for one minute."

"How many miles do you think we'd run on it, Yohara?" snickered the second officer.

"Don't laugh at him," said the Doctor, seriously. "Don't you see what a sacrifice he's making? This yo-kin is the apple of his eye. It took him weeks and weeks to make it. It's the only treasure he's got, and he's willing to part with it for the good of the ship. Now I call that a genuine sacrifice — a piece of downright good-heartedness."

"So it is," said Mr. Lovell, "and I shouldn't have laughed, only it's so perfectly —"

"Yohara!" called the Doctor to the Jap, who had walked solemnly away during the last words. "Come back. You don't have to burn your yo-kin. You're a good boy, and here's half a dollar for you. Take the yo-kin back and hang it up, and if anybody attempts to burn it I'll jump on him stiff-legged."

"I must not burn?" asked Yohara, pocketing the coin and patting his instrument affectionately. "Oh, I do not want to burn! I love yo-kin to my heart; but I sinking I must burn."

"No — no — nothing of the sort," the Doctor insisted stoutly. "I'll burn my instrument case first. Take it back and hang it up."

"Sank you, sir — sank you," said Yohara, in his soft little speech, and starting back to his coop near the scullery. "I very sad I must not burn. But if ship cannot go to San F[illegible]n-cis-co, I *will* burn — I *will* burn." He hugged the yo-kin close to his breast and went away.

"Talk about your self-denial," said my medical friend, "doesn't that beat all?"

"You're right," said Mr. Lovell, "and I'm ashamed to think I laughed. Hope he didn't notice it. They're mighty sensitive little fellows, those Japs."

"They are that. Why, even the grown men and women are just like children. And they're affectionate. No matter how much I scold that chap when we're ashore — for he's kind of careless sometimes — kind of careless, you know — he just bows his head and takes it all like a lamb. Never says a word back."

"Yes," said the second officer, "I've seen enough of 'em to notice how soft-hearted they are. Three years ago in Yokohama I — Hullo! What ship's that?"

He pointed to the northeast.

Down on the horizon we saw a black smoke-drift and low-standing topmasts.

"It's a big steamer," said Doctor Quaritch. "I wonder if we can't get some coal now."

"Maybe a little if he would spare it. But he mightn't be obliging," said Mr. Lovell.

We all went forward to where Captain Head was closely scanning the steamer.

"It's the *San Bernardino* coming down from Nanaimo, or I miss my guess," said he, screwing down his glass.

"Why, she's a big collier," said the Doctor.

"Yes," said the Captain, sententiously, but with a

world of meaning. "Carries about three thousand tons."

"Three thousand tons of coal within sight of us," exclaimed the Doctor, "and we're burning up our houses and hams! That's the fortune of the sea."

Within an hour the *San Bernardino* was within easy hailing distance. We could see her Captain on the bridge, raking us fore and aft with his glass. There was an exchange of signals and the two steamers slowed down.

"Want a tow, Captain?" came the voice of the *San Bernardino's* master.

"No," called back Captain Head, "but I'd like to buy a little coal."

"Sorry, but can't sell a pound."

"Not at sea-prices? You can sell at sea-prices, can't you?"

"The owners don't allow it. Let me tow you in."

"He's after salvage," muttered Captain Head. "The highbinder! That would mean forty per cent of the ship at the least figure. I'll see him hanged first." Then he raised his voice: "I'll give you forty dollars a ton!" he shouted. "That's eight times shore prices."

"Very sorry, but we're a day overdue now, and can't

wait. I'll tow you in for twenty thousand dollars, and say nothing about salvage."

"Oh, yes, you will," undertoned the Captain. Then he called out: "I'll give you forty dollars a ton."

"You're riding a little high, ain't you?" asked the unobliging master, satirically. "Did you burn your ballast? Where's your masts and after deckhouse?"

"Fifty dollars a ton!" called Captain Head. "That's as high as I'll go."

"Say twenty thousand, and I'll pass you the line. That's reasonable."

"Reasonable? you pirate!" yelled our Captain, stamping the deck and cursing loudly. "You needn't take this ship for any old derelict. Her engines are in good working order, and we're not out of fuel. We'll get into port as soon as you do."

"Yes, if you put your whole ship into your furnaces," laughed the Captain of the *San Bernardino;* and there were echoing "haw-haws" from his officers. "What are you burning now that stinks so? It ain't Wellington coal, by a long chalk. Say the word and I'll tie you up at the dock by Thursday night."

