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A Tale of the Great West.

BY
Richard Matthews Harper

Author of "The Lone Star,"

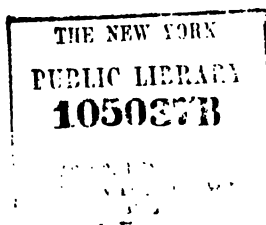
"The Lone Wolf,"

and "The Lone Rider."



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I

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon when the small porter of the *Yuly Yinks*, throwing overboard his cigarette, went down into the fantail or lower stern to waken Cagey, one of the firemen.

Stepping into the starboard room, the porter first gazed with unconcealed contempt into the faces of the men sprawled there in four dark bunks. Sweat glistened on their bodies; they sighed and mumbled in their sleep; slight tremors and twitchings possessed them, and their ribs rose and fell to the spasmodic action of oppressed lungs.

The air here was hot and foul; not a breath came in at the ports, for the ship was snubbed in close, and the tin windjammers thrust out of them nearly touched the black uprights of the coal dock.

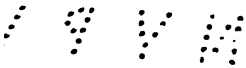
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The little porter, higher in the scale, found something contemptible and even unmanly in the willingness of these men to put up with such a job as theirs. Secretly he said to himself that they were soft.

Pretty soft they were, to go down into that something of a firehole and vomit themselves inside out for \$52.50 a month. They were very strong men, quite competent to thief and take by force. What a pack of stiffs then, to lean into the fires as they did, and lose their appetites, and singe their hair. Well the little porter knew that hair is no negligible glory.

But to his silent criticism they returned nothing but more sighs, puttering with their lips, and knocking their huge elbows against the partition of robin's-egg blue, smeared with black grease and coal dust. In the lower bunk to the left, Joe the Spaniard twirled his fine black mustache with a deft thumb, and slept on.

"Wop," spat the little porter at him venomously, and narrowed his green, faun-like eyes.



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Then he singled out the gigantic naked shoulder of Cagey, in the bunk above, and sank grimy fingers into it.

“Hey there, Cagey.”

“All right,” said the man Cagey murderously, without opening his eyes. The porter withdrew.

Cagey lay on motionless, with his eyes closed. He had been cleaning out backheads, last watch, a thing good for the temper and constitution of no man, citizen or convict. Thus though usually clean, he had this time turned in without washing; his upper body was black, and striped on the chest like a zebra, where the sweat had washed broad channels. Body and soul, he felt himself unredeemed, and consciousness was a curse to him.

“Here You,” he said in a heavy voice of command, for he led these forces of abandonment unquestioned. The man Here You—he had no other name on that ship—heard the voice of his master afar off through dreams of plunder, and in his sleep protested. He lay on his back, with his mouth open, and his great bony hands

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crossed on his breast. He was as lean all over as a spectre; the looming skull stared through the skin of his face like the shadow of death impending; his blue lids were stretched tight over the eyeballs; and his red nose came up out of this desolated face like the forefoot of an imbedded wreck. His black shirt, gaping at the chest, was arabesqued with winding white salt stains, like dried brine on a beach, due to the heavy sweating of his kind of body.

“Here You,” said Cagey, “give us a cigarette.”

The man fumbled under his mattress, and flung out a package of the tailor-made.

“Hot, ain’t it?” he muttered subserviently.

“Hah,” said Cagey.

He brought forward his immense shoulders, spattered with freckles, and lit a cigarette. Then with the match smoking in his fingers he sighed, blinked, stared morosely.

He had astonishing hard blue eyes, set wide on either side of a hawk nose, broken at the bridge;

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and these eyes, shaking off sleep, burned over his pitted cheeks with sullen brilliance. He looked contemptuously at the deckhand, who had fallen asleep again; blew out smoke in a long stream, refined, from the bottom of his patient lungs, and set his feet on the deck.

Then he swung his heavy arms in slow circles, he rolled his head oddly, and sinking to his knees, ended by laying himself face down, and rolling about on his stomach, taking the knots out. So he slaked the thirst of his fire-swept muscles.

After this he stood soaping his huge body under the shower on the port side, and listening with the smoldering disdain of a man remote from all life-contacts, to what the little porter was saying to the second engineer.

“I’m losin’ it now,” said the porter, continuing, “but I certainly did have an elegant head of hair up to last year.”

The second engineer, morose and fat, turned his bull-like head towards Cagey, in a vacuous en-

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imity; and the fireman, streaming water now on his black shoulders, gave him back the more fiery contempt of youth.

"I was slingin' the drinks last winter at Ned McGrath's place in Buffalo," went on the porter, "an' I seen dis blonde one night; an' after dat dere was nutt'n to it. Nutt'n to it, kid. Well, but she didn't like my hair, dat's a fact, an' one night w'en I stoops down to pick some change out'n her ankle, she outs with the peroxide and lets me have it slap. Course then I had to finish the job, but honest, w'en I seen it, I could a-slipped somethin' over on her. New Yorker she was; well, I couldn't never stand them New York germs."

Cagey and the second engineer were silent; and the little porter, running a worried hand through his hair, went out on deck, flinging back at Cagey,

"Steward wants to see you."

Thereupon Cagey resumed his cigarette, and said malignantly,

"If he spikes that clock again in my watch, he

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will only see me once after that. Only once, that's all. Get that?"

Bringing the towel down over his face with a slow and forcible motion, he inquired bitterly of the second engineer whether this steward was skipper of the ship or what. What should the fat fool mean by setting the clock back, so adding another hour to the watch in the hole—all this by moving his damned fat finger in a circle once? Had the skipper authorized him to do that? Cagey didn't care if he laid a season's wages in the negative. Furthermore, he was talking about locking the firemen out of the icebox. That was good, that was. A man that could say anything as good as that ought not to be suffering on a freighter. He could keep seagulls out of any wheelhouse. Did the steward crave an opportunity to explain to the skipper why the ship had stopped? All right, let him only contrive to keep Cagey out of the icebox in the fire-watch.

"I'll get the ice all right," he said vehemently. "You needn't be afraid of me sufferin'."

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He turned his back on the second engineer, bending again to the basin, and displaying a black channel between the shoulder blades which his half-muscle-bound arms could never reach. The second engineer rolled loosely inside his vast shirt of blue, which would show white dots anon; mouthing his small black pipe, he swung his head towards the lumber yard across the creek with the contemplative insolence of a sulky bull; allowed a moody interval to pass; and finally, turning a face of unrelenting brutality towards the fireman, said,

“Sufferin’? You was built to suffer, feller. Nothing won’t never come soft for you.”

“Hah,” said Cagey, and his eyes burned with their strange light, half humor, half savagery.

II

GOING out on deck, he lay down on the curved iron tiller aft, levelling half-closed eyes at the steward—a fat rascal, who sat in shadow, trying to read a novel, and at the same time scratching the back of his black and white cur, Toots.

“So the old man wants me to tell Grant the ship’s leaving, does he?” said Cagey.

“Yes.”

“Grant coming this trip?”

“The whole caboodle, I guess. Noice Toots.”

The steward rubbed the ruffled grey hairs on his chest, and the kindly creases deepened which ran either side of his immense, benevolent nose.

Cagey’s eye glittered.

“Old Grant, is it? Well, not so bad, not so worse. But how about the young one?”

“They tell me he’s quite a dude,” said the stew-

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ard. "The old man has seen times when he was glad to get a decking job; shovel coal or slob on grease or anything you're a mind to say; but the young one is tender. My, the second mate tells me he keeps a woman polishing up his nails two thirds of the time."

"He works in a bank now," muttered Cagey. "He's out of college; works in a—bank."

"They say the second generation is going out to work, nowadays," said the steward. "Kind of fattening up their averages."

"The second generation," repeated Cagey, and sank his fist against the iron of the tiller. Then he lay basking, while the blood swelled his lax arms, and the late sun glittered on the thick growth of red hair which covered them. These round enormous arms, with their red hair, and their loose-hanging habits, oddly suggested the arms of a gorilla. But his eyes burned with something other, something more than the unthinking ferocity of an ape; and his lips were set in an expression of wistful cruelty. For this

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Cagey was a weaver of savage dreams, wrought in a heart of flame; a man of ponderings which boded no man good.

For a period of more than ten years, in hot and cold, wet watches and dry, one desire had claimed him. This red desire had been present to him as he lay out on slanted yards in southern seas; he had heard it rise from the ringing of mauls in the stone-breaking colonies, to which he had before now lent the power of his gifted arm; it was one with all the deviltry of the high seas, with the roar of machinery and the snarl of steam. In short, it was the crude philosophy fixed in his head by the oppression of bodily torment, a philosophy of blood and terror and revenge; having for its sole aim and object the undoing of this Bartholomew Grant, shipping magnate.

But in accomplishing this thing, the intelligence of the man Cagey must be satisfied. He required a setting for his act; and this chance now seemed to have arranged. The man was actually coming aboard the ship whose fires Cagey fed.

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Nothing strange in that, to be sure; for Bartholomew Grant was a heavy stockholder in the line. Not strange, yet auspicious; for now, if the man Altschuler had played his part, Cagey might have them both, father and son, simultaneously under his fist. Yes, even that could be seriously considered now. He was to meet Altschuler at five o'clock. . . .

"There is a girl coming too," purred the steward, "who is some chicken, I am told."

He spoke without passion.

"You think you can stir me up by saying that," returned the fireman. "You're a hot specimen, you are. I tell you, I am independent . . . independent of women. I have got an independent job, I have; that's all there is to it why I'm here."

The steward, absorbed in his novel, said nothing to this; and Cagey glared at his boots, eyeing his toes ranged within through the holes in the leather burnt by the falling of white coals.

Then he rolled off the tiller and strode up the

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starboard alley, his eyes narrowed on the forepart of the quivering freighter.

She was a long-drawn-out Dachshund of the Lakes, this *Yuly Yinks*, with a wheelhouse for'ard, and coal bunker and accommodations aft—and in between a vast stretch of blistering red steel decks, gashed thwartships by twelve great hatches. The forepart of the ship scarcely knew the hindpart by sight, so far were they separated by this iron carrying case, divided into four pockets, which was slung between them. Salt water men, seeing her for the first time, stood with open mouths to see such a "limber ship," and they slapped their legs and swore and said that such a ship as that would break her back in half an hour if she was to go a shoving her carcase into the North Atlantic.

Still she was a good boat for the Lakes, this *Yuly Yinks*; coal and grain and ore were continually pouring into this black maw or being lifted out of it. On this afternoon she was unloading coal, inclined to be clamorous as she

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lightened. In the after holds, the iron clams of the coal dock, swinging through the dust-crowned hatches, were already gnashing their lips against the bottom of the ship, shuddering and stumbling over rivets, and sending a reverberation of the clash of steel and iron through all those iron chambers.

From the crude black oriel above the nearest clam, a livid arm was for a moment thrust, sparkling with sweat, into the red sunlight, and the fingers, cramped by their continual grip of the levers which directed the clam, opened and shut, opened and shut.

The face of this man, remaining in shadow, was white, sunken, flicked with grease; the eyes, from incessant watchfulness, had receded, and glowed, baleful and sullen, from the dark caverns of the sockets. And as Cagey watched this man, he entertained the same notion that had filled the mind of the little porter, an hour back, when he had seen the four men sprawled in their bunks.

Cagey thought, "What a fool to take a job like

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that. No watch off. He has to work all day."

For Cagey had spent his youth on the salt water, on ships, generally, and to work all day was to him inconceivably more harsh than to work half the day and half the night, which was his own custom.

Yet more vaguely, he had a fellow-feeling with the man; a feeling that he and this fellow were somehow trapped, chained into place, and yet not by chains but by a sentiment, by some expectation, as of their continued submissiveness, lodged in the hearts of this multitude that lived in houses—this soft multitude whose will could not be thwarted. Men had decreed that Cagey and his kind ought to be reasonable and kindly beings, for were they not fed and given shelter for five months out of the year, in return for the unintelligent service of feeding fires? Who was Cagey that he should think to overleap the rule of the social order, which gave to the work of the hands this, and to the work of the head that? He was expected to exert his strength in a right

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direction, putting up somehow with the fact, not disputed, that nothing would ever make him personally any better off. Strange charity of brawn to the age of reason! Mysterious dominion of the mind, which no one sees, over the body which everyone can see, in its torment, in its ransom by sweat and blood and strain of the hours of sleep!

Cagey continued to stare in sullen wonder at that man, as he toiled, fixed to one spot, subject to some invisible force which gripped him as securely as he gripped his levers, centering his eyes for ten black hours on those swinging clams. Merciless tyranny of numbers . . . words . . . statutes. Opening his huge, blunt-ended fingers, he closed them on the air, speculating. What statute ever yet had cowed that grimy fist?

At this moment the second engineer came out of his room, and shouted at him,

"Get that spare slice-bar when you come by the shipyard," resuming at once his look of ruminant hostility.

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The glittering blue eyes of the fireman shone with the light of a contempt whether for God-or-man-created things, beside which the contempt of the second engineer was nothing. For this contempt of Cagey was magnificent, the contempt of youth, a universal scorning, founded on might and abandonment and malice. Cagey would brook nothing, retract nothing, compromise nothing. He would suffer no check and no humiliation. Death rather, and at any time. For this cynicism that goes with unregarding strength is a wonderful satisfaction to the soul; the treasured possession of a few, dying always with youth. Once it may be the second engineer had had it; but now he was getting old, and filling up with doubts, and second thoughts.

Mastered by these, he turned away, dumb and sad, murmuring in his throat,

“Well, keep your shirt on. I ain’t trying to get your goat.”

Firemen were scarce, and the chief, he knew, would never part with Cagey, though on no ac-

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count would he have had him in his own watch. But the fellow got the steam; yes, he wrestled with the great god steam, and brought him to his knees, and set him turning the shaft over. He was a necessary evil.

Therefore Cagey grinned securely, like the independent slave of a great idea that he was, and moved towards the ladder. But to reach it, he had to pass the galley, and as he did so, a low voice cried in his ear.

The fireman halted, without looking in.

"Well?" he said guardedly.

A pale woman inside, dressed in black, with masses of grayish yellow hair, stared at him half in terror.

"They say he's coming aboard."

"That's right," said Cagey. "Both of 'em, if I know anything about it."

She leaned towards him till her nose touched the screen between them.

"I can't bear that."

"Yes, you can. Oh, yes, you can."

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"No, not that."

"You can lay low, can't you? He's got his head in the air. Do you think he would come jobbing round the galley, to get his lamps on you, after what he done?"

"It ain't that. It ain't him. But you say—"

"Oh, it's the young one, is it?" said Cagey. "Well, now listen. I'm taking care of him. I'm taking care of Alexander Grant."

The woman pressed him with woeful eyes.

"What you going to do? Remember it ain't his fault."

"I never said nothing was nobody's fault yet," said Cagey. "But I will squeeze him."

The woman shut her trembling lips, opening them to ask faintly,

"You're going to see Altschuler now?"

"Yes," said Cagey. "So what's the good of talking?"

His eyes shot fire.

"I'll have 'em both here by tomorrow night. So watch out."

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He moved away, going over the side brooding, and clambered down the ladder with a side-to-side motion, like a huge ape.

In the shadow of the dock, he stood still to draw breath, a long, lung-renovating breath which charged him with oxygen against firing-time. And now, in the massive and beautiful mould of his body, in the heavy slope of his shoulders, in the jut of his hawk-nose, there was a kind of splendor, splendor of youth, alert and scheming—though by the light in his eyes, and the dreaming cruelty of his full lips, rather the splendor of a 'demon.

The dock laborers were stopping work, bending down stiffly, like old men, to light their pipes and pick up their dinner pails. As he strode among them, the fireman thought, with a glee which his face could not reflect, how many of these same dinner pails he had hooked up from between tracks, as he went riding the tops of moving freights, beating his way down from the North—hah, beating down, with the frost begin-

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ning to get into his bones. A piece of wire with the end bent into a hook had served the angling nature of this theft. Robbing the workingman! Well, what would you have, with winter coming on and the South beckoning? His own body was more significant to him than theirs. Dog eat dog, like devour like, in this world of crawling things. . . .

The sun had set when he came into Joe Barnaby's saloon; there was an agreeable dark in there, a queer mustiness that took hold of his heart, associating itself with his winter-revels. At one end of the bar an automatic piano, scarcely visible, went trampling out a Valse Lamente; and at the other end, by a wet table, against the loom of great barrels, he saw the man Altschuler waiting for him, with a cold cigar in his mouth, and a smile on his bland face.

Rocking across the saloon, Cagey stood over the fat body of the gambler, his friend and ally.

"Well, Harry?" he said darkly. "Spill your guts."

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"It's all right," said Altschuler. "I want you to take him now. He's cleaned the place out."

"And you've cleaned him out, what?"

"Oh, well," said Altschuler, "I don't say."

He thrust a beer at Cagey.

"You blokes give me a cramp," said Cagey.

"You do, that's a fact."

He wiped the foam from his beer with the flat of his hand and drank.

"What do you want to do for me?" he growled.

The man Altschuler laid a bundle of crisp bills on the table.

"There's a hundred," he said. "Now I don't mind saying that he's worse than useless to me. The Grand Jury'll be at work in a week or so, and there's a few tracks in the snow, Jim, see? Put it that way, a few tracks in the snow."

"Hah," said Cagey, contemptuous of this sleekness. Altschuler leaned forward in the gloom.

"So if you get him under your wing, and he don't come back—I'm putting it that way, see—

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if he don't come back, there'll be a thousand more on the table. A thousand."

A look of terrible exultation filled the merciless eyes of the fireman, which seemed then to blaze with their own light.

"All right," he said. "I'll take him, damn him."

They leaned together, and began to talk, the hard voice of the fireman only now and then cutting short the bland syllables of his informant.

III

YOUNG Alexander Grant came out of the First National Bank, lighting a gold-tipped cigarette, and looking through the window at the shining rosewood, at the elbows and the bald head of Hendrick the cashier, who was staying late. Then moving on, he walked awesomely under the stars. Verily, in the circumstances the bald head of Hendrick the cashier was hard to bear. He was so damned faithful, so dismally unsuspecting, thought young Alec Grant. Anyone but that trusting fool must have brought this agony of waiting to a close a month ago. Poor Hendrick would sooner believe that he had done it himself in a trance, in one of his looking-out-the-window moods, some hypnotic vagary of the lowered spectacles.

The unfortunate Alexander wiped his brow with a scented handkerchief, and his nails sparkled

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in the moonlight. He wore a collar so high and so clean that it more than competed with his face in interest; and his dark suit was an aristocratic misfit about the shoulders. In the breast pocket of the coat there was a thin red book, which now contained the only truthful figures relative to the affairs of the First National Bank.

"The old shellback," he reflected bitterly; "he takes my figures like a baby would its bottle."

In sober truth the bank which he had just left was not now a bank, but the shell and shadow of a bank only. Young Alec Grant had scraped it clean inside, so that it was now only a damnable little building with a statement of its capital in gilt figures on a plate glass window, and certain glossy fixtures, over which rose the bars of filigreed cages. . . . Bars . . .

This exodus of cash through the conduit Alexander Grant had, in the first instance, been merely a teasing at the sands, and was now a veritable tide-rip, making for the green tables at Ladd's place. He had shifted a deposit once, and lost

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it at Ladd's place. And he had gone on shifting deposits, and losing them at Ladd's place. It had to be said for Alexander that he was a very solid mathematician; for over a period of some months, with surprising ingenuity, he had gone on keeping the bank outwardly composed; contorting the pages of his ledgers, and hoping for a change of luck at Ladd's place. Within the last week he had begun to suspect that not luck, but science—applied science—was the ruling principle at Ladd's place; the face of the man Altschuler, bland and brooding, was, when he came to think of it, scientific in a rare degree. . . .

He could never recoup; that he could take for certain. He had lost a trifle over \$200,000; going so far, even, with amazing skill and considerateness for that thin ice, as to impinge a little on the bank's credit. He was conscious of a certain contempt for the whole business, arising out of the fact that he had been able to balance that bank on the point of his pen for four months. Literally on the point of his pen. It was so slight

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a thing that a lying figure could uphold it, a whispered insinuation tumble it into ruin. Papers, papers! Faugh!

Say what you would of his predicament, it was rotten unromantic. They were merely going to point to his perverted figures presently, and send for the police. All very weak, very dreary. In his youth he urgently required bigness. If he had to come to grief, he wanted to come to grief mightily. There was, for example, that well-known murderer whom a thousand women had deluged with white roses on his way to the chair. Rather fine. Milton's Satan. Actually there would be more of the epic quality in tracking him for downright murder. . . . He had been sheared for a lamb, and now he wanted to be shot for a lion.

No luck like that. Clap him into jug, that was all. With all his passionate love of nature, too, which it had taken four years of Wordsworth's poems at college to instil into him. Charles Manville Wrenn, his father's friend, was President of

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the Board of Directors, but he was certain to find Wrenn filled with a ghastly historic conception of justice.

And when he thought of his father, the Viking, Bartholomew Grant, he shivered in good earnest, and his long legs widened their straddle. The Viking was a square man, a square man with hard corners, at it is said; a man dishearteningly just, who had risen from the bench, not so much by intelligence, though he had that too, as by the operation of his resistless will. He believed in letting men abide by the consequences of character. This he had said in plain speech, many the time, of late, since he had become prosperous; and poor Alexander knew by that token that his father's many millions were locked against him, and that the Viking would let him lie where he fell.

Yet the Viking and Wrenn, reflected rebellious Alexander, got money as naturally as they breathed. They could scarcely discuss the market without bringing forward opportunities for

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further millions. They sat in chairs together, and ferreted out ventures, with half closed eyes, all in the form of after-dinner chat. Shady ones, as like as not, if it weren't for the power they had of making their own rules. Well, somebody had to make the rules, thought Alexander; and these were strong men. And then they had that quality of seeming to draw confidence from some foreknowledge of happy fortune. They were always hanging on for the shift of wind that always came.

No shift of wind for Alexander. Here he was spinning around and going down by the head, like a shark with a nose-bleed, as the Viking was fond of saying about his antagonists. Hurrying home through this hot night in August, young Alexander had to admit that his father was tremendous; tremendous even in his analogies, his figures of speech. . . . But yet he stood in the way of his son like a jail wall.

Still mulling over in his mind this cheerless obliteration of his young life, Alexander came to

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his father's house; but instead of walking up the drive, he skirted the pine trees to the left, and came up in the shadow of the screened-in porch. The deep bank of clematis there gave the gloom a purple tinge; and when he paused he was close enough to hear the rasp of a match, and the general inconsiderate rumble of his father's physical personality.

He had no need to take the world's word for it that his father was a source of terrors. This knowledge was his own. Standing stock still, he heard him breathe, with oppressive exhalations; he heard the wicker chair give, and his father cough heavily now and again, with stertorous after-sounds, mingled with the disagreeable chortle of his vast pipe. These sounds were dreadful to Alexander; they evidenced a merciless lack of repression in the character of that magnate; and each and every one was like a flagellation to his guilty spirit. His father was a man who lived with his face forward, a man indeed whose life had been for ten years one mighty

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surge forward, a surge comprehensive and unreasoning like that of the tides which had borne him in his youth.

Impossible to confess crime to such a man. He had put the word out of mind.

“He’d smash me up altogether,” was the thought of Alexander, as he stood waiting on those sounds with thumping heart.

At that moment he heard the Mænad—that was Mrs. Wrenn, saying, “Now I’ve made it, I guess you men-folk can find a way to eat it,” and by that he understood that Charles Manville Wrenn and his father were going to know what it was like to eat many more slices of cinnamon toast. Night and cinnamon toast were terribly linked in the mind of that lady. And nightly, these two grim gentlemen, whose enterprises were nation-wide, moved their jaws over it without murmuring. It amused them, very faintly, to be bullied by women.

“You won’t be able to make it on the boat, Martha,” said Wrenn.

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On the boat! Then Avis had brought that little campaign to a close. Trust Avis Wrenn to wrap them round her little finger, especially the Viking. The Viking was more fond of her than her own father, who, whenever he was assailed by the fact of his daughter's beauty, coughed and seemed to think, "Let me see, let me see; how come I to number this exquisite witch among my effects. Who are we—and where do we all stand."

Avis then, returning to college, wanted to go by the Lakes; and by the Lakes she was going. An easy matter, for the Viking was heavily interested in Lake shipping. They had merely to select a boat and then away.

A mercy, thought Alexander. Avis would take—all this—hard. He would quite certainly break under her girlish defence of him, as she would surely defend him; and he had no desire to break. It was a case for stalking gloomily into court . . . day after day . . . Milton's Satan. A good thing that Avis was going East.

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He heard the Mænad saying,

"I shall die on your boat. I do think, Charles, you might have more manhood than to take your poor wife and child aboard that dirty freighter. It's unspeakable. They swarm with vermin and you know it."

"Yes," said Charles, very carefully and slowly. "Yes." Utterly without meaning. Her voice, not her words, had fallen on his ears. He was thinking, sunk in one of those vast caves of his brain where gloom and treasure lay; and at stages of his thought he coughed, with his hand over his mouth; a cough not at all assertive like the cough of Bartholomew Grant, but discreet and uneasy, the cough of a man coping with infinities.

It began to appear to Alexander a crying absurdity that this remote little man, who had happened to put the First National Bank into his pocket the year before, and could hardly have given it a thought since, should now be capable of this remorseless incarceration of his—Alexander's—person. Forgetting the law, which lends

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power to the elbow, he planted this absurdity squarely on the ground that, being larger and stronger than Charles Manville Wrenn, he could, if he chose, and at any time, "knock his block off." He quivered suddenly with an anarchistical longing to demolish all constituted authority; to contrive his freedom by effecting something—vast; a revolution, possibly. As the red moment fled past, he felt himself not averse to blood; but in the next one his father, invisible to him, tapped his pipe into the brass pan at his elbow, and said heavily,

"It's a clean boat . . . Do you good . . . I'm expecting a man up from the dock, when she's unloaded. Curse these . . . strikes."

"Avis will have it," said the Mænad. And in a different tone, "There's one piece left. Come, Charles."

Poor Alexander, feeling this mean sound of munching like an affront upon his tragedy, fled without noise, going towards the Blue Ravine, where he had told Avis to be waiting for him.

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When he crossed the tennis-court, he saw a little flame leaping up beyond. This flame struck gigantic silver sparkles out of the gazing-globe, which sat mysteriously on its fluted column; a red tongue swept the gold fish pool, and set the tiger lilies glaring out of the dark behind the slender birches. This odd pocket in the blue stone, lined with crimson woodbine, opened upon the night like one of nature's secret treasuries; for an instant the poet conflicted with the fledgling criminal in his heart; and his dark eyes fell with forgetful rapture on the figure of Avis Wrenn.

"Oh, Avis," he said thickly.

She was kneeling by the pool with her hands spread; and the little goldfish, trained by many soft fingers, came to the surface with imploring mouths.

"Oh, Alec," she cried, her head down, "do come and see these little dears beg of my finger-ends."

Alexander came close, feeling very dark, very base, steeped in crime. Tonight, for the first time, he had faced himself, doubled on himself, so

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to speak; and there, such enough, he was looking into the eyes of a consummate criminal. Such moments are strange.

"They're half asleep," said Avis.

"So they are," said Alexander, very gravely.

This intonation drew Avis to her feet; she looked proudly at him, a smile trembled on her red lips. Swiftly she put both hands on the shoulders of her black knight and straightened her arms, swaying back.

"My goodness, what's up, Alec? You look awful."

"Do I?" said Alexander. "Feeling fit; feeling fit as—silk."

"Well, you look more like—hemp," said Avis, shaking him.

Hemp. What a curiously tactless thought, reflected Alexander. Hemp . . . halts.

"Tell me, Alec," she begged. "Something at the bank?"

He turned and scuffed a cedar-log into the fire. What a gift for penetration the girl had.

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"It's my—balance," he said hoarsely. "I've lost—my balance. That is—that's a silly way to put it; I can't get my—balance."

He actually reeled, like a brandy-fed pigeon; and added politely, "For July, you know."

The girl stared at him steadily; and now he saw that she was twirling a spray of the red woodbine in her lips—doubting him. What eyes—sweet in constancy, terrible in doubt! Veritably with winged lights playing about them, this a caress, that a torment, here a dove, and there a raven light, and yet again, an eaglet—something proud and fierce, looking down as if to pounce—as if to pounce on Alexander's lie.

So soft, so slim and elegant she was; irresistible in these clothes, these light and mischievous affectations of substance caught about her without folds, affectionate, severe, immuring. Alexander, in a warm flash, felt the rarity of this creature, whom he must lose. Miserably tormented, he dwelt on the long lash, the thick hair, blue black in shadow, and very definite on the pale

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brow, like something woven; and then the arm, as she levelled it at him, with an underline which held his eye like a line of deliberate art, this arm dodging between slenderness and something more—substance and the promise of substance. Touching was the word; and then something alert and candid and abandoned, a source of rapid enchantments.

“What is it, Alec?” she said again, and now her hands met behind his neck. He felt the soft fingers sliding together, and pulling him gently down. What heart would not be touched. Her eyes were stilled; all the winged lights with folded wings; and looking down at her so, Alexander could have cried.

“Nothing,” he said.

The arms fell; she moved away from him, hurt, and sat down on the joggle-board, beginning to joggle faintly back and forth. She stirred with her breath the gauzy thing that lay against her throat.

What innocence, what charm, thought Alexan-

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der darkly. And then a mournful thought swept him, the dread silencer of passion, which no love can quite cry down; a thought of the decay of all that. Death. What meaning then in this ardent instinct for possession burning in him? Might he not better rot in jail? So many hopes, so many desires, and all these, what were they but pain, but madness destined to a dull end in satisfaction. Alexander had read this in a book. Then let him shortly find peace, in going to a place where he could scarcely gratify the least of them. Thus Alexander, upon whose spirit shades of the prison-house descended.

Then a wave of some contrary emotion dashed him another way; and he gazed down at Avis Wrenn with a yearning that pressed out all the walls of his heart. He wanted to fling himself at her feet, and cry out that he was a thief and take her hand then . . . and ask forgiveness of her eyes. But although some gentle doubt stood in those eyes, back of that was trust; a deep assumption that everything was right. In this world

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of the Viking's leisure, and Wrenn's leisure, all roads seemed free and trustworthy and companionable; a world of scents and twinklings, of far music over misty lawns, of subtleties and charms which rocked all the five senses together in one delicious heap, where they kicked out naked in the lap of things. It was what the Viking called his "swept-up world," a world where no one labored, and no effort was put out, and where this rare spirit could move in a fair freedom of the body, undismayed.

Yes, everything must come right for her; as so far it had come right for Alexander. Mandolins, gay streamers, lively women, song and supper; what wonder if Alexander had felt the mournfulness of his separation from all that, when his father had thrust him into Wrenn's bank, and forced him to live on what he made? If the other was a life of play, what was this? A life on paper. Not living—vegetating, functioning, after the manner of jelly-fish. What wonder if the seduction of Ladd's place had won him, and coaxed

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him into attaching this mathematical spigot to the reservoir of the bank's funds?

Alexander craved the key of life; and now it was to be turned in the lock against him. Unquestionably in the course of incarceration, there were secrets to be learned.

He was checked; but then she tilted up her head, and smiled a brief smile, with a clear light in her eyes that he had seen before—so sweet, so brief, so daring.

"Avis," he cried, his voice unguarded.

"Alec, dear," she half sobbed, "you are cruel. . . . My lips are trembling a little—I know they are."

Quickly, as if some shut gate had opened wide, the unconsidering Alec bent, and set his lips lightly, then fiercely, long and long, against hers. . . . He drew back, still feeling the round of her shoulder in the palm of his hand.

"Why, Alec," she said, breathless, in the little frightened drawl that was wont to succeed her daring, "I didn't mean . . . all that."

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“Now,” thought Alec swiftly, “I shall certainly have to go away.”

There swarmed into his sick heart every argument for the folly and injustice of that kiss, betraying all, which he had delayed until now; now of all times. He stood away from her, trembling himself; and suddenly she put her hot face in her hands and sank forward a little, every mellow line of her collapsing. Alexander, stricken, felt this something new, upspringing like the flame at his feet; and knew that by that one impress he had breathed into that fair body a yearning, into that quick brain a fire, which would make a mockery of freedom. For never more could he meet that yearning, nor crouch by that fire that was love until it sank and died and resignation came again.

“Why, Alec,” she murmured, “I—like you to do—like that.”

Alexander fell back, and, in his confusion, caught up a birch pole, and tried to urge a block of stone away, which narrowed the fireplace.

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Night eternal, rather than more of this . . . this unjust fusion of them, which he had not foreseen. Yet why had he not foreseen? All these years he had known her; they had been boy and girl together; it was strange that his need for sympathy, this little act, had so terribly rent a thin veil and set up this great glow between them, like direct sunshine. But he was looking on his sunshine with smoked spectacles.

He began to worry a little hole into the ground under the rock; but then a heavy step sounded beside him; a huge black bar rang against the stone; and the wielder of this bar sent the stone end for end with one contemptuous movement of the elbow.

Alexander turned.

He was looking into the face of Cagey the fireman.

IV

LEANING on the slice-bar, Cagey brought his face, channelled like an ocean-crag, to bear on the lovely flushed face of Avis Wrenn, who had risen from the joggle-board. And as his eye lingered, a change of front was noticeable in him; the insolent crouch of his great shoulders became something less, something humbler; constraint seized him, even a kind of fear, as if he felt the scars on his black soul deepen and grow red against that delicacy.

At the same time it was the eaglet that hovered in the blue eye of Avis Wrenn; for the first shock of that bold eye had had in it something personal and roving; and it was as if the grim world beyond that garden had risen to seek her out in this rich privacy, and drag her down. It was a question of levels; and Cagey's eye sank

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to the tips of her white shoes, and he fumbled his bar.

Not a sound came from Alexander, who had in that moment quite distinctly felt the long arm of the law sliding round his body.

“What do you want, my man?” asked Avis, who copied a trick or two from the Viking. “Why do you come here?”

Cagey’s eyes rose in his head and fell again. The strange calm power burning in the eyes of that frail beauty bound him hand and foot; so that for the first time in his unbridled life, he had a sense of trespass, and wished himself well away. His eye was on the four swollen knuckles of his giant’s hand, as it clasped the bar; and these monstrous knuckles were almost in a line with those white slender fingers, now busy with her belt, at which the goldfish in the still pool had just been nibbling. This contrast of use and beauty gave him pause.

“Grant’s place?” he muttered, swinging his head towards the house.

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“Mr. Bartholomew Grant, yes.”

“That’s the guy. Well, I was to tell him the boat leaves tomorrow night, see, about six.”

“Oh,” said Avis. “Then why didn’t you go to the house? Why did you come out here?”

The huge fireman began to recover his superciliousness, and smiled strangely, toying with this vision on which he saw that he could build no dreams.

“That’s the question, little lady,” he said harshly. “That’s the question. But a guy like me is never quick with answers.”

“Alexander,” cried Avis, “will you let him talk to me like this?”

“Wait,” said the fireman as Alexander came towards him, “I don’t want no trouble, kid, but I had to see this guy, understand? This guy here. You know what I mean. Now if you would go out there under them pine trees with the fairies for a few minutes . . .”

He dealt with the landscape as if it were a hu-

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morous toy, meant to enchant him further with her.

"Oh, well, do what you like," he added, in the maddening, soothing voice of one talking to a pretty creature—a kitten.

"Walk towards the house, please, Avis," said Alexander in a low tone. "I'll deal with this man."

Avis hesitated, turned away, biting her lips. The two men stood watching, listening to that delicate fracas of skirts over the dumb green lawn. Cagey's chin was even with the shaft of his slice-bar, and he swayed slightly, as if conscious of a rhythm. She never once looked back, and when she had become a mere flutter in the shadows, Cagey said,

"Can they make that kind to order, now? Hey, Slim?"

"There are no more like her," said Alexander. "She is—alone."

"Hah," said Cagey. And now the gazing-globe engaged his eye.

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“What’s this? What’s all this?” he said, half querulously; and tapped the pedestal with his bar.

“That? That’s for looking into,” said Alexander, turning again towards the shadows. Their voices now sounded flat and casual, as if the ravine had been emptied of all spur or meaning.

“For looking into. Ah,” said Cagey. “That’s it. That’s the dope.”

He examined the bright sphere with strange puzzlement.

“Well,” he said, “that’s all right, too. It won’t never make her vain, looking into that thing.”

He glared at the shimmering globe, pricked with stars, as if it were some precious attribute of that strange spirit he had seen gliding into shadow, the blown bubble of her mysterious and happy life made crystal, and set here under the blue night, on a fluted column, for her to gaze at, wondering.

“You can’t look too close,” said Alexander.

“Well, that’s right too,” said Cagey. “She

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wouldn't look too close—not at anything in this life, she wouldn't."

This symbolism brought Alexander to life, like the touch of burning acid.

"What do you want?" he cried. "Why are you here? You want me, you say. How is that? I don't know you. I—"

"Now—easy—easy," said Cagey, thrusting out the palm of his hand with spread fingers. "You'll be known by lots of guys you don't know, a week from now."

Alexander felt as if a stone had been thrown against his heart.

"Want to get away, don't you?"

"Get away?" gasped Alexander.

"That's the noise," said the fireman. "Get away—fade. Ain't it so?"

"Who have you been—talking to?" whispered Alexander.

"Altschuler," said Cagey, leering.

"Ah," said Alexander, "wait. Wait a bit."

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He looked hauntedly back of him. The three tall narrow windows of his father's room shone suddenly yellow against the dark side of the house; and Teddy Wrenn's sheep, tethered under the imported mulberry tree, uttered a distinct, very well articulated, lonesome bleat.

"Ba-a," said Cagey.

"Hush," said Alexander, as if he had imperative need for silence.

"That's the way all little sheep go, when they're shut up," said the fireman cruelly. "Quiet enough while they're being sheared."

"I'm not—shut up yet," said Alexander in a shaky whisper.

The fireman lifted the slice-bar and dealt the slate walk at his feet a shattering blow.

"You're sheared though. . . . Think you can hold off another week?" he inquired.

Alexander raised his polished nails to his hair, quivering.

"You know so damned much," he whispered. "Who are you?"

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The fireman Cagey favored him with a very singular look.

"One of the guys on the *Tuly Yinks*," he said then. "No twisters in my jeans, Jack. I ain't on your trail. Do you want a straight steer?"

"Yes," said Alexander, gripping his chin.

"I'm the guy that can give you a straight steer then; and I never went to college neither, Jack. Go down to 40 Water Street in the morning, one flight up—ask for Joe Deming, see? He'll want a dollar, but you can lift one more all right."

"What about him?" said Alexander. "What can he do?"

"Nutt'n Joe can't do when he is tired of sleepin'. He can do me, and he can do you, Slim. He can ship you on the Lakes, see?"

"My God," said Alexander. "I'm not a seaman. I don't know the ropes, I tell you—I—"

"Ain't no ropes, feller," said the fireman. "Nutt'n but coal and iron ore. You can shovel coal, can't you?"

"I never tried," said Alexander.

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"It comes easy," said Cagey, grinning.

He lifted the massive slice-bar to his shoulder.

"I'm only telling you where the wise guys make for, when they get in trouble. They make for the fireholes, see, Jack? Nice warm little fireholes. Ain't a better place in the country along in November."

The sheep cried again dishearteningly under his mulberry tree; and the huge fireman, adopting a tone almost friendly said,

"It would come natural to you to lean into a pile of coal— The old man used to do it."

He nodded towards the house.

"How are you mixed up in this? What do you know about him?" cried poor Alexander fiercely.

"Nutt'n," said Cagey, evincing blank surprise. "Nutt'n, Slim. Do as you damn please. I don't care what you do. Why should I care?" He became boisterous. "Well, come on, tell me, why should I care? Have I been taking the bones out of a bank? Have I? Why, Slim, I couldn't

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stand up on the sidewalk in front of a bank. I'm too dirty weak in the knees. . . . It's nutt'n to me, Slim; do as you damn please. You go tell 'em you're sorry; tell 'em you'll be a good skate after this; and they'll let you off. Well, I'm through. Finish. So long, Slim."

He went trampling through the blueberry bushes at the end of the ravine; but before he turned the corner he stopped, and with his slice bar black against the moon, stood looking morosely at the three tall lighted windows that marked the chamber of Bartholomew Grant. In his heavy jumper which had caked with dirt and sweat, and taken the mould of his shoulders, he looked like some vast knight of the middle ages, contemplating siege; and the look that boded no man good was on his face.

"Forty Water Street, Slim. Joe Deming."

V

ALEXANDER felt sweat rill along his spine; and standing perfectly still he saw a black tracker in every shadow that stretched across the lawn. This coal-heaver's knowledge of his crime was like the whole world's knowledge. The thing was out. Alexander had a nightmare vision of the awakening of Hendrick, the production of the thin red book, capture, court, incarceration. He went over this sequence as if it were already past, an infamous little backwater of financial history.

Then the thought smote him that Altschuler, having tricked him, had given him away.

"By God," he whispered, "Altschuler shall go down as well."

At this point he should have reflected that Altschuler, a man of science, might well enough have anticipated this resolution on his part; but

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he was too young in the game to watch any moves but his own.

He stirred the dying fire, and sat down before it cross-legged; and so he sat, thinking of that tremulous kiss, and the terrors of the law, until the moon sank behind the house and the fire fell again.

"It must be late," he muttered then, and got stiffly up, and went into the house. Avis had not waited for him. Running his hand along the smooth yellow wall, he went upstairs without a light.

Then he saw that his father's door, the second to the left, stood ajar. Setting down his feet noiselessly on the heavy carpet, he came to that door and looked in secretly.

The Viking lay in his great brass bed, with an electric light over him, and a smoking stand at his elbow, reading, and smoking his pipe with its long brown stem, made out of the wingbone of an albatross, that he had hooked up out of some southern sea years ago. The head of the Viking,

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rough and tousled against the pillow, with the red stubble on his seamed chin gleaming, had the terrible composure of conscious strength; his huge arms, heavily tattooed, were lax on the coverlet; his big chest rose and fell, and his lips moved, fashioning the syllables. He was reading himself to sleep, and he looked like a gigantic baby. No denying it.

Staring at the vast mound of his father's body, inert under the bedspread, Alexander had a moment of hot resentment at that unassailability. The Viking's past was not without dark features.

Strange to see this man, once an able seaman, later a bench workman, lying there in the glitter of that broad placid room with its fine etchings, its deep rug, its satin paper. Yes, it was the Viking's impregnable position astride all this luxury that stirred the resentment of his son. Something—perhaps the iron composure of the face—seemed to say that Bartholomew Grant would never get himself in trouble.

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It was almost possible for Alexander to think that that fellow in the bed had broken into the house, and thrust himself between clean sheets in a drunken lark. By what miracle had he collected it all about him in that ten years? Was there no weak link in the chain of legally just acts leading to this? Or, if not, then how about the preceding period, the period of Grant the workman, the married man, Secretary of his Union. How about that night—that night—

Alexander treasured a hideous doubt of his father. Coming in from play one night in winter to that mean house in the oil-tank district, Alexander had found his father on his knees in the kitchen scrubbing one of the boards. The Viking was drunk; and his wife was gone out of the house, and with her his son Jim. Alexander, then about five years old, never saw either of them again. Of late he had begun to think that there must have been a disgusting looseness about the family relations in those early days. This, he had

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decided, was due to poverty. Very dreary, best out of mind. His mother he could not remember.