"No, sir! I'll have no dealings with a pirate of the high seas. You've struck the wrong man this voyage.

I'll not be held up and robbed in cold blood by the likes of you — you infernal skinflint! I'd rather burn my ship than hand her over to you."

And the Captain ran into his cabin and banged the door very loudly.

XX

IN THE SHAFT ALLEY

THE great collier headed away from us and increased her speed so rapidly that the poor, dismantled old *Modesto* soon fell behind and lost sight of her.

After an hour or two in his cabin the Captain came on deck again and did not deign to look forward at the dwindling drift of the *San Bernardino*, but walked up and down, calling out orders and making the lives of his officers and crew very miserable for a while.

"You are the slowest lot," I heard him complain. "Here, with all these passengers helping you, you can't give us steam enough for more than half speed. The light stuff's no good. What we want is more of those planks. I wish you'd stop chasing around in a circle and do something. Get up more planks."

"The planks are all gone, Captain," said Mr. Nason.

"All gone?"

"All except what's in the shaft alley, and I thought—"

"Rip 'em out — rip 'em out! Don't be standing

around with the indicator running down and the log showing only seven knots. Rip 'em out!"

A lot of us, with Mr. Nason, rushed down into the fire-room on our way to the shaft alley. On the floor of the fire-room was a pile of the house partitions, doors, window-sashes and shutters. These were being flung into the open furnace-doors by stokers naked to the waist, and covered with sweat and dust. The head fireman was bawling his orders. There was a crashing of axes among the larger pieces and a clanging of furnace-doors. The fire-room had always been a forbidding nether world to me, but never had it seemed such a reeking, steaming, seething, hot and noisy inferno as now.

The firemen welcomed the crowd of newcomers, believing that they had come down to relieve them from their long and arduous labor of feeding the insatiable furnaces. When the pale and weary toilers learned the object of our coming, they were loud in their lamentations.

"Oh, we get a lot of help from up above, don't we?" growled one man, with his arms full of splintered boards.

"Expect us to make sixteen knots on cigar-boxes and kindling-wood."

"Stand up to one of these open hell-holes all day and see how *you* like it."

"They'd think it was a picnic."

"S'pose *you* could run a month with empty bunkers."

"Worth ten dollars an hour."

"We'll fire again on this ship — oh, yes!"

"Why don't you send down some more glass to burn?"

And all this accompanied by the hardest swearing I ever heard.

Mr. Nason, who was anxious to get out of range of this snarling pack, dodged quickly out of the fire-room and into the engine-room, passing to the shaft-alley door. I followed him closely, being uncomfortably joggled by the odious Fishley, who, closely pressed by Somers and Trust, seemed feverish in his haste to get into the tunnel. We entered the long, low, narrow alley, hurrying by a couple of oilers who were growling like the firemen, and at once proceeded to take up the first of the planks, to the right of the long, swiftly revolving shaft of steel that ran back to the stern of the ship. It was a tight place for a gang of thirty men to work in. Many of them removed their waistcoats, and some took off their shirts. We were down in the

very bottom of the steamer. If there were any ventilators and if they were doing any service at all it was not perceptible. The hot air in the tunnel reeked with machine-oil, and, with all those breaths in there, it soon became wretchedly foul. A man near me, who was prying up a plank with a heavy crowbar, suddenly gave a little gasp, reeled and fell quietly into my outstretched arms. Two of his friends carried him out, but they quickly returned and went eagerly to work. In fact, in spite of the bad air, the heat and the oily smells, all the men seemed remarkably keen for the work. I noticed that Max Fishley was officiously directing operations, and wondered how he came to be down there while Mr. Nason was in command. My mental comment on this was, strangely enough, followed on the instant by a remark by the first officer, who drew near to Fishley and asked, "What are you doing down here, Max?"

"Oh, I thought I could be of some help. Don't you want to go on deck? I'll take charge here. You must be nearly worn out."

He said this with a gentleness of tone of which I had deemed him incapable. It occurred to me that he was not such a bad fellow after all.

"Thank you, Max," replied Mr. Nason. "The Captain asked me to come down here, but as you're so good, I will go up on deck a little while. The air here makes my head spin like a top."

"Sorry you don't feel good," said Fishley, sympathetically. "Stay up as long as you like. You needn't come back to the tunnel at all. We can skin this stuff out in a few hours."

As soon as Mr. Nason had gone it occurred to me that Max Fishley had simply been trying to get rid of him.