Immediately after that, he and his father, Bartholomew Grant, had had occasion to travel a good deal; and this had rather put the whole business out of mind, the more easily because money was now strangely plentiful. The loss of his mother had indeed bewildered him; but his father had met his questions with a terrible face, and he was forced to be quiet. The disappearance of his brother was rather a relief, because that fellow, older than Alexander, had always bullied him. They had been fighting together on the very morning that went before that mysterious night.

With that night, however, had begun the rise of the elder Grant. He grew rich, then fat, then aristocratic; he covered the strong body, that had seen out his youth of heavy toil, with silks, and fine linens and purple suitings; and his head of an unhappy warrior was thrust out of all this, half

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sheepishly . . . incongruous and rather gross, it seemed to Alexander.

“The old sea-cook,” thought the youth, who had behind all an affection for his father, “I will bet he has been in tight places, only he has pulled out; he has pulled out.”

A man could see how thin the ice had been for him, by a chance remark he had made at the National Convention of Mattress Makers.”

“I found society ready to my hand,” he had said; “so I employed it; but I would have done just as well in a state of anarchy—or barbarism.”

That statement alone had come well nigh making him famous. The Federal authorities had appointed a committee to look into it. It had an heroic ring, and yet when you came to think twice, there was something fishy at the back of it. Society, anarchy, barbarism—what were they but three tools, which he had used, one after the other? Certainly his faculty for depredation was of an age-old type, and had driving power behind it.

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“See it through. See it through.” Dabbling he scorned; and Alexander knew that he had dabbled.

Now he sighed, and picking up his feet softly went down the hall. Something black ambled ahead of him, wriggling at a sidelong trot. Avis’s little terrier. The Wrenns and the Grants had lived together now for five years, ever since the building of the house.

Suddenly the dog stopped opposite another door, and nuzzled it. Alexander’s heart stopped, then beat again; he stood still, and the heavy door, which had been just a thought ajar, like the Viking’s, to catch the lake breeze from the other side, swung in on oiled hinges; and the moon, serving him again, fell on the dark head of Avis Wrenn, slightly turned on the pillow; the cheek flushed, the hair unbound, reminiscence of that kiss still smiling on her parted lips, while she slept. Ah, she could sleep.

Strange daintiness and heart-choking fragrance of that chamber, like a last distillation of luxuries into their nymph-like essence; the chairs of white

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enamel, with their tall caned backs, very slender, glittering faint gold; the elusive pattern on the wall; light shimmering from an oval mirror; all trim and spacious, half coy, half stately.

As he gazed, trouble rolled in again like fog on Alexander's soul; and he knew that for every nymph, he could find a Danaide, one of the daughters of ancient Danaus, steeped in crime, condemned forever to pour water into leaky vessels. Such a one was all he merited. Alexander had seen a statue of a Danaide; he could recall her lank shoulder blades, the neck sunk and twisted, the head nested in the arms, lost in the vagueness of despair. That crouching body, breathing ache and torment, how unlike this bright vision of calm sleep in that unfretted chamber. Which was odd, which customary, thought Alexander, gay nymph or Danaide, shine or sorrow?

Forty Water Street. Joe Deming.

His mind was suddenly resolved to go; and yet he lingered, and cast back a long look at that still face on the pillow, at the lips about which so

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very slight a smile was hovering; these lips that he had kissed and was abandoning. Then he shivered, holding fast to this vision mistrusting that it was a fair dream, from which he had better not awake.

The dog, composing itself to slumber on the rug, sneezed, and Alexander moved away, but at the last moment he saw, shining splendidly in a corner, the suit of armor in which Avis was to play Joan of Arc at college, and this was the last dream-touch of all.

“Out of armor,” he whispered; and as he turned away, the moonlight was half withdrawn from her glowing face.

VI

WITH the first dawn he stole out of the house, and walked rapidly in the direction of the ship canal. As he came into that general district, he found the morning so dismal, and the dark houses so sad, so fronted with ash-cans and broken iron fences, that he began to believe a cup of coffee might hearten him; and he turned into a little greasy bake-shop.

The baker was just up, but he had evidently got out of bed earlier to light the gas under his fine nickel coffee urn, since the shop was very hot and moist, and the brown tops of the stale loaves shone with grease. The baker himself was ghastly in the early light; he stepped about sluggishly in shoes which he had not laced; he turned his head wearily over the abrupt palisade of a collar more vast even than Alexander's, but gifted with a

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dirty shine, as if its owner had forgotten that a collar is nothing if it is not resplendent. And finally, as he stooped under the counter for a bowl of sugar, his worn pants shone faintly, and he yawned or moaned a little; indeed so far was he out of the path of rational nature that Alexander had a shuddering moment of black disgust, in which he felt quite sure that it would have been better all round if this baker had never been, and the whole world never been.

He drank his coffee and fled out of the shop. The sun was beginning to break out in rusty horizon cracks as Alexander came into a crooked little street, full of trucks and ruts and cinders. The world of mere things stood there in hard outline, relentless heavy bulks which Alexander would certainly not have set down where they were, had the world been of his own conjuring. Lives had gone into the building of them; but he could have willed them flat in one resentful moment. Yet philosophers, thought the youth, have said that we see a world of our own imagining. Philoso-

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phers were plainly not in the habit of coming into a warehouse district early on a dull morning, to escape the law.

With a sinking heart he came down to the canal, and sat on a dank stone pier which ran under a jackknife drawbridge. Here it was open to him to look up and down the creek, with its greasy surface; and its barges full of caked mud; overhead at dripping iron girders; across the way at the black wall of a grain elevator, a rampart of yellow crates and the steaming flanks of great horses, on whose harnesses the sun already gleamed.

At his feet lay for inspection part of a chair with the cane hanging through the bottom, a girl's draggled stocking, and a rotten orange. And as he lifted his eye little by little, more and more of these devilish unmeaning fragments came into his ken. How was he going to take hold on all this? . . . It was more than he could see; yet he knew that upon this was founded that swept part of the world, of which his father spoke—lawns,

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silks, leisure. There was some urgent connection between this wrecked chair, that poor stocking, and the shining bed in which the Viking lay last night, the sock of grey silk which clung to Alexander's ankle. Alexander, sitting on the cold stone, was divided in his mind between socialism and anarchy.

After a long time the bridges up and down the creek began to yawn like the jaws of languid crocodiles; and the yellow crates across the way to tumble into carts. The sun burnt his cheek a little; all the dream-freshness of the early morning was gone with the mist and the blue shadows, and Alexander, jumping up, faced anew the problem which Cagey had spoken in a single enigmatical word—"Fade."

Musing, he saw first that he stood sorely in need of clothes—dirty clothes; and then assuredly he must be rid of his collar—that mocking piece of the jade custom. Proceeding up the creek some way he came to a store faced with bricks painted black, and hung all about the entrance with oil-

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skins, gleaming black and yellow in the sun. McOscar's Toggery.

Turning in guiltily, he bought a black shirt, blue overalls, a low-looking cap. These he put on in the back part of the store; and sold the clothes which he took off to the Toggerer at a very great bargain, as men do who burn their ships behind them.

"Ye mak a bonny navvy mon," said McOscar. "Ye lack noo but the wee bit of string below the knee."

Alexander blushed, but said nothing.

"Weel," said McOscar, "ye are no a man of words, but I doubt not ye wull be dunnerin' awa' at the thinkun'."

True, McOscar. Alexander fled out of McOscar's Toggery with the frightening self-consciousness of a man who walks abroad for the first time in working clothes. He saw now that the body within such clothes has an account to render, and a dignity to uphold; a dignity of strength and stain. This dignity seemed lacking

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to him. His forearms seemed to him to hang white and limp as paper out of the black sleeves of the shirt. They were neither rough nor swollen, and the palms of his hands were soft. Poor Alexander felt himself a very feeble imposter indeed. Drifting with a red face on the rough morning tide of things in general, he suffered. This feeling of incompetence and even downright fraud was so strong in him that for a moment he had almost taken to his heels, thinking to beg off his bargain with McOscar and return. But with this impulse came the image of the Viking, propped in bed, with the strong fumes of his morning cigar drifting away from him, and his red chin grislier by a night's growth. Never that, said Alexander to himself.

Walking very fast, his face set in stern lines as if to anticipate and overbear the chance ridicule of teamsters and their like, Alexander crossed another bridge; and as he came out from between the high buildings, and the light of heaven fell all about him equally, he felt more profoundly

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than ever his newness. Despairing he saw that he would never be anything but clean. His black shirt glistened, obviously in its first wearing; and his overalls had a marked crease running from his feet to his midriff. He felt like a supernumerary on the stage of labor. Never had a new black shirt been seen before; never till now had a man walked forth among his fellows in creased overalls. With all the weight of his crime upon his mind, it is a fact that Alexander wrestled with his feelings like an embarrassed scholar on the carpet; and when he came to the middle of the bridge, he sat down on a little bench that was there, to think, and by accident his arm came against the under part of an iron girder, and rubbed off some particles of rust.

Eureka. Alexander craftily dragged both his arms and the palms of his hands under that iron beam; and behold! his arms to the elbow were a rich red brown, and the inside of his hands a trifle scaly. Then he knelt and rubbed dirt into his overalls; and going on to the end of the bridge,

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leaned out, and ground his cap into a greasy cable.

Then he went on to 40 Water Street, and up one flight. There in a roomful of hard characters, sat Joe Deming, trimming his nails.

"I want to ship," said Alexander hoarsely.

"Got a book?" inquired Joe Deming, amused. Cagey had preceded Alexander here.

"A—a what?"

"A book. A discharge book."

"Why, no."

"Got a dollar to buy a book?"

"Yes."

"Slip it."

At mention of this dollar, Joe Deming lost all his blandness and became crisp and nippy. He began to ask questions and to write down the answers in a little green book with a white number. Name. Rutherford Taylor. Age, height, complexion, experience. No experience? Call it salt water then. Place of birth. Father's name.

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"Jeremy Taylor," murmured Alexander reverently.

"Any maiden aunts?"

Alexander grew rigid, because he saw by these words that his disguise was pierced; but it evidently made no difference to the Lakes whence they drew deckhands. Joe Deming laughed and ran the dollar between his fingers, and threw over the little green book.

"There you are, my boy. . . . Riley," he bawled.

A round Irishman with a livid jaw got up out of a chair, and came alongside sheepishly.

"Riley, you were piped when you came here."

"Ah—ay," said Riley, sighing.

"Here's your book. Your bag's in the entry, with a cross chalked on it. I'm giving you another ship, you and this man here. Do better this time."

Deming began to write certificates of identification in an orderly hand. Half a dozen boister-

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ous fellows had now pressed in from a back room.

“How about me, boss? . . . Ain’t I in on this? . . . Well, I’ve sat here since yesterday morning.”

“Sit down,” said Joe Deming, with a burst of sharp savagery which showed why he was in command over these restless forces of unemployment. “Damned if I understand you men. Don’t you ever get enough of eating heat? Take a rest. Get your mind off the job. It’s coming to you. Why, you’ll sweat by tomorrow. Take your time. Have a seat. This is a decking job. . . . Hell’s delight, sit down.”

The men fell back, though still faint murmurs came from them, such as “I could do wit’ a sandwich,” “If I had a dollar like them guys, I’d get a ship quick enough.” “Would the bloke see a dollar walkin’ out’n the door all by itself?”

But this was merely the wake of trouble; and Joe Deming, bland and clerkish again, flipped the two cards he had made out, to Riley.

“Take him down to the canal. . . . Third

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berth above the Dow Street bridge. And a good ship. . . . The mate is a personal friend of mine."

"Where's she—going?" asked Alexander, aghast at this casualness.

"Going?" said Joe Deming. "Going? Going out, feller. Ain't that good enough for you? God's sake, do you want to know where you are going, and you a deckhand? You got a nerve, Jack. You got a nerve. Beat it fir the canal, before you want to know why you got a face to feed. Hep. Left, right, left, right."

VII

MR. RILEY took up his chalked bag and followed Alexander into the street. And now the unlucky youth, feeling the strangeness of this slide into a new mode of life, laughed, a little hysterically. If he must come to smash, then let it be in a manner new and strange.

“’Tis fine it is t’see a happy man,” said the little Irishman, swinging along beside him. “Well, ’tis a home this boat as the man said; that is, as it were, in comparin’ it wid the City of Whisky.”

“The City of Whisky?”

“So they call her, be the booze that floats her. Four days I shooveled, and four days I drank; on the fift’ day I come a shorek desperated. ’Twas a notorious playboy, that wan; man; eight fires and four to a watch to clean. An’ a craven-bould heap of ashes to shoovel, if you like, Shlim.”

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"What's a deckhand's job?" inquired Slim, new-christened. On the Lakes, all lean men, under God, are christened Slim.

"Deckhand?" said Shorty. "He ates and shlapes and folds together the fine big hearrty hands iv him. He's maid of all wurk, what wid liftin' off hatches and shlappin' thim on, and heavin' on cables, and passing coal whin the bunkers will run no more. Annything shorrt of mutiny."

Shorty stopped and scratched his chin.

"Wan thing more," he said, "they will take no deckhand wid a rough jaw. Ye must shave be-fure ye come to the parrry. Wanst aboard, ye may shtep on yer beard prisintly; but they will see yer face at the shtart iv it, whether or no. . . . Am I schraped to yer taste, Shlim, me boy?"

He raised his jaw.

"Clean as a bone."

"Strange it is what an infloonce the absince iv hair will have on a mate. Drunk ye may be,

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naked, widin limits, ye may be, mutinous, ye may be; man, ye may be a desperated felly althegether; but iv one hair shows, ye hit the dock."

Hearing this talk, Alexander all at once felt strangely safe from pursuit, as if he had fled into another world, and swung to some impregnable gate on his pursuers. They came to a bar; and Slim, putting his hand into his pocket, was inspired. The sun was now burning.

"Will you have a drink?" said Slim to Shorty, man to man.

The Irishman set down his black bag on the pavement, as if to the summoning of death itself.

"Man," he said, "it would be wan iv the gr-reatest charities ye iver done."

Alexander throve on this. He began to forget what he had suffered, and the view of life that Shorty took was like a morning wind fresh on his brow.

"What would he say to theft?" thought Alexander; but with the thought he knew that Shorty

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would say nothing to theft, but would lie low and wink the other eye. Plain to see that Shorty leagued himself with chance mates to keep the world proper out of the slippery territory of his soul. On the firm ground, and the things of the firm ground, on tall godless temples and uncharitable men alike, Shorty cast an eye of sheepish benevolence; he knew that he had sinned, but he knew as well that he was never the man to strike a balance among all these things. Let feeble man do what he would, the soulless shadows would lengthen as the sun went down; and then in many a bar, what was unjust could be expiated in the bitter beer.

So they went into the bar, and lifting schooners, whose weight caused their forearms to shake and tremble, slaked their thirst. And between gulps Shorty purred,

“Man, ’twas the notorious drunk. . . . Aw, ’twas the classic thirst I had wan momint back. The exthraordinary horror iv ut was beyond—it was beyond words. . . . It was beyond inter-

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rogation. . . . Whisky gives me a thirst; but 'tis the beer quinces ut."

Alexander laughed.

"Whisky first?" he shouted.

"Ah—ay," said Shorty, listening to distant tumults, for he was of those to whom this world is a world of shadows and of echoes. "But not now, lad. 'Tis then—then follies the contamination of me noodle."

He put a gravely significant thumb over his temple, and sighed.

"This mornin' I put me toes to the flure wid five cints in me panties. . . . Ah—ay." A gulp. "I cast me eye on the coin, and says I, 'Av I am an honest man, will I have a beer or a shave?' But firrst I wint rumblin' about the town f'r a flea-barber."

Gulp. Gulp.

"A flea-barber, Shorty?"

"'Tis an undhergraduate iv a barber college, me innocuous Shlim. Wan that will shrape yer f'r the learnin' how. But divil a wan could the

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prisint individual discover. So, wid the amber-colored flooid on ivery hand, I wint paddling out to be shaved, and that was be the wife iv a German grocer. . . . Man, 'tis a roonous thing f'r a man, this lake trade."

Shorty put a hand to his red-ploughed chin, and fell into a considerable sadness.

"Shlim," he said presently, "'tis plain t'me ye are no man f'r deckhand. No—no. Have ye no gurrl that will be takin' care of ye, but ye must work with the shoovel?"

"A girl?" cried Slim. And whispered swiftly in the ear of Shorty,

"I'm running away from her."

"Ah—ay," said Shorty, full of sympathy. "Will she be wan iv the powerful wans? But I'll say no more, Slim."

He paused and added,

"I'm wild to get to Buffalo. There's a gurrl in Buffalo . . . ah . . . ay."

He sighed, shifted his bag, and cast his eye back, as if in quest of his Eurydice.

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"Here's the berth," said he.

Coal roared overhead; they plunged into a narrow alley; and in another moment had sided with the ship.

"Ah, she's a home," said Shorty, lovingly, and brushed her iron side with a gentle palm. But as he put his foot on the bottom rung of the ladder, Slim descried a pitted face, cleft by a hawk-nose, high above him.

With a sinking heart he whispered, "Wait. What ship is this?"

The face continued to stare down into the gloom of the dock, not making him out; and Shorty, pausing on the ladder, shouted down,

"The *Yuly Yinks*, God bless her."

"Zowie," said Slim, petrified.

This was the ship his father had chosen for the Lake trip. He thought a million things at once; and back of all was an impulse to take fairly to his heels. So far he had made good his escape. He would not be missed at the house, for he was always out before the rest; nor at the bank, for

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he was a smiling son of fortune, and often took days off. But should his father and old Wrenn find him on this ship, then would suspicion be abroad indeed. Then suddenly he thought of Avis. He might see her for a last time, though unrevealed himself. This possibility amazed and touched and thrilled him; and he started up the ladder.

"I'll dodge 'em somehow," he reflected.

He came level with the deck, and Cagey seized him by the arm and drew him inboard.

"Ah there, Slim," he said, "rubber shoes and all."

The eye of Cagey had fallen on Alexander's tennis-shoes; for to a sailor shoes are the consolation note in the sad winding fugue of life.

"Good firing shoes, Slim," he said, and stopped opposite the galley window to admire them anew. Slim felt in his face a puff of moist heat; and, looking into the zinc lined galley, saw there a woman rubbing her hands slowly on an apron, and staring at him with a white face.

VIII

FOR seven hours Slim and Shorty and the man referred to as the Other Guy—this was Here You—labored in the hold of the *Yuly Yinks*, sweeping down coal from ribs and cross beams; for the mate was half expecting to get grain this trip, and the least he could do for grain was to sweep up a bit.

Still the Other Guy found it weariful, frequently mumbling that he ought never to have allowed himself to get down to where he had to take a decking job. He was delicate, he said: good constitution, but delicate. It was a crime to ask him to lift those unchristian hatches on and off. Furthermore, the dust played hob with his throat. Last Thursday he had stepped ashore off the *George Drummond* for a beer, and in his absence the ship pulled out, and there went the liniment he had been rubbing in—with good results too.

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That was as much as that ship thought of a deck-hand, sneaking out in a dastardly underhanded way like that. Heavy days.

When the sun had set, they came on deck, the merry deckhands of the *Yuly Yinks*, and lifted on the hatches, section by section, spitting on their hands, running ash-hatch clubs through rings in the boards, groaning, heaving, "Ah, it's a white man's job. Ho, lay 'er low. These boards is rum-soaked good and plenty."

The mate came among them and said pleasantly,

"Now then, lively, men, tarpaulings. What's that? Sleepy? Look at me. I ain't slept. You had four perfectly good hours yesterday morning. What yer do with 'em? You sleep all winter, don't yer? Can't yer keep yer eyes open just through the summer? Sleep, he's tellin' me."

To this effect the age-old objurgations of the mate.

"Go and eat," said he, lashing them even to the

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mess-room, as if their very appetites were more brutish than his, which he had just satisfied.

The mess-room had a temperature of 130° F., and was sheathed with varnished boards on which the steam had gathered. They sat either side of a long table on black stools, Tommy and Joe and Cagey, firemen, Shorty and Slim and the Other Guy, and a random Swede, deckhands; and Henry, deckwatch.

They ate like wolves, in ravening silence; and the sweat stood on their brows. Then Cagey, pushing back his stool, clapped on his firemen's cap, shaking black dust into the dish of cabbage, and said abruptly,

"Once we get out, Slim, you're my coal-passer. See?"

"All right," said Slim humbly.

"All right," said Cagey. "I know it's all right. You don't need to tell me it's all right."

His hand closed on the roll of bills Altschuler had given him; and his eyes grew ugly.

"And whatever you do, don't die on my hands.

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When you feel like dying, go up on deck and die. Jump into the lake. I have hauled four measly coal-passers up that ladder already this season."

They jostled one another in their anxiety to get out of that hot box; and Shorty colliding with Slim, murmured,

"We have thracked the villin to his lair. Watch him, watch Cagey, me ould college chum."

They found him sprawled on the iron tiller aft—his favorite haunt. He lay outstretched, his limp body following the iron, a cigarette in his lips, his arms hanging. He was breathing deep, and watching the stars.

Black stillness had fallen all about the dock; the screw of the ship, turning slowly, sent up a vile breath from the stinking creek; and in replete whispers they cursed the second engineer for monkeying with the engine, and regaling them with this sort of thing.

"Curse the flies," said one of them. "They sting a man sump'n fierce; and get in at the holes in his boots too."

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"Where'll she be goin' then?" said the voice of Shorty.

"Duluth, I guess," said another.

"I was hopin' f'r Buffalo," said Shorty, disappointed.

"So was I," said the Other Guy. "My clothes—"

"Here You," said Cagey, "give us a tailor-made."

The Other Guy made a humble sound in his throat, and passed him the package. Among themselves, the ship's company had remarked that Cagey never bought tobacco. Also he shaved with other men's razors, and had altogether nothing by him in the way of personal property. Yet he was serene; he never went in want. The deckhands saw to that. From having long known this sort of service, the deckhands knew a dangerous man without so much as wrinkling their noses. They knew that this guy Cagey was dangerous. No telling how many guys this rough one had smashed up.

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"You, Shorty," said Cagey, "why do you want to get to Buffalo?"

"'Tis so much nearer County Kavan," said Shorty, who loved not Cagey.

The men in the fantail listened eagerly for what should follow this immense daring of the Irishman. Cagey let smoke through his nose in a fierce sniff, and rolled half over on the tiller.

"Why did you leave home?" he inquired.

"I had a fallin' out wid me father's coachman," said Shorty meekly. He was extended on one of the blades of the spare propeller, which was lashed to the deck; Slim lay on the other in shadow.

"How was that?" inquired Cagey with perfect calm.

"'Tis ashamed I am to say," came the sad voice of Shorty. "Anny deckhand wud be, to fornce out the wurds. I hit his sither over the head wid a roll iv music."

With extreme slowness, Cagey lay back on the tiller.

"This is a funny guy," he said. He had placed

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his man, and lost interest in him—almost. Presently he said:

“Got a girl in Buffalo; ain’t you, Shorty?”

“I adore her,” said Shorty.

“Well, listen here, feller, forget her. A chicken just went in there”—he moved an arm towards the dining room—“that smiled at me when she went in. I say, at me, Jack.”

“’Twas wrong iv her,” said Shorty. “It wasn’t charitable in a dacent lady to be pullin’ her lips at a poor fireman.”

“Hah,” said Cagey, rolling his shoulders.

“Fine germ,” he muttered. “Perfume. . . . Coming for a little ride on the Lake with Grant.”

“They’ve come aboard,” thought Slim, and spread himself out thin on the propeller blade.

“Grant owns some shipping now; I say the guy owns half the town, but it’s not so long ago he was shovelling coal on the Lakes like you and me, Shorty. Now he’s a millionaire. You’ll be a millionaire too, Shorty; keep your hair cropped close, that’s all.”

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"Whin I came here five years ago, I had me hopes . . . grreat hopes. I was young, well, I had failed in a little tobacco business I had in Glasgow, but I was aggressive. Oh, I was aggressive. I would let no man tell me. . . . But five years have passed away, Cagey, and the individual is much the same."

"Let's see your hand," said Cagey. The Irishman thrust out a massive fist, uncurled the fingers slowly, and held the thick yellow palm nearer Cagey's eye.

"It's a good hand," he said proudly.

"Yes, it's a good hand," said Cagey. "I'm glad for you, Shorty. You need a good hand, feller; you and me, we need good hands. We will need them, right up to the time when we stop squirming. No heads. No damned heads. How about it? How about it?"

The fireman clamored, a hint of storm in his voice.

"'Tis booze," said the Irishman, in a pensive voice. "'Tis the amber-colored fluid, as it were,

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a shnootful on an impty stomach. The wurrld would niver shpin on an impty stomach. No, Cagey, me lad, cagey ye are by name, and cagey be nature, I take it, but niver will ye explain into me the pearls on the wan hand, and the swine on the ither. Niver will ye tell why I put me honest hand to a shoovel, and see me frind Shlim here toy wid the nayked shoulder iv a queen. 'Tis not brains, 'tis circumstance, 'tis not what I can tell you. A strange wurrld it is; it's all a mix-up and all a complication; that's me sooming up iv the sum and substance iv ut."

"Hah," said Cagey.

Then his jaw set and his eye flashed, for the passengers were coming out of the dining room; the Viking in carpet slippers, breathing hard and smoking a fat black cigar; the Mænad, in a bad temper; Wrenn, a dry little man always adjusting his glasses, always thinking. Then little Teddy Wrenn, tottering under the weight of some companionable furry thing, with beady eyes; and Avis last of all.

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Slim crouched in shadow. All in white else, she had a black storm cap on her head, whimsically slanted. Swift, supple as a wand, she met calmly all those eyes gleaming out of shadow, though she must have known how rare, how strange she was in that surrounding. And Cagey, on the tiller, came slowly to his elbow, as if against his will; and again his devouring eyes shot blue fire.

But her wrath of the night before was gone; pity stirred her; as she turned into the starboard alley she smiled brilliantly, full on his face, and stooping, bowled an apple towards him, which she had held in her hand. Cagey hung his hand out for it, still looking at her; she vanished, and then some irregularity in this apple threw it out of its course, and it rolled into the palm of Shorty.

"She rolled that at me, feller," said Cagey.

But before Shorty could make good his possession, the second mate thrust his lean head into the fantail and cried,

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“Tug coming. Get ready to let ’em have the hawser. For’ard. One man here to take in the stern line.”

The winch snarled amidships, and Shorty dashed forward, putting the apple in his pocket. Slim followed, and came to an exceedingly hot little room of white painted steel, full of machinery and fat ropes, where he took hold of all that he should not. And the tug took hold of the lank black immensity that was the *Yuly Yinks*, and twitched her past many corners, until they came to the breakwater.

Then Slim and Shorty, standing aft, by the door that went down into the firehole, spoke together in the soft voices of men leagued.

“Look for’ard, Shlim,” said Shorty. And Slim looked forward and saw, to his surprise, that the front of the ship dipped, rising and falling, though the lake was as still as a pond.

“’Tis a limber ship,” said Shorty. “Limber as a fishpole. But she’d break her back in a salt sea, the *Yuly Yinks*.”

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The affection of Shorty for ships was as quick as that of men for women; and even now he would defend the *Yuly Yinks*. Yet it is the truth that when she went light, she sagged fore and aft with each stroke of the piston; she buckled in the middle like a strip of tin. It was half-terrifying to Slim to see this iron ship bending in the middle.

"Where's that Other Guy," said Slim. His eye wandered vaguely for'ard to where he thought his father must be sitting in a canvas chair. Bitterness flashed in him when he thought of the Viking's towering security. Who could attack?

"That Other Guy is on watch," said Shorty. "Av coorse he wud take this watch, figgerin' on sleep the rest iv the night. A deckhand will be always figurin' then; figgerin' right, or figgerin' wrong. But figgerin', mind ye. I'm figgerin' now meself."

"What are you figuring?"

"What time will be best for me encounther wid Cagey," said the Irishman.

“Your—encounter?” gasped Slim.

“I have his apple in me pocket,” said Shorty. “Did ye not take heed to that? And now me bould lad Cagey will be rumblin’ about in the fan-tail wid his fists in his jumper; for he knows there can be only wan man on a ship to wanst, and Cagey is that man on the *Yuly Yinks* be his account, me innocuous Shlim.”

“You’ll fight?”

“No fear,” said Shorty. “But he’s a big junk of meat, like. Come down, Shlim, me boy.”

They went down. Cagey stood on the deck-plates beside the steam steering gear, thinking, as Shorty had foretold; and Shorty hastened into speech.

“Man,” he said, with a mournful sparkle of the eye foreshadowing his own end, “’tis certainly a dandy girl. Oh, a magnificent gurrl, Cagey, me bould fireman. Wid the little shawl iv shepherd’s plaid, too. An’ the little nose iv her. Ah . . . ay. Oh, boys, oh, boys, ’twas the Roman nose iv her was to me taste. Not sharp

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enough to cut with, man, but not blunt enough be Hivins f'r a hatch club. Betwixt and between, as it were."

"Where is the booze on this ship?" quoth Cagey contemptuously. "Hand over that apple."

"Ah . . . ay," said Shorty. "I'm comin' to the apple—be suitable degrees, Cagey. Be degrees. But why did ye not give me an inthrejection them? Wud ye be takin' no heed to the sowl iv Shorty forninst the tiller? Man, I adored her. I was ravaged away, that's the soom and soobstance iv ut."

"Hah," said Cagey. At this point he flung off his jumper and sinister corrugations appeared about his shoulder-blades.

"But the rare shmile iv her, ye say," continued Shorty. "Is ut the shmile ye are considerin', Cagey me lad? Niver will it be a shmile to beshpeak goodness in a woman. Tak me wurrd, Cagey, it rruns two ways at wanst, like the current iv Lake Mitchigan. A shmile is a roonous thing. A dimple, yis; a shmile niver. 'Tis the mark iv

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murdherin' mischief to a sailor. But 'twas a faint shmile, ye say. Man, 'tis the faint shtar ye cannot be certain iv winkin' at ye or no. Ah . . . ay."

Cagey moved his head in torture.

"Can it," he roared.

It is impossible to hit a man while he is talking; and of this principle of truth Shorty made heroic use.

"But, Cagey lad," said he, "if she wud be shmilin' at ye, why did ye not give me an inthrejection to her? But now I think iv ut, 'twas her nose that ye hung back for. 'Twas Corsican. 'Twas like the vile Corsican's, vilest scum of the earth, although the grreatest ginerall the wurld has iver seen. Grreat, not as a man, not as an individual, mind ye, but as a ginerall. Am I right, or am I not? Oh, but the nose of her was to me taste. . . . 'Twas a shnout, to make it in rrough language . . . a shnout. That I saw; and then the fantashtic little gown iv her, that blue wan,

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oh, boys, oh, boys, that was to me taste, and herself quiverin' widin it like a fish in wather. But, Cagey lad, why did ye not give me an inthrejection?"

"God," cried Cagey, to whom words as words were vile poison, "if I could wring you out, you would drip words. Take that."

He came forward softly at his lingering crouch; the Irishman ducked his plump body; there came the sound of a very heavy jolt, and Shorty sank to the plates, his round short legs sprawling pitifully. . . . Slim's heart rose in him hot and resentful to see the terrible form of Cagey looking down, with his huge red hairy arm, limp again, terminating in that unconquerable fist.

"You rotten sport," he half sobbed, and flung himself like a long beast at Cagey's throat. But Cagey shook him off, hurled him against the white partition aft, and on the rebound, struck him fiercely so that he fell with his head in a pool of grease, sick at heart.

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"Turn in and get some sleep, you coal-passers," said Cagey. "You'll need it, Slim, in my watch. By God, you'll need it."

"Oh, boys; oh, boys," said Shorty, stirring. "'Tis the bunk f'r spoiled wans, Slim. Do what yer tin Jesus says."

He crawled into his bunk, and in a moment waved one round white leg out of it, in agony.

"'Tis the classic fireman ye have, Shlim," he murmured. "Cagey—ah, cagey be name, cagey be nature."

Slim suddenly swung into the bunk above him, and closed his eyes, with a surge of black despair to think that he was only a feather in the fierce wind of Cagey's might. The voice of the Irishman came to him muffled in a last ebullition of the wisdom which no pain can vex.

"These are good bunks annyways. The wind will blow through the wires on me poor head. . . . The Pope in his Vacuum is no better fixed, I'm thinkin'."

The deckhands made shift to sleep.

IX

Nor so Cagey. He stood in the middle of his own room, breathing heavily and crushing in his fist, which glinted, the roll of bills given him by Altschuler. He looked sharply at Tommy, to see that he slept; and then, sitting down slowly, spread out the money on his knee.

"Like I thought," he murmured. "Pulpy. Muck."

He dared not leave the stuff in his bunk, because he had no trust in Joe and Tommy, who indeed had no right conception of the sanctity of private property. He might of course have put it in the old man's safe; but this would give the old man a decided bulge on him; for then, should Cagey choose to leave the ship, inopportunately, the old man might keep the money; an act which would involve sudden death. It was as well to foresee this.

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The only alternative was to keep the money all the time in his pocket; and this he had done; but sweat and heat were dissolving it, and working it into a joyless mass, difficult to spend. This preyed upon his soul.

Cagey thrust the roll into his pocket again, resumed his jumper, and went out on deck, dragging his mattress with him.

Throwing this on one of the after hatches, he rolled a cigarette, and wandered about in his bare feet, smoking and suffering an inroad of languorous thoughts. The dazzling face of that centre-board he saw again and again, through velvet gloom; she smiled, she shook her head, she pointed a white arm at him, she disappeared. All a dream. . . . The heat. Well, they were running out of the heat for a few days; they were going up into the cold lake, where he could resume his sanity. That was good.

He stopped, leaned in the doorway leading into the firehole. Looking down through the steel platforms he saw, at the bottom of this pit with

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its black walls, a red midget, shoveling, and running water in a glow of light.

“Wop,” thought Cagey. “Salt water fireman. Never heard of a light fire, and ain’t got language enough to listen to reason. Put the smoke to her, Joe; lean into ’em. Work your fool head off; the grub is good.”

Thought of grub turned his mind; and he strolled into the mess-room, where the night-fare lay clustered under newspapers and clouds of stinging flies and other insects.

Cagey lifted the papers, and discovered a plate of biscuit, a bowl of prunes, slices of a strange compressed meat resembling variegated marble. Seizing a slab of this meat, between two crackers, he took a cup in his other hand, and went into the galley for coffee. As he was turning it out, the steward came in gravely from the deck, rubbing his vast hairy chest.

“Eating, Cagey?” he inquired in mellow tones.

“That’s sensible, that is,” said Cagey. “Eating, am I? Well, yes, if you call this eating.”

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Here, I'll tell you something now. The old man came snooping in here last night, and he asked me if I was getting enough to eat. I said 'No.' There you are. There you are. I wasn't beating about the bush. He wanted an answer. Well, he got it. I wouldn't beat about the bush for no guy at all. I haven't ate enough in three days to keep a brass monkey spoutin' water."

"It's the heat," said the steward gently. He scratched his nose. "I can remember at Buffalo last season a feller come aboard, a good sizeable feller too, an' my, I thought he was going to throw coal right up through the stack. He et an awful hearty meal, and then he went on watch, and I laid out to have plenty on hand when he come up to supper; but I'll be damned when the time come, all he could take into him was a cup of tea. He was right level with the deck."

The steward was a brave man in a brave act; he was accusing the fireman of inability to stand the heat, than which, in that trade, there is no greater insult. Cagey's shoulders sagged; but the

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steward, without looking round, rattled stovelids, and poured coal into his fire.

“Why hadn’t you complained to the skipper?” he inquired, wheeling round.

“D’yer think I would?” said Cagey. “No, I wouldn’t. No, I wouldn’t. But the man asked me, didn’t he? He asked me, all right. It couldn’t have come around better. Well, I told him. That’s all. I told him, steward. You never hear me complain. If I don’t like it, I can leave the ship, can’t I?”

The steward regarded him with patient eyes.

“Why don’t you go out on deck and moosh up to that pretty centreboard? She’s out there sitting on the hatch, and she is lonesomer than a she-sea-gull.”

“Hah,” said Cagey, but immediately his hand shook, so that he was forced to set down the coffee. This fact, that she was just around the corner, loosened the very flesh over his bones; his chest rose strongly, and his breathing was more thick.

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"Go on," said the steward persuasively. "My wife was saying yesterday what a fine couple you made."

Cagey took a rolling step forward, and brought down his outspread hand in a fearful clutch on the cook's shoulder.

"Steward," he whispered, his sense of humor lost in this surpassing weakness, "would she talk to a guy? Would she—"

Here the mask of the steward's gentleness fell; choking back his passion of wrath at this fellow, against whose talons, sunk in his soft shoulder, he knew himself powerless, he laughed hoarsely.

"She would walk on your bones, Cagey, that's what that girl would do. Take a look at yourself in the lake. Don't you give a girl no credit that has been brought up like that girl has? Ain't it possible she would see the fly in the mustard? I ain't religious, Cagey, but ain't it possible—"

He broke off, uttering a cry of pain; and reached out for the bread-knife.

"Go gentle," he sobbed.

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Cagey's arm fell; his eyes were full of blue fire, and he breathed into the bottom of his lungs. He rolled himself another cigarette with unsteady fingers and stepped out on deck.

The night was blue and calm; the lake reflected stars; the *Yuly Yinks* pushed her black panther's body softly north.

Cagey sank down on his mattress, burying his head in his arms. Long he lay without movement, when suddenly the sweet notes of a little song came from the forepart of the ship; some pensive song of woe, with shy trills and little upward hootings. . . . The sky was not deep enough to receive the bitterness of his aspiration as he listened, the oppressive agony and blind search and striving of his locked out passion. A faint breeze fluttered on his cheek; he slid out of his jumper, and reared up his barrel of a body on the hatch, gleaming. An odd wistfulness touched his cruel lips; for he could give no name to this thing that had risen in his heart to strangle him; this ache or yearning, love of love,

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more terrible in Cagey's breast than love of strife.

Never before had such a woman smiled on him, however casually. Those who had were round and powerful and harsh, even as he was, rude creatures, already bowed a little, reflecting from deep serviceable bosoms the toil that racked their lords. Never had they come bearing in their train this strong unrest, never coming to the conquest thus, like a shell, like a flower, like a strange spice lingering on a wind from an unknown coast. He had looked into the blue ravine, and seen her return the kiss of Alexander Grant. Slim's love. And Slim had run away. Yet the image of Slim undoubtedly persisted in that fair head; that slender arm yearned to slide about the neck of this man whom Cagey had lured into his firehole. This blazing fact was central like the sun in heaven; withering him, proving to him that he had been fashioned and foredoomed in the beginning of time to toil below the waterline.

His big chest rose and fell; hate filled him, deep

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as the quiet, deep as the night. They were then of another world; this source of his delight had floated to him, light as down, capricious as a foam-touched wave, out of the glittering world of his scorn, where the slaves of good had their abode.

The song broke, like an airy bubble vanished in midcourse; and faint laughter succeeded. Cagey drew on his jumper, and with strange reluctance began to glide across the hatches, going forward, and as he drew nearer he panted and trembled and stumbled.

Now his eye was full upon her as she leaned in the passageway which led to the forepeak where the windlass was. The yellow light fell brilliant on her cheek; her lips quivered in a smile as she bowed her head prettily into her father's cabin. Cagey surged forward over the iron railing which protected the forward side of the hatch, his lips parted, his arms shaking.

"Father," he heard her say, "it's a perfectly delicious bogey hole. I'm going down. Want to come?"

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"No," came the voice of Wrenn. "No, I guess not."

He was thinking.

"Then I'm going alone," she said. She lifted a red lantern and held it in the doorway of the steps which led down into the dunnage room. "There are steps all the way. I saw them."

The iron on which Cagey leaned sagged under him. She was going into the hold. Into the hold.

With the stealth of a great cat, he drew back, and opened a small iron hatch midway between the two forward cargo hatches. Into this opening he plunged a leg; his toe caught the round of the perpendicular steel ladder rivetted to the wall of that huge iron chamber. Then like a vast ape he swung himself down, down into that whispering blackness, and stood, ten seconds later, on the iron floor of the second hold. He thrust out a cautious arm; the tips of his fingers rasped against the partition between the first and second holds. He trailed his hand until he felt the shoulder of

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the great swinging door between the holds, and this he thrust open a foot or so, remaining crouched behind it.

Almost at once he was conscious of a red glow on the other side of the door; and then he heard her coming down the wooden steps that led out of the hold to the 'tween decks and the dunnage room.

He pressed his ear to the rusted iron; now she had descended to the bottom; now she paused, uncertain; now she came towards him. He heard her small heels ring—tap, tap, tap—on the bare iron. Then she came to the door, lifting the lantern with a little shudder, flashing like a rare butterfly against the rust and gloom of that immense cavern, with its tomb-like echoes, its grisly ribs and lips of twisted iron . . . its remote secrecy from which there was no appeal. They were alone.

“Oh,” she cried, her cheeks curiously indrawn; and set the lantern on the plates. Then, for some reason, the engines were cut to half speed; they

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droned, and the ship shivered all its length and set her trembling.

"Why are you here?" she said, and knew then that she had spoken in a whisper.

"A wrench," he lied. "Well, I came down to get a wrench I left."

"Without a light?" she thought, but dared not say it.

Her face was mortally pale against the scarf of deep purple swayed over her shoulder. "Gently, gently," she thought. There could be no running away from this. No slightest backward movement.

The fireman breathed harshly. Again, as when he had crept over the hatches towards her, as when his eyes had dropped from hers last night, in the ravine, this odd reluctance, or even bashfulness, went through him; and he could will nothing. What was fierce died in him like a dying flame; and what was left he felt to be a cowering thick brute without a tongue. Had she moved but one step away, had she broken under the strain of

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waiting, this mood would have passed; but, as if she knew this perfectly, she did not move.

His arms hung limp, his brilliant eyes were turned from hers to the narrow shoulders, with their lines half hid under the folds of the scarf; he heard her breath, rapidly but evenly; and felt an imperious poise in that sustained silence. Felt it, and yet knew not what it was.

Sweat gathered on his brow; he heard faint coal-droppings from the ledges with painful distinctness; a ticking of lapped iron all along the ravaged sides of the *Yuly Yinks*. And then again he felt a desire to say something reassuring, and a sense of unholy trespass, incomprehensible to him.

“Well, have you got it?” she was saying calmly.
“Have you found your wrench?”

“Well, no,” he said. “It ain’t here. No, lady, it ain’t here.”

His voice was hoarse, and the echo exceedingly unpleasant. The heart of this barbarian was in a craven mood both sweet and terrifying to him.

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The restriction on him was this: that after her first cry, she had shown no lack of confidence in either of them. Not in herself, not in him. No one might surmise, to see her face, so seriously framed in gloom, that any doubt was there. Red light lay, vividly even, on her cheeks; her lips were steady and parted like a wondering child's; her quick breathing might have been the breathing of simple interest.

At the one moment in which she could have done so successfully, she said quietly,

"Will you take the lantern? I want to go further back."

Amazed, the fireman rolled his head on his shoulders, and felt a compression under the ribs and a tremor of the heart, precisely as if fire were beginning to creep into his bones again.

"Well, yes, ma'am," he said. "Yes. I will—I will swing open them doors for you."

He picked up the lantern, hesitated, and moved forward heavily, mumbling,

"They're all alike. . . . All alike."

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“Yes, but I must explore. Do let’s go to the end.”

He walked sulkily aft, and felt her following, he heard the whispered clash of her amazing body-coverings, the very definite clap of her tall heels on the iron floor, the slight boom of his own bare heels. His one thought was now of escape. Sweat stood on his brow.