The third officer appeared to be much relieved and not a little elated by having been left in charge of the work. As I looked at his face in the light of the flickering lanterns, hanging from the low, grimy ceiling, it flashed upon me that the hidden gold must be in that shaft alley, and that Fishley knew where it was. I walked up and down the narrow lane in which the long shaft was steadily turning, and peered carefully all about. In this occupation I was interrupted of a sudden by the third officer, who snarled forth:

"Git to work, or git out o' this here tunnel. If you ain't able to do anything but walk around, I ain't got no use for yeh. And anybody here," he went on, ad-

dressing the men, "who wants fresh air, better go up on deck. There's too many in here for comfort anyway. Ye're all tumblin' over each other an' standin' on each other's feet."

At this I saw Trust and Somers exchange glances. It had no doubt occurred to them, as it had instantly occurred to me, that Fishley would send the whole gang away if he could, but that in any event he would thin them out as much as possible.

"I'll bet a dollar he fixed them ventilators," said Somers to Trust, quietly. "He wants to choke us all out."

"Well, I can stand it as long as he can," was the reply.

Two men passed forward, panting, and left the alley.

"Leave that door open!" bawled a man with an adze.

"Don't you dare!" shouted Fishley. "Captain's orders — very strict — wants it kept closed."

"You're a liar," breathed Trust, though not loud enough for the third officer to hear.

The door was closed, and I felt as though we were all sealed up in a great tin can. Most of the men had stripped themselves down to the waist, and yet the sweat rolled from their bodies.

Half a dozen planks had been removed, but no sight of the treasure rewarded the eyes of the weary workers. Still they kept at it diligently, and, as it seemed to me, with a sort of desperate zeal, although half fainting for want of air and some of them reeling blindly. I had kept up my close search of the planks—peering, peering for any trace of a hiding-place which might be disclosed.

Fishley had been careful to keep the men forward, and had so directed their work that none of them had any chance to examine the after part of the alley floor. When he was not observing me, I stooped low, dodged along behind the shaft and stood away in the stern, where I could hear the propeller pounding the water. There was a little heap of refuse there, a few old scraps of junk and some bolts and pins. I thrust these aside with my foot and pried about in the cracks of the planks with a long cold chisel. Of a sudden I drew a quick breath; for a piece of one of the planks yielded gently. I raised it and saw below a dirty piece of canvas, which I lifted — and there lay my eight buckskin sacks, nested between two angle-irons, and smiling up at me like old friends!

"Where's that boy?" I heard Fishley bellow from

his station forward. "Where's Morning? Anybody seen him?"

"He didn't go out!" sang a voice from near the door.

I heard a quick beating of heavy soles along the planking, and the third officer pounced down upon me like a pelican after a fish, just as I had slipped the canvas over the treasure.

"Out o' that — out o' that!" he roared. "Git for'ard there, you young rascal!"

A stinging blow from the stick he carried fell upon my back.

"Not till I have got my gold!" I yelled at him angrily, though he was within two feet of me — "the gold you stole and hid away under this plank."

The men heard me, and they all rushed aft, in a whooping, compact mass that bore down upon us both so heavily that had I not ducked under the shaft they would have trampled me under their feet. It was evident that their curiosity to see and handle the gold, if not actually to make away with it, had much to do with this rash action. But many of them must have been moved by a natural desire to make Fishley desist from his evident intention of securing the treasure which they had all worked so hard to find, and which

was about to be taken away from before their very eyes.

In their wild, distorted view of the matter, half choked with the bad air, and with their brains a-buzzing, it must have seemed to them that they were about to be robbed; and so they pressed aft down the alley, a fierce, hot mass of half-naked, maniacal men, fired to the last drop of their blood with the relentless lust of gold.

"Keep him off — keep him off! Don't let him get it!" cried several of the mob.

"Where *is* the gold? Let's see it — let's see it!' shouted hysterical voices.

"Stand back!" yelled Fishley. "The' ain't no gold here. He's fakin'. Th' ain't no gold!"

I saw Trust's evil face near mine. He was pawing at the canvas which I had replaced upon the buckskin bags. I kicked his arm away, clapped the piece of planking back in its place and lay heavily upon it. Two men of the swaying, struggling mass fell near me, suffocated by the foul air and the steam of the hot, reeking bodies that were fighting their way aft. I saw Fishley on his knees near me, and in his hand was a shining something that must have been a knife. He bent over me with uplifted hand. I struck at his face

with my bare fist, and tried to pick up the cold chisel to strike him with it. He came at me again with the knife uplifted, but he was pulled back by the others. He floundered violently and lost the knife. Then he rose, leaning against the side of the alley, and kicked his way back a few feet. At last he and Trust sprang upon me simultaneously at either side, each man trying to roll me over in a different way and get at the gold.

"Don't let 'em git it!" I heard a ringing nasal voice cry out. "Don't let 'em git it!"

The mob sprang at us again, and pushed and huddled itself into a mass that could hardly lift hand or foot. I felt a terrible weight upon my breast. My face was buried in the greasy, sweltering, naked back of a prostrate man. The contact was insufferably loathsome to me, but I could not escape it. My legs were pinned down and something was grinding on my head. Then a dense blackness stole quietly over me, great wheels hummed in my head, and of what went forward during the next half-hour I was utterly oblivious.

XXI

IN WHICH MY BURDEN IS RESUMED

I AWOKE on deck, where I found myself lying on a cot, with the friendly face of Doctor Quaritch bending over me, and I could hear Yohara chattering near by. After the vile closeness of the shaft alley, the fresh, sharp afternoon breeze was a delight to my thick senses. But it was five minutes after I had opened my eyes and filled my lungs with the life-giving air before I could gasp out:

"The gold — did they get the gold?"

"The gold is safe, John. It's all in my black bag, right under your cot."

I breathed a deep, delicious breath and lay back exultant.

"Feels good, doesn't it — that air," remarked the Doctor. "We found you all lying in a pretty heap, Nason and I, when we got down there. Ten of you under chaps had fainted dead away and the rest hadn't strength enough to walk out of the tunnel by them-

selves. Fishley and Trust weren't very pretty to look at when we pulled 'em out. I never saw such a purple face as Fishley's, but he came to when we brought him out and soaked his head; and we've got him and Trust and Somers, all in irons."

"So you convinced the Captain that Fishley was one of the conspirators?"

"Yes; and it was easy, for there was the testimony of a lot of the passengers that they saw him trying to stab you."

"Do you think Fishley closed the ventilators?" I asked, remembering what Trust had said to Somers.

"What ventilators?"

"Those running into the shaft tunnel."

The Doctor smiled.

"There are no ventilators to the tunnel. All the air you got was from the engine-room, through the door."

"Which Fishley kept closed," I added.

"Did he? The scoundrel! Well, it turned out as badly for him as for the rest. He didn't count on that jamming up toward the stern-post. That was what made the trouble for him."

"But how about Bill?"

"Bill hasn't been seen. He probably heard about

the arrest of his pals and Fishley. But they'll get him, if he hasn't jumped overboard, which I very much doubt. For men just out of wrecks don't often do that."

I gave the Doctor's hand a grateful squeeze, and asked:

"How did you manage to keep the mob out of the gold? They were all after it, so it seemed to me."

"Why, John, there was no more resistance to them than in so many dead men. They were just lying there like flies in a corked bottle. They were stifled. It was the worst conglomerate case of mal-aria you ever saw. But they will all come around again — the rascals."

"Well, I don't know," said I, "that they were all rascals. A few of them seemed to be trying to help me."

"By piling on top of you and smothering you, eh? How do you feel, John?"

"All right," said I, sitting up; "and I'm going to get my old box—it's in our cabin—and put the gold in it."

"Our cabin's gone — torn down," said the Doctor, sadly; "but our things are all in with Mr. Nason's. Run and get that box, Yonara."

MAX FISHLEY

I rose rather stiffly when Yohara came with the box. I opened the Doctor's black bag and took out the gold, counting the buckskin sacks as I laid them affectionately in the box. The treasure seemed to have increased tenfold in value, although one of the sacks, from which a few hundred dollars' worth of the dust had been extracted, was a trifle light. There was still over forty thousand dollars' worth of gold left, so that what was missing seemed trivial to me.

Now I was a made man again. Now I could face my father. I breathed deeply two or three times and the Doctor smiled down at me.

"I think," said I, looking up at him, one of the heavy sacks in my hand, "that this belongs to you."

"To me? What are you thinking of?" he gruffed forth. "Do you suppose that I helped you as I did for the sake of your gold? No, sir — not for a moment! It was because you were the son of William Morning, and because you were my friend."

I saw that he was offended by my offer of the gift, and so I did not press it upon him, but made a quiet resolve that when we got ashore there should be some sort of substantial recognition of his services to me.

Bill was found toward evening in one of the empty

coal bunkers, and was hauled out and set to work in the fire-room. The Captain promised that all four of the men under guard should be turned over to the authorities as soon as we should reach port.