He set his shoulder to door after door; they snarled on the hinges, and these exploring spirits glided on, the light flashing on beams and cross girders, shadowing huge dents and hollows in the floor plates punched there by the fall of solid ore—giving all a gaunt and worn look, like the chafed hide of a thrall’d monster. And to this thrall’dom the man also bore harsh witness.

Not till he came to the very last partition did he summon resolution to turn. Then as a rare thing might stay the arm of poet or savage, by the insistent stillness and enchantment of mere beauty, he stood again, massive, limp, eyeing her in quick flashes, as she hovered to and fro, now in

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gloom, now in the fantastic rays of the red light, under which she glowed like a tinted marble.

Again she became still and thoughtful; and now just inside her lips there was a smile of exultation, almost of mirth, as she watched him. For she had mistaken his strange indulgence of her for her conquest.

And again, feeling his own shaggy bulk, seeing the writhing veins of his own huge arm, on which light glistened, Cagey's eye returned to this something velvet, smooth, this something sheer, precipitous, this curious medley and mischief of silks and brave movements whose frailty touched the heart with its pathos, whose beauty kindled it with its fire. This sweet activity of her silent presence fell on him like wind on the brow of a bound slave. Temptation of Caliban in the Isle of Vices.

The scarf slipped from her shoulders, and wavered towards him like a purple bat struggling silently in the silence of that rusty cavern. He put out his hand, and when his fingers closed on

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the fabric he thrilled, and a strange pricking ran all through his body. He had never felt silk before. He knew now for the first time the sliding softness, the lulling or enlivening ecstasy roused in the body by the things that women wear.

She took back the scarf without touching his hand.

A heavy timber, which had been used to prop the door, lay just behind her. Adjusting the scarf, she sank slowly down on this, and clasped her knees, keenly receptive of this harshness and hugeness of the lonely echoes of faintest noises, of the innumerable rivets, the rough edges of the seamed interior, the red halo of light around the immense arms of the man-ape who confronted her with his inert stooping of shoulders, his doubting, his dread silences, during which he strove to reach the heart of his problem.

Again a chill, a tremor passed through her; but she made as if she had felt the damp, and drew the scarf tighter about her neck.

"What a great gloomy place," she said then,

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using her full tones. "Only think—it is moving. It seems so still."

"Yes, moving," said Cagey. "Thirteen knots."

"You are a fireman, aren't you?"

"Yes."

Cagey breathed noisily.

"And this is your time to sleep?"

"In a bit."

"Is it hot, these days in there?"

She levelled an arm towards the fireroom, and allowed it to sink slowly to her knee again.

"No, ma'am, not now."

Cagey was trapped; his body lashed with a million tiny thongs, his tongue leaded.

Slowly he squatted before her, folding his limbs under him with strange facility, with the solemn deliberation of a ceremonial kneeling. He leaned forward, his eyes averted, his forearms flattened against his knees. He was unable to go, and yet to stay was torture.

This then was Slim's woman. Slim could deal with her, could come at her as he chose, could solve

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instantly the cold brilliant puzzle of those detaining eyes. Here, and here alone, Slim was master; for this was what he had been bred to master.

Yet what had Slim contributed to his opportunity? Nothing. He had opened his eyes on the world and found it good. Ah, but now he should find it evil, he should know the bitterness of burning marl-bottoms, he should know the awful striving of the dark regiment of scarce human toilers, who gaze with eyes of intolerable longing at the brilliant pageant of clouds and seas, and solid houses and comfortable men, these men who march serene, trampling down the livid bones of the dead, sea-washed, on their road to happy fortune. And in a fiend-like blur of thought, Cagney swore that Slim's eyes should no more see good, but only, in the light of fierce fires, these throngings of regret, these stifling desires, thwarted, thwarted, until one morning he would be knocked on the head and thrown into the lake, to bob about there like a bit of rotten fruit.

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He sat glaring at the lantern, half forgetful of her, in his thought of this balancing of evil fates; and heard her only when she said for the second time,

“How long have you fired on the Lakes?”

“Three seasons.”

“And before that?”

“Windjamming.”

“Ah . . . What is that?”

“Well, I was an able seaman,” answered Cagey, sullenly. “Square-rigged ships—China, Australia, and the West Coast.”

He sat crushed, spreading his toes, while this gentle voice fell on his ears, tormenting him, loading him with a mysterious embarrassment, so that he, whom all men feared, could only close and uncloset his hands, inspecting, with veiled eyes, the nervousness of his toes. Stroke on stroke, she beat him down, beat him flat.

“Can’t you get a better job than firing? You seem intelligent.”

His eyes flashed.

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"I got the most independent job on the ship," he said. "I don't take orders from no guy at all, once I go on watch."

He bragged of his independence with a sullen and challenging pride.

"And yet," she said, "surely you're not satisfied. You must long for something better than the firehole."

"That's good, that is," said Cagey. "Well, here, what do you think a guy like me is for, if he ain't to shovel? Here."

He raised the palms of his hands towards her, seamed and healed and yellow—invulnerable hands dipped and proved in fires.

"While I got them hands I will shovel," he mumbled indistinctly. "Yes, I will shovel, all right."

"There is a man on this ship, worth millions, who had hands like that once," said Avis Wrenn.

Cagey's head sank between his shoulders, his lips protruded; he whispered harshly,

"That's a fact. . . . That's a fact."

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"You know that?"

"Yes."

"Well, how was it? Why lose hope?"

An odd change came into Cagey's behavior. Without looking at her, he seemed to crave knowledge.

"How does he get along though?" he asked swiftly. "He don't look overjoyed; I seen him coming out there at supper time. He looked sorry. I could break him all up now. . . . Is he satisfied? Satisfied with what he done . . . I wonder. How does he figure it will end?"

He spoke in low and fierce tones, like one suddenly awakened.

"Why do you ask those questions?" cried Avis Wrenn. A glint of terror showed in the corners of her eyes. "What's that to you?"

Cagey crouched lower, meditating, half drowsed again by the fragrance of her drifting over him, in faint essences. By this she came and went, elusive, for still he had not raised his eyes.

"Nutt'n," he said. "Nutt'n at all."

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The girl drew breath deeply, and shifted her feet so that they disappeared under the white skirt. This movement seemed to the racked fireman deliberate, as if her thought had silently thrust against him. But her eyes, full of bafflement and sorrow, shone on him now mistily, and fearless. She saw the force in his huge shoulders, and at the same time these limitations of his soul, these deep scars sunk there by the paradox of labor and leisure side by side, the illogical subservience of the visible body to a distant brain.

He bore his chains heavily that night. Beast and god in him brooded over her together while the ship moved over the empty lake, shaking a trifle, with her suggestion of mysterious stealth, sliding north through the night with merciless craft, making for the iron which was to forge new chains, and in another form, without substance, to enter the soul of wistful millions crouched below a blurred horizon.

"After all . . . what you must have seen," murmured the girl.

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The sullen eyes of the fireman, meeting hers, exhibited their curious blue light, betrayed their inarticulate longing and fell again. He had turned his eyes from no living thing before.

The challenge of her physical nearness, the slight rich sounds attendant on her, such as the barely perceptible creak of her slippers, and then a nameless rustle or whispering of fabric—all this haunted him, and suddenly he thought he would contrive to have her touch him of her own accord, signifying thus some bond between them of the common flesh. Yet he sat rigid, doming his back, straining every muscle, and allowed her to sit, moment by moment, on that huge timber, unmolested.

All this had for him at once the haunting melancholy of a dream, and the disenchantment of awakening. This world of men who dwelt beyond in houses, had brought up a soft spirit to torment him for he could have no part in her; and yet in the cold fury of his unquestioned might he allowed them to live. For this was his tor-

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ment—a strange jealous question of the destiny of this creature, or destination of her; a mad jealousy which could unseat even that cynical and devastating calm of which life had made him master.

This torment the girl felt, exulting; she saw that he was cowed, that he was abased; she looked round upon the scaly walls of that dark sea-chamber, wide-eyed, her breast tumultuous, Andromeda not yet freed from the monster; and now a dizzy fancy seized her to put her head somehow in the lion's mouth to prove him tame. He had lain in wait; and he should suffer.

At this very moment Cagey was hearing again the words of the wrathful steward, "She would walk on your bones, feller."

Rousing himself, he muttered, "I seen a lot, all right. Yes, I seen a lot. . . . I been in the Army too. I got sliced in the Philippines."

"Where?" she cried.

He bent forward and down, bowing before her, and thus he drew back his blue jumper slightly,

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and his back shone silken underneath. Strange that though the commonplaces of him were rough and seamed, he should yet display this clear uncorrupted beauty deeper. A long white scar struck down diagonally from the slope of his formidable freckled shoulder. Fascinated, the girl gazed at the thick white corrugations of muscle between the shoulder blades. Irresistibly moved, she bent and laid a finger on that scar. Thus she came close, with lips parted, and said, "Oh," faintly, as if dizzied, her breath warm on his neck. That fragrance chilled him.

Suddenly her eye gleamed, as in triumph; her dark brows arched, her thin nostrils spread wide. The submissiveness of the fireman, expressing itself through her finger tips, ran like wine through all her narrow body, flushing her cheek, even now red by lantern light.

But that touch, prolonged in the sweet insolence of her mood, was fatal to the spell she had cast. With her eyes on the straight line of her arm, terminating in austere contact with that mas-

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sive shoulder, she forgot the reason for her ascendancy. She forgot that this submissiveness was nothing but the dream-fabric of his indulgence of her, which a touch with one hint of her soft reality and weakness would rend. This touch struck away the formalities of his imagination, it divested her of the dread remoteness of her charm, the secure uprightness of her bearing, the compelling justice of her reserve.

In a twinkling his great arm had coiled round her; he leapt to his feet, taking her soft body towards him, feeling it arch away from him like the right challenge, the consuming hatred of the physically weak, the hate that was love, that was pain, the flash of barbarism in the daunted heart within the silk, in the face of which his yearning must prevail. He pressed his lips deep into the soft throat, bending as she bent, one with her for that second of time. . . .

In the next a long figure dropped out of the upper reaches of that red vault, a hatch-club fell twice heavily on Cagey's skull; the place rang

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with the dull echo of it; he shuddered, sank, losing his hold . . . rolled on the plates. . . .

Avis Wrenn, finding herself in the arms of Alexander Grant, pressed close, staring up at him with woeful eyes.

"Alec," she cried, and then, when the strangeness of his being there first came to her, she whispered, "Why, Alec . . . Alec."

"I've come," said Alec grimly. "What are you doing down here?"

"I—came down just to see . . . and then he—he must have followed, and I stood him . . . off . . . while I could."

She pressed her cheek to his with a terrible gladness; and now hers was the submissive part.

"It was—horrible," she whispered. "I didn't dare turn my back. Not once."

Alexander stared at the body of his fireman and at a line of blood gleaming on the hatch-club.

"This is a rough lot," he said. "You must stay forward, every minute. This man and I have an account to settle."

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She clung to him.

"Alec, he will kill you. He is so strong."

"He may be done for now himself," said Alec. "I didn't choose weapons. I couldn't sleep for the heat. I saw your lantern flash through the hatch; and I—looked down."

"Alec," she cried, "what are you doing here?"

"Deckhand," said Alec.

"What can you mean? Alec . . ."

Again the doubt lay in her eyes. Inexpressibly heart-choking to Alexander, the nature of whose crime had put him beyond her sympathy, and beyond the solace of her love. Yet, because she knew nothing of his crime, she was still betrayed into the mood of adoration. Such was Alexander's logic. Affection he took to be a load, held by one bolt; snatch but the bolt away, and the whole would fall. Alexander feared this bolt more heartily than fires of his penance, if penance there could be.

"Come," he cried, "get out of this. He will come to in a minute."

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He loosed her arms, set the scarf about her neck, picked up the lantern.

"Come," he murmured, taking a step forward. She came to his side; he took her hand, and guided her rapidly through the holds, and again her little feet rang out—tap, tap, tap—on the iron plates.

"And whatever you do," said Alexander, "don't tell the old man I'm aboard. He'll never see me, if you don't. Avis . . . promise me that?"

"Yes . . . Alec."

"Well?"

"What is it? Tell me, Alec. Your face looks hard. This isn't a prank. Oh, I know, it isn't that. It's something."

"Well?"

"Something you're ashamed of," said the girl steadily, in a whisper. A weird echo of that whisper bounded from the iron plates, making a menace of it; the secrecy which Cagey had noted was here still; but with a difference. Alexander breathed fast; and Avis set her foot on the bottom step.

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"Yes," cried poor Alexander, "I'm never coming back. So that's the truth. I've mangled everything."

Avis caught her breath.

"But you follow me?"

"No, no. I swear it. A terrible mischance."

"Then Alexander," she said, "I follow you. I don't care what you've done. I don't . . . Alexander."

"Well?"

"Steady a minute . . . I'm . . . kissing you."

"No," sobbed Alexander; but she shut the words off with her lips.

"Alec, dear, come back, come back," she cried pitifully, sinking towards him again.

He thrust the lantern into her hand, feeling her softness like a corruption of his iron purpose, and reeled away into the blackness, still holding in his hand the hatch club stained with Cagey's blood.

Kneeling in the blackness of the after hold he fumbled about until he came against the body of Cagey. He ran his fingers over the skull; and

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then satisfied that it was still intact, he swung himself out of the hold and returned to his bunk.

Half an hour later the head of Cagey protruded through the hatch, sleepy, calm and quiet.

"That's all right, that is," he murmured, running his hands through his hair, and staring at the red fingers. "Wait a bit. Wait a bit."

He put his body cumbrously to rest on the hatch, and took counsel of the stars.

X

THE *Yuly Yinks* steamed north on an empty stomach; the deckhands ate, slept, washed their clothes, and shovelled ashes. Yet the retaliation of Cagey hung fire.

Each watch Slim went down, cautiously, to help him draw his fires, and to shovel the ashes into the elevator; but Cagey said nothing. At first Slim sat out the whole watch with him; until Shorty told him the way of a deckhand on the Lakes.

“Shoovel his ashes f’r him, and come away to yer bunk,” he said, “like the individual ye are.”

And as to the coal, said Shorty, that, by the unwritten law of the Lakes, must Cagey pitch himself.

“Niver lift yer hand to that, lad,” said Shorty.

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“Two dollars he gets f’r every wan iv yours; so let him earn it. Aw, he’s a notorious playboy, is Cagey. Whin the bunker will rrun no more iv itself, then ’tis time enough to stand by him. . . . I mind the *James Q. Shorthouse*, a cruel hot wan, that. Four fires a watch to clean, and the white heat iv them streamin’ out an’ growin’ me beard for me. I was passin’ coal for a wop fireman, and that was a lamentable sart iv a man, wid fine white hairs on his chin, and a monkey face as yellow as a hot cinder; and ivery fire he pulled he wud be moanin’ and rumblin’ on f’r his own ease, and ploomp goes his head in the wather barrel and swashes around betwixt each fire, and comes out drippin’ an’ rumblin’ on again.

“Did he ask you to help?” inquired Slim.

“Divil did he. No, but arl the time he wud be vampin’ on as earnest as a mimber iv Congress; an’ simple junk, too, iv a man cud take heed to the dago iv ut. An’ out comes the second and says he, ‘Can you not throw on a bit of smoke for the man?’ ‘No,’ says I, ‘niver; not that I wud be

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grudgin' the man, but 'tis the principle, wan man to eight fires, says I, an' the ship should have the spectacle iv the poor man befure it, says I.' "

Shorty was no man to choke the sluggish stream of social morals.

Even the slight exertion of shovelling the ashes made Slim's arm strangely leaden; and always he kept an eye sidelong on Cagey, who continually delayed . . . delayed, with something like a smile on his lips, and allowed his eye to rest on the slim body of his coal-passer with a kind of quizzical patience. Masterly, this ability to suggest, by rolling the tongue in the cheek, the terrors of a lingering vengeance. Cagey was a man fastidious in his cunning.

Once he said,

"That is a gay germ of yours, Slim," but Slim answered nothing.

"Soft," muttered Cagey. "Soft."

The light in his eyes swam through the black side of the ship; and suddenly he roared aloud, and brought down his fist on a square black of coal

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and shattered it. In all his life he had met but one man who could do that thing as surely as he; and that was a dumb Finn whom he had beaten to a pulp on a warmish summer's morning in the Indian Ocean. His strength, with the kind of physical intelligence he had, could never be withstood. When he felt the forces of abandon gathering and trampling in the back of his head, then he formed some fatalistic conception of triumph and swung forward. . . .

In the sixth watch Cagey met the bo'sun Oscar, scraping his feet on the steel platform or fiddley, over the boilers—for the north wind blew on them now, and when they were not hot they were cold, poor souls, always in a shivering or a glow of sense. Yet, although they never could understand this perpetual agitation of their nervous surfaces, they bore it with humped shoulders, with pallid grins in the North, and greasy ones in the South.

"There's the stacks of *Calumet K. Hecla*," said Oscar. "Dock next watch."

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Black and spidery the stacks of the great copper mine rose to the south through a crimson sunset.

"Who's monkey rope man, with Tony?" said Cagey.

"One of the deckhands," said Oscar.

"Which one?"

"The Irishman."

"Here's a five-spot to make it Slim."

Cagey thrust out the bill.

"He ain't never been down a rope," said Oscar aghast.

"You can ask him, can't you," said Cagey fiercely. "Well, there's no harm in asking the man, is there? You know what I mean? Here's the five. I don't care what you do. It's nutt'n to me."

The bo'sun's fist closed on the money.

"I can ask him," he said, abashed and smiling. "Yes, I will say to him, 'Go down,' and then he can complain."

"That's enough," said Cagey. "Well, you

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know, Oscar, any deckhand ought to go down a monkey-rope."

"Sure. What is he paid for," said Oscar, dubiously.

Therefore, in the middle of his seventh watch of sleep, Slim was struck awake by Oscar.

"Hey dere," said the bo'sun.

Shorty was already up. He sighed disconsolately over his stockings, which the heat had rotted.

"She's notorious; notorious," he murmured, and meant that the *Yuly Yinks* was notorious, to bring him back from the dead.

"You dere," said Oscar to Slim, "come on deck and stand by der monkey-rope, along vid Tony."

He withdrew, hearing no complaint; but Shorty leaned back, dragging at his stocking, and poured forth homely speech.

"'Tis Cagey will be forninst all this. I tart so. I tart so. Have ever ye been down a monkey-rope, Shlim?"

"No."

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"Then do not. Let thim call the other watchman. 'Tis forbidden be Act iv Legislature."

"Still I'm going down, if I'm told," said Slim. "I'm a deckhand all right."

"Yes. Yere a deckhand. A mortal deckhand. What's deck watch then? What's me bould Henry then wid the aggressive ears to him? Where's he at?"

He listened critically to the sizzling of the hot radiator at his elbow.

"Cagey again," he said, "twisting the handle off the business here, out of his black heart."

The heat in the room was merciless. They glistened, they swayed on the long bench, and drew on their stiff clothes.

"I couldn't refuse," said Slim, shutting his teeth.

In all watches now and in all crises, he saw before him the sorrowful face of Avis, for whose sake he did penance. "It'd be mutiny, Shorty."

"Aw mutiny, man," said Shorty. "'Tis a case iv conscience. Have ye not the girl to consider,

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to say nothin' iv yer appetite. What would I do tomorrow, watchin' the loomp iv cabbage ye will niver eat, me ould college chum? Wait. I'm tellin' ye a shtory."

He wrung his chubby arms, and dashed sweat from his round face.

"I mind on the *James Q. Shorthouse* a man wint over at the Soo—a bould lad that was, wid-out patience, boys, he was a desperated sart iv a felly too, an' off he joomped, wid six feet iv open wather betwixt him and the dock. Man, do ye mind the consthruccion iv the American lock at the Soo—cimint, wid smooth edges ground down to a bit iv a polish be wire cables shcrapin' along it. That was what me bould Edgar hit wid the heels iv him; an' then he tossed back his arms, an' I cud hear the nails iv his boots shcrapin' across the cimint."

Shorty shivered, sitting in that heat, and Cagey, standing outside the door, purring thickly,

"Trying to spoil yer nerve, Slim?"

"Boys, oh, boys," said Shorty; "he fell back;

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and the ship came in and caught him before he could touch the wather, and she wint in, as it were, widout knowledge iv the man at all. He wud not even serve for a dacint bumper but the forefut iv her shteped on him, like a heart-lazy man settin' down fut on a rotten ploom. . . . Wan mo-mint a man, and the next a notorious rred fountain iv blood, shpatterin' the wheel-house."

Thus Shorty; and the heart of Slim beat hard and fast; but he was the son of the Viking.

"I'm going down," he said.

The hawk nose of Cagey glowed bleak and terrifying over the end of his cigarette. He was satisfied.

"It's easy, Slim," he said. "Just a swing out at the right time, that's all. There's nutt'n to it. But don't swing too early, Slim. No, not too early."

"God rist ye, me heart crawls to think iv ye, in yer awkwardness," said Shorty.

Outside it was black night, and the great freighter, shivering, nosed her way into the docks

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with the screw sobbing at her stern. The docks came stalking into the lake on a thousand black piles, a long line of lights twinkled at the tops of the ore pockets, but below all was darkness.

They were in a great harbor, Slim now saw; and his sleepy eyes, blinking, caught a wide shine of lights from a town on the hillside.

A cold wind blew over the forepart of the ship. This was the North, the inclement North, known to all who know the Lakes; a haven in summer to such as come out of the reek of Erie; but in the fall, sending out frost-devils from which all good firemen flee, going South for the winter; for then the random spirit of fire seizes on them and frees them and turns them loose for the great rolling adventure of their winter-freedom.

Mysterious and unreasonable men, to fly in the face of more pay and less work on account of a little frost. But to firemen you must preach a hell of cold, not of heat. . . . Have they a philosophy in all this? Do they, in truth, after Carlyle's great formula, love the world, though it

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injure them, nay, because it injures them? Perhaps.

Slim and Shorty paced the deck with shrugged shoulders. Profuse sweating had opened their pores, and made of their skins sieves through which the north wind blew on their hearts direct.

"Where's the monkey rope?" said Slim.

"Yonder it lies coiled, the snake," said Shorty; and pointed without blitheness to a knotted rope on the starboard side. Like an unconsidered tramp the *Yuly Yinks* had got to help herself to the dock, flinging off two men to take her heaving lines and cables.

The mate, clad in oilskins, appeared over the starboard ladder, and cried,

"Who's going down the rope with Tony?"

"I am," said Slim.

"Done it before?"

"Yes," said Slim casually; and felt Shorty's fingers in his arm.

"Niver, lad."

"Yes," said Slim, taut as a drawn cord.

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They were silent, for now the ship was close. The wind fell, there was a lapping of waters; the underbody of the dock gave out a dank breath; and the *Yuly Yinks* forged ahead through gloom in a kind of prolonged stealth. They were almost in the shadow of the steel ore shoots, which were attached to the bottom flaps of the pockets, and pointed heavenwards, reeled up in long rows, like mortars, high over the dock. On the port side rose up, vague and unsubstantial, the huge bulks of grain elevators.

Tony, the French watchman, began to pace up and down beside his monkey rope like a prevented cat. Better than Slim, he knew the terrors of night docking; and with each turn that he took, his body quivered and he looked for the mate's word as for a sign from heaven. Imagination of it was a worse thing than the act itself.

And Slim saw now that by this single resolution he had stepped out of security, like these others, in whose muscles lay the movement of giant freights, by whose blood and will they went steam-

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ing down the Lakes, he had submitted himself to be crushed like a rotten plum, in the service of industry.

“’Tis law that a ship should have accommodation shteps,” whispered Shorty, “and so she has, this wan; but be some shtrange chanct they’re too shorrt; they were bornn, like the prisint individual, to eshcape service.”

The watchman tied the rope and flung it over. He made the heaving line into two coils nervously and hung a bowline about the loop in the end of the wire cable coming from the winch. Kneeling on the loop, to flatten it, he thrust it through the sheave in the side of the ship, and crouched, waiting. It was going to be a ticklish landing.

“Eet ees dark,” said Tony, showing his teeth. It was dark.

The *Yuly Yinks* went in fast, on a line parallel with the dock, which came out nearly half a mile into the lake. Her engines were still at half speed, for the wind blew off the dock, and it was impossible to lay her back on driftway.

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Though he strained his eyes overside, Slim saw nothing. But all the time the dock was there, with its chafed spiles and rotten planking. Faint moans from swaying timbers floated up. Very pretty, thought poor Slim, hugging his heart. For upon him had been thrust the duty of landing on this dock, by hook or crook, as the ship still was coming on.

“Hang a light out the starboard hawse-hole, Riley,” said the mate, reappearing; but this thought came too late, for the next instant he shrieked, “Now then . . . lively boys.”

In a tone of equally agonized entreaty, he said, “Look out for your legs. Watch the spiles.”

Thereupon Tony fled over the ship’s side like a rat running on a hawser. He swung into shadow, they heard the soles of his feet rasp on the iron; the bit of yellow rope on which the mate’s lantern shone jumped and tautened; and then there came up to them a hollow sound, very distant. This was Tony’s body sprawling on the dock.

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"Awri'," he shouted faintly.

"Now, you," yelled the mate.

And Slim went down the monkey-rope. The knots ploughed through his blistered palms, turning up skin like sod; and as he slid, he bumped the iron plates of the ship, which loomed over him impervious as a cliff.

"Watch the spiles, you."

The mate's voice came winding down to him like a cry from a remote cavern; and lowering himself another knot, he stared into the dense black. But it was not only impossible to see the spiles; it was impossible to see the dock. Far up the ore pockets loomed over him jewelled with lights which were no good to him down there; and which appeared to him, in his inverted position, to dwindle away into infinity. He heard a chop of waters; and then, accustoming himself to the dark, sensed at length the outposts of the dock. The ship seemed to Slim to come on at frightful speed, with a disheartening slur of water at her stem.

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“Like a rotten plum.” This was the excellent and tenacious image Shorty had given him.

Twisting his head he could see the black bulge of the *Yuly Yinks* advancing as if to overtake him; and high above the ship’s rail was beaded with staring faces full of a concern for him that now seemed to Slim a trifle humorous.

“He’s not away yet,” muttered the mate.

At that very moment, Slim put the soles of his feet to the side of the ship, and coming up a little on the rope, let drive with his body at the dock. He was conscious of going through the air all awry; and then his chest came with staggering force against a wooden pile; he reeled, his foot sank into a pile of ore drippings and a piece of the round ore whirled his foot to the very edge of the dock. He bent back and forward, his upper body described a wavering circle, and then he fell into the water, and his finger nails just scraped the edge of the dock as he fell.

The water was cold, full of ore slime; he rose with dream-slowness, and reached up an arm for

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the beam running above his head. He touched it with his finger-tips and sank again. Then the ship, in that fraction of a second, came closer, and the water boiled all round his neck. He shrieked, and endeavored to dive underneath the dock; but heavy planks had been nailed against the piles under water, filling up all openings. He dashed his forehead against these insane planks and at that moment, his legs, kicking out behind him, came against the underbody of the ship itself with stunning force, whirling him sidewise, and knocking his jaw against the forward spile. Then he felt the breath of the advancing ship strong on his cheek; he heard the screw muttering, for the ship was light; and he saw with certainty that he was doomed.

At this moment a rope came wriggling from above; he grasped it, and raised himself a little way. But already the opening between the ship and the dock was too narrow to permit the passage of his body; and for a fateful second, he was conscious of that row of stricken faces, curi-

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ously distorted, straining down to him, yellow in the light of lanterns. With what mind was left to him, he noted that the mouths of those men were all open, their cheeks hollowed, and immediately after he fell between the spiles again, and felt the rope go loose. And still he continued to thresh about, in this enclosure, which now barely allowed of his head coming out of water, battering his body in vain against the thick planks.

Suddenly the breath whistled out of him; his ribs rose and fell, aching, and his lips opened in a terrible circle. This was the instinctive action of his body, anticipating the pressure of the ship's side. In another instant he felt that pressure, dragging him down and forward, at first with extreme considerateness, as if he himself had leaned against the ship. Then the *Yuly Yinks* packed his shoulder-blades with perfect evenness against the planking; she rubbed the skin from his nose, which was just out of water; he felt the harsh iron drag across his very lips. . . .

Another inch nearer, and the *Yuly Yinks* would

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have gently snubbed the dock, erasing the deck-hand Slim, and leaving nothing but a red blot on the waters. But instead of swinging in this inch, which meant nothing to her, the *Yuly Yinks*, by some caprice, swung out an inch, another inch, a foot, two feet. This enabled Tony the watchman to make out, with his cat's eyes, a human arm wavering among the black piles. Kneeling, he seized this arm, and drew the body of Slim out of the water.

"Hurt?" he inquired.

Slim rubbed his nose, and his mind came back with hesitance into the body it had deserted.

"Eet ees awri," said Tony then. "Tak the mate's heavin' line."

Slim continued to stare at the man Tony, who, provoked by this stupidity, began to jabber in a loud, grievous tone, as if here were an end coming for both of them.

All at once Slim took meaning from the words. He was being urged to go aft and take the mate's heaving line. It had been perhaps fifteen sec-

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onds since he had left the monkey rope. In a flash, he saw that more remained for him to do than to be grateful. The ship was there, in this dream, in this dark; the mate was there. He could hear the engines reversing, and men running on the decks; and indeed now that he came to think of it, he heard as well a loud, dolorous cry, which was the second mate, wanting to know if there was a condemned man there, or was not a man there.

And then Slim stumbled among the spiles like a man drunk, and uttered a strangled cry betokening his presence. At once the heaving line came whipping down, and stung his cheek. He seized it, and swayed back hand over hand, until he felt the harsh wire loop of the cable; and taking this in both fists he strained against the ship, hearing the mate cry, "Fourth spile back. Fourth spile."

He turned his blurred eyes down into the blackness at his feet, but although he could see no holes in the planking, they were there; so that at the third step, he plunged one leg through a rotten

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spot, clean to the thigh. This seemed to strip the leg of flesh, and he felt the sickening shock of it above the groin. At this moment, too, he heard the mate, crying out in mystified agony to know what that fool out there was doing with the cable. Why wasn't he taking it?

Poor Slim got out of the hole, and dragged the wire back, yelling as he settled it over the spile. The winch drew it taut so quickly that his fingers were nearly jammed and he heard the wire biting into the spile, and shivered, and looked up consciously idle for the first time.

A strange sense of conquest or independence filled him now with something rather like religious zeal. He was re-born; once more he drew the quivering breath of a free agent, and felt as if the world had been thrown at him afresh, to do with what he would. He hung back his head, pulsing with pain; and now all his senses flooded him with a double alertness. He had jumped. That was something . . . for the first time something . . . and he was alive . . . to know that it

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was something. And Shorty had not jumped. Ah, Slim, but then Shorty was playing to no invisible gallery of proud or tender faces; and since he had not these mirrors to show him how admirable his personality might be, why risk a siege of the Marine Hospital or worse to make it admirable?

The clouds were breaking then, and sharp stars burned over Slim's head. He gaped at them with an unreasoning and even stupid joy; the joy of an escaped animal. He had come off with his life, no less; and now he knew how the sweetness and sharpness of life is founded upon release from peril deliberately undertaken. The night wind sang in his ear and fluttered on his cheek . . . he opened his mouth to it; and now the stars were raining on him, and his heart leapt to think that his eyes still turned in their sockets. Then he thought, in a spirit of forcible and terrified amazement, how soft and frail a thing he was. In the face of this frailty, how could men hope for anything? He glared at the black side

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of the ship, in a spasm of shuddering. There were men who undertook all this even and yet grew old. How was that?

He glowed, and drew back his shoulders. The worst that men could do to him was as nothing compared with the dreadful iron cheek of this affectionate *Yuly Yinks* which had so soothingly slid past his own. The machinations of Cagey, if such they were, became laughable; the authority of his father was nothing; jail was nothing. . . . But then he thought of Avis and at once something dropped out of the bottom of this heroic attitude.

Was love, then, he reflected bitterly, a weakening constituent? Constituent. It was all or nothing. This something new struggling in him had no part in that old love; it was free and self-created. Yet the touch of that past relation crumbled it, and brought back those languors, those implications of wealth, that sluggish acceptance of the sorrowful mysteries of ease. He must break with that forever. To form himself

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into a new man, he must shut the gates on that; he must shut out—Avis. Activity may leave the remembrance, but it will loosen that heavy and sweet clutch of love which men who work with their heads feel most strongly. . . .

He leaned against a spile, in blackness, breathing hard; and high overhead he saw four of the huge ore shoots lower themselves into four of the *Yuly Yinks'* holds. This was harsh and actual. With renewed poignancy he felt the possibility of the heroic here. Harshness and tumultuous slide of iron. What could say out more clearly than this the spirit of the men of the *Yuly Yinks'*? This downplunging of the stuff that in another form underlay the modern world; unrefined, dross, mere dirt dug from a hole; and yet without which men must seek caves again.

And seek caves they must as surely if ever they lacked the aid of these defiant Calibans below the water-line, who, guided by some unconscious philosophy of the value of agony to the war-soul of man, undertook to move the iron.

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Slim saw strange men, like men of another world, sway down the ladders on the outside of the ore pockets, moving lights, and unbolting the wooden flaps at the bottoms of the pockets. After which they swung their mauls into the planks, to start the ore; and there followed a rasping and spitting in the shoots, a fiery cascade of sparks speaking to the true iron in the ore; and then a muffled stumbling and groaning, a heavy roar, portentous reverberation and clamoring of those iron chambers as they awakened to this downleaping consignment of the iron earth.

And listening, Slim thought that all this, as it was gigantic, as it was necessary, must be somehow good, or greatly evil. Now it seemed effective action; and again only a mournful and eternal struggling of men with weights, a sore tragedy decreed to be played by men for dark gods to laugh at, a puny juggling with the visible symbols of this steadfast spirit of attraction, which ere-long would draw them all down tight to it forever in unseeing atoms.

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Then he heard the mate's voice,

"Has that man come aboard? Where's that deckhand? Where's the fellow that dropped into the water?"

Slim moved away from the spile, and found then that his body was fast stiffening. He dragged himself to the deck; a circle of faces pressed in on him, staring, stupidly solicitous. He waved his arms in front of him.

"I'm all right," he muttered. "Let me go below. . . . All right."

The skin was gone from his nose; his lips bled; his whole body was covered with ore slime. He heard groans, mumbled and horrified protests swam in his ear, which gave him to understand that he was a thing ruined beyond all help. And the mate, urging him aft, muttered with monotonous earnestness, "I told you to look out for your legs. I kept saying, 'Look out for your legs, man.' I told you to mind yourself. You ain't paid enough to take risks like that. Why, the

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ship could have made an awful mess of you. It could have— Are you all right?”

Slim glared at him helplessly, and nodded. A vague tremor ran through him again, as the mate, by his misdirected sympathy, mingled with self-justification, recalled the whole affair. The mate was even angry, would have liked to be wrathful, at the hideous awkwardness which might have resulted in death, staining his record. By his reproachful earnestness, he implied that the man Slim might have shown more consideration for his superiors than to have fallen into the water in that shocking fashion. They were all upset. Utterly unnecessary. The mate's eyes, speaking this reserve accusation, glowed balefully in his gaunt face, while he continued to say,

“Well, go below. You're a fright. You are daubed up something fierce. Get the Chief to give you the handle that turns on the steam in the shower. . . . You told me you had been down a rope, before, didn't you?”

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"Yes," said Slim.

"Well, then," said the mate. He subsided, and went forward, with that duty done.

Slim continued to walk steadily down the deck, all alone; and as he walked, he felt the atmosphere thickening about him. He might have been walking on a deep sea bottom . . . in molasses. Very queer. When he came opposite the galley door, another of those racking spasms overtook him. It was like the recoil of his imagination. He felt again those cold planks, the water seething at his neck, the droning of the screw . . . the raw breath of the oncoming ship freezing his soul. In one monstrous moment, worse almost than the other, he anticipated all this again, and putting out an arm blindly, drooped against the galley door. It swung in, allowing him to fall his length on the deck. . . .

He opened his eyes, and found his head in a woman's lap, a woman's hand on his brow.

"Avis," he whispered.

"No, dearie," said the woman, brokenly. Her

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woeful face bent over him with a terrible yearning, her eyes, shadowed by the masses of that bright hair, sparkled with tears. She shook with some fierce emotion, stroking his brow with her soft, moist fingers, which had the greasy feel of dishwater.

"He's all right," came a harsh voice. "Let him up. Let him up. I tell yer. The guy is scared, that's all."

"You get out," cried the woman. "I know. . . . This is your doing. . . . You put them up to this. You wanted—"

"Can it," said Cagey contemptuously. "You women give me a cramp. Well, I wanted what?"

The woman's head fell back; she gazed at him with flashing eyes, still holding the pallid head of Slim on her knees.

"He can't help it," she whispered.

"Hah," said Cagey. He flung himself out of the galley; and Slim struggled to his feet.

"What's all this?" he cried, making a pass before his eyes, and staring at the woman. She

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clutched at him, her long hands trailing down as he staggered up.

"Oh, it's nothin'," she whispered wearily. "Only you look out, young man; that man there . . . he's got it in for you."

Slim bent forward. A haunting doubt now flashed bright in his brain.

"Who are you then?" he whispered.

The woman shrank away, moaning; and suddenly buried her brilliant head in the folds of the black dress.

"I'm his—mother," she sobbed.

"Ah," said Slim. He caught himself again. He was reassured. The man Cagey was unwilling to avow the presence of his mother on the ship. A mother. That would weaken him. Yes, it would be like a weakness. It would be allowing sympathy or mother-love to interfere with the sufficiency of his agony, and his indictment of life. It would say with final clearness that, despite this demoniac necessity and lurid blaze of evil, leaping eternally abroad from no

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certain centre over all that great ploughed up field of torture, there yet hovered near him, in rare glints and rosy flashes, some spirit that was good, some hand that could soothe him, if he would.

Slim was calm.

"I won't hurt him," he said loftily.

The woman stared at him.

Slim repeated in tones of benevolent assurance, "I won't hurt him, I tell you," and backed out of the galley. The woman lifted her head and her eyes devoured him.

XI

THEN Slim, lurching into the fantail, ran foul of Shorty, who had left the forward winch.

"Oh, sick I was to see it, me innocuous Shlim," he moaned. "Sick t'see the sowl ground out iv yer body, and you only this marnin' prunin' an' dabbin' at yer face wid me own razor, and no man cud be more ch'ice iv a plant than ye were iv yer blessed face. But niver say it was me to give ye the advice to joomp. 'Stand clear, Shlim,' said I, 'an' let the ship help herself. Ye're not paid f'r it, that's the bitter rights iv ut. Let them as is paid to joomp, joomp,' says I. But ye joomped, an' there was me classic playboy Cagey grinnin' t'see ye go. Tak' heed to me, Shlim, me ould college choom, yer fireman is a bad wan; an' wid some tart iv murther rumblin' in the round head iv him."

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"Ah," said Slim.

"Mark me," said Shorty. "I wud be advisin' yer to leave the boat."

"Not leave the boat. . . . Never that," said Slim.

"Is ut the gurrl ye crave?" said Shorty, staring.

"No," said Slim sullenly. How desperate the grip of that other world on his affairs! He had opened the gate into it ever so little, and now all his mortal strength was not enough to shut it.

"Ay, 'tis the gurrl," said Shorty. "Ye wud serve her best be leavin'."

"It's not the girl," said Slim. "No man shall beat me off this ship. I'll have to be dropped off."

Something of Cagey's own fierce spirit of abandon was creeping into him; he felt it like fire in the veins of his aching body.

"Then he'll drop ye off," said Shorty, "f'r he loves the gurrl himself, and there cannot be two iv ye to the wan courtship."

"No?" said Slim ironically. "Well, hold on. I'm here yet."

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"Shlim, lad," cried Shorty, "f'r the sake iv argyment, now, will ye let me paddle forward an' ax the gurril herself? Let her say the wurrd—"

"No!" yelled Slim. "You leave her alone, Shorty. I'm nothing to her. I'm a deckhand, I tell you. A deckhand, a burnt, damned, dirty deckhand. And that's all."

"Is ut so?" said Shorty, sighing. "A mortal deckhand."

He surveyed the bare body of Slim, whose lines showed an increasing beauty as he hardened.

"A sthrange deckhand, that," he muttered. "No, Slim, what ye may be I know not; but 'tis not a deckhand. 'Tis another talent ye have. Strong ye may be, too, but look at the hand iv ye. Man, 'tis a thing iv beauty. 'Tis the hand iv a lady on your mother's side. Wid blue veins and all and all, an' the long fingers iv a pretty wife."

He sighed and pressed close.

"Ye give yerself a little torment in shport," he urged. "'Twill be the grand little trip t'relate to yer friends. 'Tis so I pulled on the rope,"

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ye will say; 'an' aw the hot wan she is in the hold.' . . . But wud I be doin' this iv me little tobacco shop in Glasgow had whispered the wurrd in me ear? No. Wasn't it for the mug iv him, that no dacent man wud hire, wud Cagey be feedin' the smoke? No, me ould college chum. Niver. Turn yer back on it, whilst yer hands is soft. That's me summin' up."

And while Shorty looked at him with round grey eyes curiously earnest, Slim saw anew that the body of man has a character of toil, or has not that character. Wherever he went the soft shield and shadow of his youth of luxury hung over him; and all men knew it. Yet in that moment he swore that he would elude it; by force of will he would sink himself among them and be lost; and come into the agony, that was good for him.

As he stood on the plates, in a cold fury at Shorty's words, Cagey came noiselessly into the fantail out of the engine-room, rolling himself a cigarette.

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"Well, Slim," he said, "you're monkey-rope man for the rest of this cruise, all right, all right. You done well. You done noble, Slim."

Slim's wrath broke.

"Come on and finish me, you big crook," he bawled. "I laid you out fair and square, didn't I?"

Cagey arched his diabolical brows.

"Why, Slim," he purred, "that was all right. That was no dirty trick. I got what was coming to me, Slim. Well, you don't hear me complain, do you? No, I ain't that kind of a guy. What kick have you got coming? A little tap like that is good for me, Slim. Ain't it? Well, ask me, ain't it?"

He hung the cigarette in his lips, and lit a match without once shifting his brilliant eyes. And then Slim leapt, in all his nakedness, and brought his head bull-fashion against Cagey's ribs. The fireman grunted, and dealt his coal-passer an ugly elbow-blow behind the temple. Slim shuddered and sank to the deck; then he rose to his

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knee, stood up weakly, and took the next blow of the savage fireman under the heart.

"We'll even it; we'll even it," whispered Cagey, glaring at the battered body of Slim, which lay twisted at his feet. He lifted him as he would have lifted a child's body, and put him in his bunk. Then, crawling into the bunk opposite, he lay with his chin in one hand, and his eyes steadfastly on the still face of Slim, uptilted in gloom.

After a time Slim stirred, opened an eye, and rolled weakly to his elbow. The face of Cagey hung out of the bunk across the way, grinning.

"Well, what would yer little germ say to yer now," said Cagey.

Blinking his eyes, Slim might have recollected what one of his old professors had said upon a time to a class in English—that every man, however tame, at least once in his life is mad enough to kill, and would, were it not for the moral restraints which civilization has laid upon him. For this, to Slim, was that red moment. He longed to feel the throat of Cagey bursting under

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his fingers, the eyes swelling, the huge body going limp. He lived this moment in anticipation with the dumb ferocity of an ape; his fingers strained into his mattress; and his very legs grew quivering hard as he put forth physical effort in the wake of his imagination.