My gold was now safe in the purser's hands, and there was nothing more to fear from anybody's evil designs upon it.

The next morning we were all hard at work, tearing out what remained of the woodwork. We even chopped up the fore-hatch and shot it down the chute. The hatch was replaced by a piece of sail-cloth. We did not strike an axe in the large passenger saloon or the dining-room below, as they were built of costly wood; but when one of the young women aboard insisted upon drumming upon the piano, much to the Doctor's annoyance, he went in and gravely requested her to leave the instrument, as it was about to be broken up for fuel.

"Going to burn the piano?" she exclaimed. "Well, I s'pose they *are* pretty short of wood by this time." And she returned to her cabin, much to the relief of the Doctor.

"Well," he said to me as I cut away at an unwieldly piece of studding, "this should be our last day. We are only two hundred and fifty miles out, and ought

to reach port sometime to-night. The passengers are talking about a steamer to the eastward, but I haven't picked her up yet."

I looked sharply about the eastern horizon.

"There she is!" I cried. "Maybe this one will be more obliging than the other was."

"Oh, yes; I see her. Well, she isn't throwing out much smoke."

We went up to where Captain Head stood with his glass pointed toward the steamer.

"She's a little queer," said the Captain. "I can't make her out just yet. I don't believe she's making much way. She can't be the *San Bernardino*. She would be blowing out smoke for further orders. But by thunder, that's what she is!"

"The *San Bernardino*? Why, she ought to be dumping her coal over at the S. P. wharf by this time," was the Doctor's oracular remark.

"It's the *San Bernardino* all right," said the Captain. "I wonder why he's running her so slow. Well, we'll know pretty soon."

In less than an hour we were near enough for close observation. The steamer was drifting about idly, every stitch of her smoke-begrimed canvas to the breeze.

"Oh, she's making no way at all!" said the Captain, and his voice had an exultant note in it. "I'll tell you what, Doctor, she's stalled — broke her crank-shaft, I'll bet my buttons."

He called up the chief engineer, and I heard him say to that officer:

"Jim, we've simply got to make better speed. To-morrow will be the first, and we must be in by noon. Besides, I'd like to come a-flyin' up by the bows of that chap over there. Can't we do a little better?"

"Yes, sir; I've got a few knots up my sleeve yet."

"How can you make it? There's nothing but this light stuff out of the house."

"You won't mind, will you, how I do it?"

"No; not unless it's dangerous."

"Well, it *is* a little dangerous. You see, we've got four hundred gallons of coal oil on board in those tanks."

"Oh, you can't feed that illuminating stuff. It will go pop if you throw it in."

"I couldn't feed it in solid, I know. But I'll tell you wnat I can do: I can soak a lot of mattresses in it — roll 'em up and poke 'em in. That would work all right. Dangerous, of course; but we don't want to be out here all winter, do we?"

"Well, try it," said the Captain, with a smile. "Anything to get around that fellow."

"All right. In go the mattresses."

Within ten minutes we could smell the petroleum smoke from the stack, and in half an hour we were flying toward the *San Bernardino* at a good fifteen knots.

"Good morning, Captain!" said the *Modesto*'s master, with cool politeness, when we had neared the *San Bernardino*, and slowed down on her starboard side. "I see you are in no hurry about making port."

"Yes, I am; but my propeller's hung up for the present."

"I don't suppose you want a tow!" called Captain Head, in cutting tones.

"Well, yes; I'm in a hurry to get in. But you haven't any fuel."

"Oh, yes — enough to run in with."

"What are you asking?"

"Well, you are low in the water, and are a pretty soggy craft to handle, but I can tow you in all right."

"At what figure — five thousand?"

"Oh, no! Salvage!"

The Captain of the *San Bernardino* whistled.

"Huh, but you're burning your insides out!" he yelled. "You're showing half your bottom."

"What of it? My engines and machinery are in good order. I've got something to turn a screw with. But yours are useless. You're adrift, and may be carried anywhere by the current and the tides — perhaps on to the coast."

"Well," said the dejected Captain, still trying to make the best of the situation, "it would be only a matter of a few days with me, for I've got four good machinists at work fixing up the shaft. But time is valuable. If you'll tow me in, I'll give you all the coal you want and eight thousand dollars to make repairs with."

"Nothing but salvage, and I won't do it for that unless you let me have the coal and lend me your firemen. You wanted to take advantage of me, and now perhaps you'll learn something."