And Shorty, feeling the strain of this silence, began to mumble foolishly,

“But which is the leopard and which is the tiger? Whichever you choose, lady; you have paid your money; and you are entitled to take your ch’ice.”

XII

SLIM fell asleep and sleep played him foul tricks. He dreamt that Cagey leaned over him with a white hot bar and sank it into his shoulders, and burned his arms away. He woke writhing, to find both his arms stone-cold below the shoulders. This was the numbness due to unaccustomed strain. He swayed his body back and forth in the narrow bunk; and then pain came into his arms again and he was immensely thankful and fell asleep.

But this second sleep into which he escaped betrayed him yet more grievously, for now he fell overboard again, and raved and pounded the planks, hearing the blades of the ship's screw threshing the water a little way off; and then the ship pressed him flat again, and with his last despairing shriek, he came to life, sitting bolt up-

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right and driving his head into the bunk above with such force that he collapsed at once and lay nauseated. His face was bathed in cold sweat and his ribs ached.

He fell asleep again, but the dream of the monkey rope and the ship's side lay in wait for him; he saw the wet plates gleaming within an inch of his tortured face, he heard water slobbering in that narrow space, prisoning his soul; and when all but crushed, he woke and stared, half in rage, half in gratitude through the wires of his bunk.

Cagey had taken himself away.

The sound of Shorty's breathing filled him with hot resentment because that fellow lay like a log, and took sleep to himself selfishly. Slim rolled out of his bunk weakly and went out on deck. The ore still hissed in the shoots; but less continuously; and now he could see the ore dock men, high above, thrusting down into the pockets with long poles, to start the flow. The moon was shining; the shoots, which had been red with

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rust inside, were now broad paths of silver, after the rub of downcoming iron. An engine came puffing out on the tracks, moving a long string of steel ore cars, heaped with the iron, come to replenish the pockets.

And the *Yuly Yinks* sank, sank, like a black duck settling on her brood; and now the spinning cones in her dismal holds had risen high, and because she had tilted a trifle, the shoots were reeled up to discharge against the port side, and so trim ship.

"Thirteen cars there," bawled the mate.
"'Nough."

The greedy ship had had her fill; and before dawn stole out of that mysterious harbor, sunk to her line of deepest load. The poker players in the mess-room put up such packs as they had not torn in pieces, gambling; and Henry the deck watch, he of the wide set eyes and forward leer- ing ears came out and took his place at the winch, moaning that he would marry and settle down in Cleveland and have it soft. He had won his

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spurs that night by tearing a pack of cards in two, when the luck turned against him—no easy feat, without long practice; and now, though he was admired for the first time, he affected to be sad.

Yes, he would settle down and have it soft. What man could say honestly that this was a pleasant thing, shivering over a winch in the dark before the dawn, submitting to the profanity of the mate, the inclemency of the wind, the callousness of mates who had won at poker, where he had lost. He would get a half hitch around his destiny and have it soft.

This was also the view of Shorty. He too wanted to have it soft, to repose indefinitely on the bosom of that girl in Buffalo. He was meant to stretch his legs over a pipe, with a mug of beer at his elbow. Ah, that was it. This life of "cravenbould" heaps of ashes gave him no ease; and ease was what he sought, the cool expansiveness of bars, some nodding space in the daytime.

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Hugeness of indulgence. A true disciple of Gargantua, Shorty. He had none of the abandon that gave Cagey a name in the land. No, but he had a wisdom in him of which he must be delivered.

This wisdom he meditated while they were steaming through Superior. Sitting on the hatch, with his plump shoulders rounded over, and the sun stinging him through a cool wind, Shorty be-thought him of Slim's love, and Slim's fate. Ah—ay, a fine bulk and body of a woman, slim, like her lover, a skin yet fairer, hair finer, a soul purer. Yet a match—yes, a match. But for the pig-headedness of Slim, who in his folly had faced about, and now would not even linger on the hatch with Shorty, hoping to catch a glimpse of her. Beyond argument Slim should have gone vamp-ing off with her while he had the chance; but he had not. And now he lay in his bunk, unwashed, unshaven, awaiting the vengeance of Cagey.

But well Shorty knew that Cagey was waiting for the heat. When they sank through the lock,

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and began to plough through the warm lakes, Cagey's mind would thaw; and then look out. Oh, boys, oh, boys, anything could be done under cover of heat.

"I fear f'r ye, me ould college chum," murmured Shorty many times.

They came to the lock on a bitter cold morning, and sank through it, and forged south again, with Shorty still dubious on the hatch, afflicted with contrary dreams.

From these the bo'sun roused him.

"Hey, Shorty."

"Ah—ay, bos'. Wan momint whiles I recollect the last time I came shkimmin' along this river in a little boat, to break the heart iv an ould woman be tellin' her her son had married a widder. Man, the tears on her cheek. ' 'Tis design,' she says, and right she was, and after a long life iv blessedness the bould bride was no comfort to him at arl."

But the unemotional bo'sun, who hated melancholy like a Scotch mist, put forward a pail of

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caustic soda, and ordered the deckhand into the dunnage room to scrub paint-work.

And Shorty rose and went into the dunnage room, where, sitting on the pail of caustic soda, he lit his pipe and took more thought for the weal of his innocuous Slim, who had forsworn the consolation of a love that lay ready to his hand.

Now, he reflected, she was over his head, fantastic little gown and all; and in her heart, all-providing love for wretched Slim, whose fate came lingering on.

Shorty took his pail of caustic soda and crawled up the stairs, having it in mind to wash them, beginning at the top. For this enterprise, there was all the time there was. Inasmuch as, when this should be done, another thing would be found for him to do, and so on to all eternity. Therefore Shorty took Time not by the forelock, but squarely round the middle, lingering like injudicious love. Undone by toil, he could yet find time to know himself in the smiling present and

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knew no other oracle. In this moment all others were comprised.

He dipped a sponge into his sujee mujee, and drew it slowly down a panel. Arriving at the bottom of the panel, he sighed; but beyond contemplating the second panel, and dipping the sponge again, did nothing for a time. He inquired of himself who in this world was better off or happier by the dark side of this obscure doorway being clean; and he knew that nobody was, unless he himself, who moved the sponge. Procrastination was the thief of time; but then time thieved daily from eternity, and of the two procrastination and time, who should say which was the greater laggard?

Shorty put the sponge to the paint again, dabbled it, sighed, heard a faint step a swash, slid back the sponge into the sujee, and lifting up his eyes with the sad earnestness of the Celt, found himself confronting Avis Wrenn.

“Boys, oh, boys,” he thought to himself.

Shorty’s eye first saw her foot as any sailor

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should. Those tottering little chutes of plain white leather, resting on dreamtowers aft, affected his heart with their sweetness, lulled his reason with their charmed curves, which so entranced him that he hurried out of mind their bitter anatomical impossibility. The ankle gleamed silken at him and ravished him away. His eye rose with the calm of an adventurer who, finding the new and strange on every hand, contents himself with going slow. . Following the blue dress up and up, which conceded everything but color to her essential womanhood, he found it square cut upon the bosom, very cool and dainty, with a thin chain of gold slung there, as if to lose its beauty in the flesh and whirl him out of thought. He was going on to make discovery of a pattern of things like long low tigers creeping in a circle about her waist, when she spoke.

“You’re Shorty, aren’t you?”

“Yes, ma’am . . . I’m the individual.”

He shut his fingers hard on the sponge, and signed.

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Avis Wrenn came closer.

"Where is—the other deckhand? The one they call—Slim?"

"Ah—ay," said the oppressed Shorty, "below wid Cagey."

"Firing?"

"Passin' coal, yes."

He looked up; and her eyes questioned him fiercely.

"Is it—hot there yet?"

Shorty stood up, squeezed the sponge and passed it across his chin.

"Come down the wan shtep," he whispered, receding.

She put her foot across the sill, leaned over him, while the little chain swung free.

"Have ye a fancy to the lad," breathed Shorty.

She bent close with eager eyes and nodded pitiously. Now was no time for subterfuge.

"Av ye love him," whispered Shorty, "come to Cagey wid money in the little fist iv ye, befüre

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the heat comes on. For I mistrust the heat will be the death of Slim."

He felt her tremble, saw her nod, dry-eyed, and ran back swiftly, hearing a step in the alley.

She was gone; and Shorty retreating to his bunk, dreamed the other half of his dream more earnestly than ever.

The *Yuly Yinks* went south and the sun got warmer, and the deckhands began to pick up their net more gingerly from the steel deck, and to drift about, looking for a place out of the sun where they could dream away the time off watch.

"Don't you never do nothing with the time?" said Cagey to the Swede.

"I wash my clothes and sleep," said the Swede in his sophisticated little singsong. He knew the world, in all its corners; he knew it hot and cold, aloft and afloat; in all its merciless reiteration of dark or brazen days. What was odd no longer assailed him; he had allayed the fever of life,

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stolidly enduring this sleek alternation of sleep, and movement, for which last, he was paid amply by renewed sleep. He had reached the age of seventeen; and no huger nor better hands than his were to be found on that ship.

Often as he lay in his bunk, before going to sleep, he would stare at the yellow palms of these hands, each of which was marked, the line of life very long, as had been pointed out to him by a lady in a tent. Ah yes, many more of these delicious periods of sleep, from which to be sure there was a rude awakening, but always with the prospect in three hours of more sleep. Fire and sleep. Sleep and fire.

And after all, he was no fireman. He drew no fires. He might even be said to have it soft, by stretching a point. He stood no more than the first third of the watch; and then, after shoveling his ashes, came back into his bunk. Once he had slept eighteen hours out of twenty-four. Again, in port, he had slept two hours out of forty-eight, and in the two hours dreamed that he was work-

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ing still. But if a deckhand is small, he may often times stuff himself into an odd corner; and it is no fault of his if he is found. It is his nature to sleep; as Nature abhors a vacuum, or is said to, the constitution of a deckhand abhors consciousness. Let there be darkness and oblivion, shades and terrors of a nether world, for the puzzle of this world has ceased to interest; or else the mind, out-soaring philosophy, has rejected it as tame or frivolous.

“Well, he’s a great guy,” said Cagey. “He’s a great guy. Shut his eyes. Here You, shut his eyes.”

The Other Guy, also in his bunk, made a humble noise, but moved not. He seemed to dwindle. For three days he had eaten nothing, and so he must have rest. To look at him, one might well think that this rest would shortly be a rest eternal.

“What’s the matter with you?” cried Cagey.

“I’m a—all right,” said the Other Guy, trying to smile. “Well, I ain’t been quite so good since

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I lost that liniment. That done me an awful lot of good. This ain't no job for a white man. But I got a good constitution. A feller told me at the Marine Hospital in Buffalo—he says to me 'If it wasn't for your constitution, you'd have been under the sod long ago.' ”

The Other Guy shivered, and drew breath, like a ship in a sea meeting with a frightened eye the direct gaze of the fireman.

“I will begin to eat something . . . in a day or two now,” he whimpered. “They told me I would have these setbacks.”

“This is no place for you, feller,” said Cagey, abruptly. The Other Guy drew down his blue lids to shut out his concurrence in that thought. Nothing is more terrible nor more prophetic than the soul of man when it stares out of his sick body, on a ship.

“He's gone,” thought Cagey, going out on deck. It was a fair night, with scarcely a ripple on the water.

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"Saginaw Bay, hey?" he remarked to the steward.

"Yes," said the steward. "And she never gives up her dead, neither. If you sink there, you sink."

"So I've heard," said Cagey. "So I've heard. Guys has told me that before."

He moved forward to his favorite hatch; and again, vaguely, he thought of death, as he had seen it watching him through the blue skull of the Other Guy. He was not conscious of fear; because he had never known security. He had moved in peril; and so had shaken hands with death many times before. There was nothing, he had concluded, after that. He would stop squirming, as he put it. No more torture of fire, no more wakening and unlimbering to the watch; no sound in his ears, no straining of bodiless emotions in his fool head. This thing he called himself, that grasped now so mightily at everything, and clutched so little, would be gone, fading like an unwelcome dream. There were those who

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said that there might well be hot watches in the world below; but Cagey had no fear of this. . . .

Once in the North Atlantic, he had worked with a cockney as firing mate, who had come aboard ship drunk at Tilbury, having spent his substance unwittingly on a great cold Bible with limp leather cover and flashing gilt edges. This Bible they had taken below, and put in an ashpit to warm the cold leaves of it—for like all firemen, they had the blood of fishes—and then they had read it between pitches. But the cockney was a hard man with a bulbous nose and tow hair; and he came to the conclusion that the Bible had been got up by the rich to pull the wool over the eyes of the poor. For it was always bashin' into his 'ead the value of property and hardship and being "on the bones"; and if you were on the bones you would get in and if you were not on the bones you would never get in. . . . Well, there you were, there you were; the rich, the swankers, had hit on this gilt-edged device to convince the poor that misery and tears were the holy things, and that they

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would be paid later for sliding on their bones this way; an' so the bloomin' fools kept slidin'. Why they was to be paid for doing something that was no good to anybody, was wat Cock couldn't see. Holding out his black arms, he had bawled, "Wot would Gawd say if he seen me now? He would larf. Bli' me, he would larf. O . . . Oh, I twigged it. . . . It's a varst plot, tha's wot it is."

This had seemed to Cagey a reasonable thing; and they took the Bible out of the ash-pit and thrust it into the fire-box; and became grimy atheists. Later they were stranded in Colombo, and the cockney became a Buddhist, because when a Buddhist laid down his burden, he was gone, plump, Nirvana—nothingness. This was his ideal. Perpetually off watch, which was to say everlastingly unconscious, with a deaf ear forever turned to that world which was a varst plot, a shameful conspiracy against the ease and quiet of his ego. Eventually he bought a roll of sacred writing done in ink on a scented and spiced shaving, and speaking of the sins of the flesh.

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But Cagey was still without a religion; and on this night of stars he wrestled unguided with the strange mystery of his oppression. He had no words for his fierce thought, and yet the thought was there. No end, no end to this merciless desire, no satisfaction to his afflicted soul. With dumb anguish he knew that he was not framed for the experience he sought. His was another world, a world of invisible chains, a world of outpouring fire and the clank of iron. He toiled that she might live; yet he might have no part in her. She walked on his bones. Hah. Even that—her soft foot set lightly on him—what was that but a notion of the fool steward's. . . . These fires he fed sat under the steam that turned the screw which drove her south; and to this he had chained himself.

But this desire, this fierce jealousy of Slim. What was that? He dwelt on the strangeness of emotion, which could neither be seen nor weighed nor taken in the hand; this thing which was no more than a deep strain, an impatience consum-

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ing life, a pain seated nowhere, a thing he could not put his finger on, though he tore himself apart. Where was his calm? Where was the dispassionate cunning which had lured Slim into the hold? Gone. Even his reign of fear contested. Slim, whom he had meant to crush, grew day by day more his own disciple; satirical and domineering at table, meeting contempt with contempt. Hah, but Slim's time was coming.

Cagey glared at the horizon, where lay already a sluggish black belt of smoke. Forerunner of heat. Erie was the place. One watch—two watches more—and then? Well, no fault of his. The heat had done far better men than Slim. Yes, it would be the heat.

He began to pace tigerishly between the hatches, his shoulders rocking, his eyes smouldering either side of his broken nose. Gradually he went towards the foredeck, and lying down on the forward hatch, made out two dark figures under the awning. Grant and Wrenn. Well fed and silent, they sat there secure in the possession of the

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power that had brought them wealth, release from toil, soft hands, flabby bodies.

And yet in the chain of events leading to this eminence of Bartholomew Grant, there was one weak link—and this link Cagey knew and treasured against a time of reckoning. Even as he stood, pondering, the Viking grumbled in his fat throat, and lit a match. His face of chipped granite stood out yellow in the blue night; he twisted the cigar about and about in his glistening lips, as he had twisted destinies of the men who had thwarted him.

"I feel a little seedy, Charley," he said thickly. "A man can take too much Gordon gin in hot weather."

"Yes," said Wrenn slowly. "It's very oppressive tonight. "Muggy," said the Viking.

"There's no wind," said Wrenn.

"Not a breath," returned the Viking. "It's a good thing for you, Wrenn, that you're not firing, down there tonight. You'd lose your life."

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Wrenn moved a considering thumb over his skull.

"What's the reason they can't put fans down there? Why not induce a draught when there's no wind?"

"Rot," said the Viking. "What's the good? We don't have to, that's all. This sentiment makes me sick. What have we got in the hold—women?"

"All the same, they look bad when they come up. . . . Bad."

"There's plenty more where they come from," said the Viking. "Whole jail-deliveries, Wrenn. The fact is, if they weren't here, they'd be in jail two thirds of the time."

"Were you?" inquired Wrenn boldly.

"I had a head," said the Viking. "I had a reason to stay out. Don't mistake me, Wrenn; you give these men enough to eat, and a place to sleep, and you've done all you can for 'em. It does 'em good to sweat; they work their deviltry out that way. They're a menace to society."

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"Ah," said Wrenn. He smiled curiously in the dark. "What supports a pyramid, Grant, the invisible blocks at the bottom, or the one at the top?"

"Humph," said Grant.

"How much weight do you figure we are holding up—you and I?" pursued the inventor gently.

"We're holding up our end," said Grant.

"Ah," murmured Wrenn. "We cultivate our garden, eh? We're tourists, Grant, damned intelligent tourists sitting on that top stone."

"They're all the bigger fools for letting us sit on them," returned Grant. He was thinking of that near-famous allegation of his that he would have done equally well in a state of anarchy or barbarism. "Well, ain't it good economics, Wrenn; the heavier the work the less the pay?"

"Good economics, yes," said Wrenn, "but it may make devilish red history some day."

And suddenly Wrenn too recollected that near-famous allegation and added, "You're committed

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to the top yourself now you know. You've got fat. There's a man aft there, one of the firemen, that could put you over the side without half trying. I noticed him particularly. You've got to rely on the police, with all the rest of us."

"Humph," said the Viking. His chair creaked; he coughed majestically.

"Hah," breathed Cagey below. His arm grew rigid; he put out his huge hand, spread the fingers, closed them slowly on nothing. He had heard enough. He drew back and stole aft again, muttering to himself.

The pale woman in the galley whispered to him as he passed; but he paid her no heed, and went towards the fantail. . . . Cards were pattering on the deck there; and the men of the *Yuly Yinks* spoke together in accents of woe. Cagey stood in shadow, listening, aloof, contemptuous.

"Going to take a rest in jail this trip, any of you?" inquired the Other Guy listlessly.

"Divil can I," said Shorty mournfully. "I'm

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not friendly enough wid the police. Jail wud cost me more than a fine hotel."

"Now you're slingin' the bull, Shorty," said the little porter.

"Am I or am I not?" said Shorty, composedly. "I am not. Widout money ye cannot go to jail; but iv ye have it, ye may leave be me experience. 'Come now,' says the arficer, wid his face in yer cell, 'me man, have ye the risolution to face the coort tomorrer. No, ye have not,' says he. 'Do ye deny yer drunk and disorderly,' says he. 'No ye do not. And have ye money,' says he. 'Yis ye have, or wud I be the fool t'sweat undher the weight iv ye, poor sailorman, bringing ye here? 'Twas not far f'm the ship I tuk ye,' says he, 'an' ye cannot have spint all. Then agin,' says he, 'I know he have not spint all, f'r 'twas me duty to the Commonwealth to search ye, and here's the twinty he had, in me honust fist. Tin ye may have, to be arf wid ye. 'Tis like a bribe, but ye may have ut. . . . F'r tin dollars, these crool bars will melt,' says he, 'like magic, an' ye may vamp arf like a

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lady on yer mother's side that ye are. Cough,' says he, 'av ye have lungs, cough. Av not, in the marnin' the coort will take the twinty.' "

"That's a fact, Shorty," said Tommy the fireman.

"Am I right or am I not?" said Shorty, "av ye have money, ye are a criminal; av ye have none, down ye may go on yer poor knees t' them on the cowld stone, 'tis no use. Ye cannot be taken in. Jail is no place f'r a man widout a payday. In winther 'tis heated; an wud ye have the Shtate pay f'r the heat? Wud ye rrun a hotel on thim principles?"

"No charge for heat here," said Tommy. "It's coming free."

With wide nostrils he glared at the sluggish horizon.

"In Cagey's watch too," he muttered, with satisfaction.

"Ay, it's coming," said Shorty, oppressed. "Why did I leave me farm and come to sea, says the man. 'Tis because I was not worth takin' to

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jail, says he. I cud contribute nothin' to the comfort iv the officials."

"Why didn't you join the Army, then?" said the little porter, striking a match. "A—ow. Curse these flies."

"They're finding a nist f'r their young in the holes iv yer boots," said Shorty. "The Army, says me classic porther. I have thried, porther, I have. Wanst, whin I had gone a week widout food—that is, to make anny selection av ut at all—I wint to the recruity station, and they put the tape to me ribs, and laid the poor body iv me on the scales. 'One hunder an' twinty sivin,' says the man. 'Ye lack but the wan pound. Ye need one hunder an' twinty-eight. Rist up,' says the man, 'take light exercise, and plinty iv milk an' eggs an' steak,' says the man—aw the juicy sound iv ut—'an' I do nit care iv ye tilt up a schooner in the mornin',' says he, 'an' at night. 'Tis fattenin'.' Oh, boys, oh, boys, me mouth ran wather whin I heard the wurrds iv the man; an' I wint out

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slaverin' at the lips, wid remembrance iv the rotten sandwich I had had wan day ago."

The iron tiller behind his head rattled and shuddered, swinging to starboard.

"'Tis ships f'r you an' me," said Shorty. "An' thin an ace."

The cards fell; and the heat grew, stopping their voices; reserve energy became precious for the purposes of cursing. The black drift of smoke on the horizon lay sharp as a belt on the hot surface of the lake; the lavish stars struck fire in deep heaven; and now the smoke ascended out of the funnel of the *Yuly Yinks* without backward bend. The faint wind was crawling up behind the ship; and the ship crawled away at an equal pace, and thus there was no wind at all, and the ventilators tapping the firehole spread wide mouths aft in vain.