"All right," said the crestfallen Captain of the *San Bernardino*. "Pass us your line."

The sea was smooth, and, as the crew worked rapidly, in a short time we had plenty of coal aboard and the aspect of affairs was wholly changed. All the firemen were soon cooling off on deck. Half of the crew had

quit work, and the passengers were singing and smoking and making merry — all save Trust and Somers, who, with Fishley and Bill, were in irons down in the steerage.

"This isn't so bad for the ship after all," was Doctor Quaritch's remark to me, as he glanced at the low-lying *San Bernardino*, trailing along astern. "We didn't burn a third of our deckhouse woodwork, and those planks from the holds weren't worth much. Twenty thousand dollars will pay for the repairs, so the Captain says, and the salvage will be twice that amount. We have really made money by gutting the ship."

We steamed along, the *San Bernardino* in tow, picked up Point Lobos light by midnight, and next morning, after some little delay, because of a rigid quarantine inspection, lay alongside the Howard-street wharf, where I could hear the old familiar hum of the trolley-cars, the sound of which made my heart leap with joy. Never did the grimy streets of the water-front wear such a friendly look as in the hazy sunlight of that brisk October morning.

I had come back to the city of my birth, after my long Arctic pilgrimage, and after all my moving adven-

tures by land and sea, and I had fetched home with me the golden treasure of my dreams, safe from all the covetous hands that had reached forth to clutch it and wrest it from me. To say that I was glad but poorly expresses the delight I felt when the plank was lowered and we all crowded to the side. Doctor Quaritch had undertaken the task of informing the Federal authorities about the prisoners, and I ran down the gang-plank, jumped into a cab, and in a few minutes was flying up Market street.

I burst in upon my good people, who were soon all in a high state of excitement, my mother weeping and laughing all at once, my sisters and brothers making wild demonstrations of welcome, and my father's wan face — he had just come safely out of his long siege of illness — wreathed in glad smiles.

"About the gold," asked my father, after I had been nearly smothered by my affectionate sisters, "is it safe?"

"It will be in the Mint to-morrow." I showed him the purser's receipt.

"Did you have any trouble bringing it down?" asked he, considerately.

"Did I have any trouble?" I repeated. "Well, yes — a little!"

And then I gave him an outline of the adventures that I have detailed more fully to the readers of the foregoing chapters.

The next day, after the gold had been deposited in the Mint, I saw Trust and the others in prison, which I visited in company with Doctor Quaritch. Somers and Bill were lying on their cots behind the bars, apparently asleep. Fishley was reading a newspaper, and persistently kept his face away from us. Trust was smoking a cigarette and writing in a corner of his cell.

"Wait a minute," said he, as we turned to go. "I'm just putting the finishing touches to this."

A moment later he rose, gathered up a half-dozen sheets of writing paper that lay before him, and passed them through the bars to me, saying:

"Here's something I wrote for you."

"For me?" I asked, wondering.

"Yes, for you — to read."

I surmised that the scrawl he had penciled on the paper was some sort of plea for clemency on the part of the complaining witness against him. But it consisted of eleven stanzas of what purported to be poetry, at the top of which I read the title: "The Gold-Seeker's Lament."

I handed the manuscript to the Doctor, who glanced at it askance for a moment, then took it and looked it over with a smile.

"I know one gold-seeker who will lament long enough," he said, in an undertone to me, as he glanced toward Trust significantly. "He'll have plenty of time where he's going for writing poetry. Let us hope that while he's there he'll improve his style as well as his morals."

The Doctor and I left the prison and took a street car to go down to the wharf and visit the old *Modesto*, now in the hands of the repair gang, and pay our respects to Captain Head. As we passed along East street, by the wharves, and saw the great hulks lying in the bright sunshine that glinted over a summer sea, I bethought myself of the cold, forbidding Bering coast, and shivered a little in spite of the warmth of the day.

As we neared the dock, we heard one of the passengers in the car, who was going aboard an Australian steamer, remark in a sophisticated tone to another, in reply to a question as to the probable dangers and adventures of his proposed voyage:

"Oh, no! Life on board ship is tame enough in these commercial days. All the romance is gone out

of it. Now you take a big ocean steamer, either on the Atlantic or the Pacific, or anywhere you want to go — life aboard of her is no more adventurous or interesting than it is on a railroad train. Everything goes along about as smoothly as on the rail, and the experiences of a steamer captain are not much different from those of a conductor. Romance? adventure? there isn't a bit of it left on the sea."

I looked at the Doctor, and the Doctor looked at me.