The heat had come; and now the interlude of what was tolerable had passed, and on the burning floor of the ship, where Spanish Joe reeled back

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and forth, opening and clanging to the doors of his fires, the red symphony of hell began. . . .

And deep in the heart of Cagey, as his nostrils widened to the coming of the heat, lay vengeance, ardent pain, mysterious abasement.

As he leaned on the rail of the ship he saw, over the rise of the deck, a slender wand-like streak of white, like a motionless and beautiful spirit, arrested, vexing him.

His arms bulged under him; he rolled his head on his shoulders and yearned for the heat.

XIII

As Slim lay sleeping in the fantail, he felt his ribs jolted, and came awake, sweating, experiencing anew his dream of pressure, which visited him as surely as sleep.

He leaped up gasping, with arms raised high to strive against planks which were not there.

"Can it," said Cagey. "Come on down. Our watch. . . . Hell to pay this time."

They came savagely to the steel rungs that were to let them down into the firehold. Dexterously, Cagey spat on the top rung, and saw bubbles rise.

"Go get your mittens," he bawled. "You can't touch them things with your hands."

Slim's heart pounded in him. They were to pass three hours in a black pit whose farthestmost side was too blistering hot to touch. He fetched a pair of woolen mittens, but in his haste he

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stumbled on a prone figure in the starboard alley. He stooped. It was Spanish Joe breathing with closed eyes, and all the sprightliness out of his mustache. Joe had ended his watch, and come to let the awful stars shine on him.

Slim turned away and went down to the fires, where Cagey stood, rolling his shoulders, and speaking loud things of Spanish Joe, whom he called "the Greek."

"One hundred and forty pounds," he bellowed. "I'll strangle that Greek in a watch or two, God's truth. Saltwater fireman. Thirty pounds to go. Look out."

This he roared at Slim, and twitched down from their rack a giant slice-bar and a rake. The tools fell on the plates with an infernal clamor; and the prongs of the rake were still smoking hot, where Joe had ploughed through his fires in a last despairing effort to bring up the steam.

Leaning on the rake, Cagey snatched open the door to the first fire, and glared in.

"Chokin' full," he snarled. Great beads of

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sweat glittered on his shoulders, with their forward crouch; deep lines came in his face; and that sting of yellow heat made him grow scarlet in one rush under the glitter of his squared chest.

“Look out,” he yelled again; Slim moved aside, and the fireman charged into his fires, head down, like a terrible bull. He raked them and turned them over and threw in coal, far back and along the sides, where the firebox was tender and would make heat.

“That Greek didn’t clean fires,” he panted. “That’s the matter with the steam. I want to hear that second open his head. Well, I want to hear him yip.”

He slammed the door to the fourth fire, and standing with his feet far apart, he rubbed sweat out of his eyes with a dirty rag which he had untwisted from his neck.

They came together under the ventilator, and Slim felt the slap of wet shoulders—the whole menace of this breathing immensity and wither-

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ing force that was Cagey. This was the tortured power that gave rise to the steam, and made the screw turn, and the iron move. All the rest was posturing. Poor Slim felt frail, like a lily; and although he had not lifted a hand since coming into the hold, it seemed to him as if he had been poured, molten, into a burning mould, and he sank despairingly. His cheeks had fallen in the effort to draw breath; and his eyes were on the black hole of the ventilator above. But no slightest air fell on him; and he crouched ignobly on the steel plates.

“What’s the matter with you,” said Cagey contemptuously. “You ain’t done nutt’n. What have you done, Slim? Hey, stand up. You’re a coal-passer.”

The effect of the heat on him was beyond all Slim’s fore-imagining. It had got into his lungs like live lead, had poured into his intestines. He was hard, it is true, the muscles interlacing his midriff, which are the ones that count in fireholes, were hard, but he was not indurated.

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"Hang on," he repeated to himself. As he lay with his cheek ground into the burning steel plate under him, a line of Milton came into his head—

"This horror will grow mild; this darkness light."

He stood up, trembling.

"I'll be—all right," he muttered.

"All right," sneered Cagey. "Look out."

The fireman swung open the second door, and put in his broad hoe to the left. White fire poured over the lip of the firebox; gaseous flame played about the body of the fireman; but yet his arms plunged in, the handrag sliding along the smoking shaft of the hoe. He got the edge of his red tool into a crack in a huge cinder-mass at the back, and strained against it, with writhing lips, shaking his head doggedly, as the fire-pains shot up his arm, and entered the marrow of him. He was so close to the flame that the shaggy growth on his arm stirred, the hairs shrivelling at their tips. Still he hung; shaking his head as in grotesque despair, twisting his body away from the cone of fire that now glowed malignantly under him. This was his

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strength, going into that one tug; it could not be spent again; that part of it could not be got back without more sleep.

Pride of his trade held him; sooner than yield he would have thrown himself bodily into the fire. Insanity of the will to achieve. Suddenly the cinder stood up on end, raging, and he yanked it out of the box, and fell back, dripping all over. His shoulders came against the steel boxhead behind; it was burning hot; he twitched away from it, and took a faltering step or two, twisting the sweat rag about his bursting throat. This brought him again under the ventilator, which was a mockery.

"Go ahead," he breathed hoarsely to Slim. "Throw some water on that."

Slim dipped his leaky bucket, and threw water over the live coals; after which they leaned together under the ventilator again, grinning and hissing and spitting black dust.

"One hundred and twenty-five," said Cagey, looking at the pressure-gauge. "I can't clean that

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other fire until she makes steam, Slim; but I'll finish this one."

He cursed the Greek again, and flung open the door to the fire-box, turning his weary face away from the glow. He thrust in his bar, and winged the fire, raking the hottest of it over to the bare grate. Then he pulled the second half, winged it back, and shoveled in the block coal to start it afresh.

Then he towered over Slim, managing to say, "Going to get—ice. Give her a little smoke—in three minutes."

Slim, crouching, nodded; and Cagey took the lard pail on his arm, and went up the ladder. As he came out on deck, the steward, sitting on a little stool to port, uttered the single word "Hot?" in a mellow tone of compassionate inquiry.

"No, we're making ice down there," snarled the fireman, going aft. As he swung open the door to the ice-box, his arm was caught at the elbow, and he turned to look into the pale eyes of the woman from the galley.

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"Is he all right?"

"All right, yes," growled Cagey.

"It's so hot," she said, trembling. "It's 130 even in the galley."

"Yes, it's hot," muttered Cagey, "but it does a feller good to sweat. Yes, it does him good. He's all right—so far."

His fist came against his hip pocket, where he had stuffed the bills given him by Altschuler.

"You wouldn't dare—" cried the woman.

"No, wouldn't dare—" sneered Cagey. "We wouldn't dare, you and I. A fat lot we are. Wouldn't dare. Well, wouldn't dare what? Now you've said it; wouldn't dare what?"

"Hurt him."

"Kill him, is what you mean," muttered Cagey. "That's what you mean, all right. Well, I don't know. I don't know, I tell you. . . . I'll show the guy what the job is. . . . Go inside."

The woman wavered back, and stood staring at him doubtfully from the galley door. The moon shone and the waters raced by the side of the ship,

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and the ship moved south, with an assurance which seemed to make it entirely independent of the efforts of this black man leaning into the ice-box.

Leaning far in, the fireman shattered a block of ice with the fire-ax, and collected pieces in his pail, breathing that cold damp strongly. He hung there in that atmosphere of frost perhaps a minute, in a kind of trance, watching his breath, gazing at those cold blocks of ice, tier on tier, with the palms of his hands resting on one of them. Then he drew out, closing the door and at once the heat surrounded him again like a hot sponge.

He lit a cigarette, and strolling forward, lay down deliberately on one of the hatches to prolong the torture of Slim. As he lay he dreamed again his savage dream; and desire and despair, locked together in his shut-in soul, shook him like a rat. Again and again he felt, fierce in his arms, that fair body of the girl forward; he saw the eyes with their raven light, the tumbled hair, the with-

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ing form soft under silks. . . . At a touch some part of that miracle had flown away. Was it so with all miracles?

Mingling with this he heard suddenly that sound—tap, tap, tap, the sound of her heels ringing against the plates; and this he took to be a part of his imagining as well. It grew definite and certain; a curious little clanging accompanied it; he lay absolutely still; it rang out within two feet of him. He opened his eyes.

Avis Wrenn stood over him, miraculously shining in the armor of Joan of Arc. Under the lifted vizor of the helmet her fair face shone pale as death. One hand she held doubtingly to the hilt of her dagger, and so for a moment, all burnished and beautiful, her slenderness rounded out in steel, she stood looking down at the fireman, who came slowly to his feet, staring.

“Hah,” said Cagey.

“Wait,” said the girl. “It’s my—armor. What I’m to use in a play.”

Then Cagey’s mouth opened in a grin; he saw

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something humorous and rare in this; and he heard all over her body the slide and tinkle of steel plates, as she moved nervously.

"This is good, this is," said Cagey. "This is what I call all right."

"Listen," said Avis. "I have heard that you mean—mischief to your coal-passer. Oh—it is even said that you intend—his death, under cover of the heat."

"Who said it? Who said it?" replied Cagey lazily. "I don't tell guys them things usually."

"It's in your face," said Avis Wrenn.

Cagey's voice grew thick.

"Hh. In my face?"

"Yes. Don't I know? Shouldn't I know? Haven't I felt that force—that cowardly—brute force?"

She could talk of brute force, whose very life depended on it.

She gripped the dagger with her small fist.

"You've some strange reason," she went on. "You know why he ran away. Do you?"

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"Let the guy tell you," said Cagey. "Let Slim tell you why he ran away."

"Ah, he won't," cried Avis. "But you could say, if you would. I feel it."

Her lips quivered, her eyes, terrible in shadow, played upon him a soft light of persuasion. An idle beam from the deck lantern flashed on her armor; he heard the slight shuddering intake of her breath, and again he felt her glittering remoteness like a load bearing him down into the blackness of the pit. Yet she had sought him out; though she had armed herself against him, she had come to plead.

To the tortured Cagey it seemed right that her own soft flesh should tremble within its armor. His fists closed, he sighed profoundly, and felt that the hour had come.

"But suppose I could," he muttered. "Slim's my mate. That's a dirty trick, informing against him."

"Do you think it would go further?" she cried. "But no, you don't. You are playing with me."

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Then, what is your price. I will pay what you ask."

Cagey's eyes seemed turned to stone.

"Well," he whispered, "suppose I make the price . . . you."

Breath seemed to leave his body in one fierce hiss; he leaned forward, actually stretching his muscles to compress the yearning from them.

She stood rigid, her cheek shadowed by the vizor. They were at dead-point.

"No?" breathed Cagey. "Well, then I ain't got no price. How do you think you can interfere with me?"

But secretly he shook with terrible wrath, the wrath of a man caught in the toils of a power greater than his own.

"You want to pay me money," he said slowly. "Money's no good to me. Money's a joke to me, kid. Never had it, and never will, because what I got is hands . . . hands, I told you."

He held them out, and moved the fingers.

"Yes, and listen here. You think you can tell

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the old man, don't you? Well, that's no good. No, that's no good. These deckhands always get it in their noodle some one's trying to murder 'em. The old man won't take no stock in that."

"Well, I know it," she said.

She had turned slightly; and he could not see her face.

"Well, you were right, see? I worked it to get Slim . . . in the hole. I took money . . . there's the money . . . I'm saying I took money from the bloke that got him in wrong . . . to put him out of the way . . . Yes . . . here. I took money, and I can't do it. Well, when I look at you . . ."

He made a murderous sound in his throat, as if he were strangling this right emotion.

"I wanted . . . him . . . down . . . here," he muttered.

"Why," cried Avis, "what had he done, what had he done to you?"

"Nutt'n," said Cagey. "He was nutt'n to me, if you look at it that way."

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His eyes for the first time sought hers without embarrassment. He moved his shoulders, and his sullen face loomed black above them.

"Who are you, then?" whispered Avis.

"That's it. Well, that's the question. Didn't I tell you I ain't quick at answers?"

He chuckled.

"Ask old Grant," he said then. "Well, ask old Grant how his luck has been since he trew out the peacock."

"But you say you can't do it now," she pressed him. "You can't find it in your heart."

He darkened.

"Well, maybe I can . . . maybe I can," he returned.

He picked up the pail of ice, and walked steadily away from her. When his feet scraped on the fiddley he checked himself, and hung his head out.

"I think different when I get away from you."

She lay glittering on the hatch, her head lost in the brightness of her steel clad arms.

XIV

ALONE in the firehole, Slim stared at Cagey's huge watch, which hung over the canvas seat from a bit of wire. Then in three minutes he threw coal on all four fires and sank back, panting, on the hot floor of the ship. Sweat ran on his contorted body ready as blood. He felt as if he were bleeding all over, and he could mark his strength ebb, as it was sucked into the yellow entrails of the fireboxes. The maze of steel ladders overhead wavered in thick gloom; they were crooked, and went curving into impossible places, like ladders in a dream. Fantastically half in lethargy, he doubted them. Were they real, were they feasible? Or were they not rather imponderable ladders, crawling up the black sides of this pit, against whose walls he must strive in vain? Ah!

He jerked himself together. The thick heat

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was bearing down his brain, as cold would numb it.

He looked at the watch. He thought he had been alone with these fires since time began; and Cagey had been gone five minutes. Yet Cagey had nursed them on watches without end.

Slim's head sagged on his shoulders. He knew that now he should throw on more coal, but he suddenly perceived that Cagey stayed on deck to plague him, and his arm was leaden. Let the ship stop then. Perhaps the second was asleep. Must be asleep. Steam at 120 and no sign of him. Or was it that he was afraid, afraid to come out, afraid of his friends?

Slim was tortured by something grotesque and unescapable about the place. The baleful boiler-fronts seemed to press him back, and shrivel him like an unwary spider. There was a mournful light on shining-hot steel rungs, a menace in the monstrous hooks, ten feet apart, in which the smoking bars and rakes were cradled; and in the still glowing ashes, which he must shovel into the ash-

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elevator anon; and in the nameless dust-covered junk, shaped like ribs and beams and mauls, which lay beyond the boilers.

"She's walking back," he thought to himself, looking at the stream. With this thought, he stiffened; he swept from his mind the trick that Cagey was playing him, remembering only one necessity; the grim necessity of the ship's moving. It was this curious harassing of the mind by the insistent personality of the ship, on which Cagey had banked. This thought, that the ship would stop, for lack of steam, was not to be borne.

"Here goes," he mumbled . . . To his surprise he sat still, as if the rusty machinery of his will had stuck. Not until the third repetition of the words did he sway to his feet.

Active once more, he rubbed dust on his slimy hands, and swung a maul into the block coal which had spread out of the bunker.

"Must pull myself together," he reflected. "That second—"

He opened the fire; and began to shovel desper-

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ately. The head of his shovel stumbled against the lip of the box, heaping up the coal in front; and forcing him to drive it back with a rake. The glowing heap resisted his rake; he strained against it, mad, helpless, blistering on the skin. His feet slipped; he burned his arms; but the wall of coal went back. He felt as if he were taking boiling lead into his lungs; and his chest smarted like raw flesh, where the heat struck through his wet cotton shirt. Cotton is no good for that. Flannel is the thing, should you care to know.

Slim was now fairly in the grip of this insanity burning in the coal; the insanity of the will to get the steam. He raged up and down before the boilers, snatching open doors with blistered fingers, dragging the red-pronged hooks after him, shovelling, harrowing the fires, his head bent down and shaking from side to side, in that curious dogged movement as of despair, peculiar to a fireman.

His arms were pithless; his knees shaking; and the pit of his stomach was the seat of a scathing ball of fire over which he bowed, writhing, while

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his body uttered senseless protestations through scorched lips. The day's work . . . All in the day's work in summer Erie.

In the end a coal fell onto his ankle; he shrieked, and ripped off his shoe, sinking back slowly on the canvas covered bench, shuddering in little spasms. In a moment he became quieter; and drooping forward, pulled off his shirt. As he leaned back against the greasy board set at a slant by Cagey, the wet skin over the muscles of his back made a slight sucking noise against that flat surface.

This was the moment of recuperation. By some somersault of the imagination, he felt as if he had gained a trifle on the heat; he breathed deeper; he experienced a slight resurgence of strength in his body, of which this noise of pulling muscles made him conscious. He put his hand to his black breast; it was hot, hard, swollen with effort, running water through pores as big as bullet holes. He sank forward, gathering confidence, making the turn. Second wind.

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And at that moment, the indicator on the pressure gauge, quivered and moved forward. With a wild joy he saw that the steam was going up. In this environment of blistering steel, suggesting an undertaking beyond the powers of man, he had made steam; by his effort, the ship moved, and its seven thousand tons of iron ore glided south. Stupendous fact.

A thought of Cagey swam into his mind; of Cagey, with his teeth bared, and his grisly head rolling on his shoulders; and then Slim choked with swift admiration and even comradeship for this man, this attendant fiend, whose duty and delight it was to torment and prick these fires into an ever more intolerable glow. This man could teach him to make naught of the terrors of life; or even to laugh at the dreadful jest that lay at the heart of all such undertakings. And whence his cruelty even, if not from this oppression? Yet he was loyal, loyal to the steam, steadfast in his black spirit of disdain for its accompanying agonies.

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Looking at the pressure gauge, he murmured, "one hundred and thirty pounds," his eyes glittering.

What shooting up of the world's will was here then? What embodiment of universal strife, waged under the black gates of death itself; and even, it seemed, forever waged, as if this were that dark abode, below all others, whose portal the angel of death had never trod. This fiery struggle was no dumb submission of the brute to its yoke, but the warfare of a terrible soul for any freedom.

Slim eyed the pressure gauge.

"One hundred and thirty-two. We'll get it on the Blood."

Even when first he had come down, amid clangor and grating of hinges, and hissing of live coals and thundering of flame, he had had a consuming sense of the reality of the eternal pit; and of a battle fought at the deep red-riveted bottom of all constituted things.

Now he saw again, in his lethargic dream, the

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sharp light outpouring in withering rays on Cagey's face; that awful face, now puffed, now wan, shining demon-black, goblin-yellow out of cinereous gloom. . . . The arms shadowy with thick veins, quivering eyes shut in the blind agony of toil. And to Slim it seemed as if this assumption of fire-task by an unconquerable spirit was like a forging of the world anew each day in flame. For by virtue of this inexorable will, seated in a spent body, did the ship move; and so was the iron shifted and the age made an age of iron.

"She's walking back," he thought again, and willed himself to his feet. This keeping of the steam to the mark was like the effort of a pigmy to hold up a faltering giant; the labor of Sisyphus with his stone, of the Danaides, with their eternal pouring of water into leaky pots, which never filled. Left alone, this pale bodiless giant sank to his knees again undone. And as Slim lifted his bar he felt anew the fact of his frailty, this unutterable craven frailty of man, which could yet build suffering places of hot steel, and conceive

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monstrosities which it must serve and never flee from. How strange the flesh against the iron.

As he put the shovel again into the coal, he was conscious of a huge descending shadow swaying above him, floating out of the unreal tangle overhead. A drop of icy water fell on his face; and he reeled back, and snatched the pail from Cagey's hands, and sank his face into it.

"Spit it out, Slim; spit it out," warned Cagey.

But Slim sat down, with his elbows shaking on his knees, and drank. He mouthed the ice; he ground his nose into it; and the touch and taste of that sweet cold mingling with the odor of kerosene from his firing gloves sank into him like a merciful knife. . . . He glared at the inside of the pail, with its rusty patches, and lumpy soldering looming large; he breathed into it, guzzling like a beast of the burning desert, and heard sounds like echoes of his slobbering there. He lived a bewildering lifetime in that pail, which had, for his thirst, all the significance of life.

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"Can it, Slim," shouted Cagey, opening the fires again.

But Slim sat stupidly clutching the pail. He pulled off his gloves, the better to feel the cold sweat on that round of tin; and stared as Cagey fed his fires with lazy thrusts. Then they sat together again on the black seat, watching the canvas flap which Cagey had affixed to the bottom of the ventilator hole to play the wind more directly on his shoulders. It hung absolutely limp.

"We ought to have a few damned souls hopping in there," muttered Cagey. In his interval on deck he had got hold of himself. "Who was the guy that thought of this, anyway? Who was the guy?"

He shook an arm at the boilers.

"Watts," said Slim. "He got the idea watching a kettle."

"Watchin' a kettle," said Cagey sardonically. "You can sling the bull all right, Slim. You can sling the bull. But that's the guy. We ought to

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have him hoppin' in there. Well, not that I have anything against a bloke that has croaked . . ."

"Why don't you . . . get a job when it's cold," gasped Slim.

"Cold," said Cagey. "That's good dope. Cold. What?"

His eyes filled with fierce hostility.

"What do you know about cold, Slim. Hey? What do you know?"

"Better than this," murmured Slim.

"No, it ain't," said Cagey. "No, it ain't. . . . You don't know what cold is. Heat is nutt'n. This is nutt'n, Slim. Cold is what gets a man, Slim. Listen. I was coming up from the south last winter and I was cold. I was cold all right. Ever travel in the dry battery box of a Pullman, Slim?"

Slim shook his head.

"Well, that ain't much, if you're a short guy. You slide the bolt and let down the lid of the box, and knock out the junk that's in it, and crawl in. Get that? Well, I always travelled with eye-

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screws and wire; and once I was in, out I reaches and screws in one eye with the wire in it, and pulls up the lid, and screws in the other eye into the other side of the box, and runs the wire through that, and there we are Slim. Damn light little joint with holes in the bottom; but God help you if you're too long, Slim. Hah. She's walking back. She's walking back, Slim. Put some smoke in those starboard fires."

They swung mauls into the bunker boards to let down the coal; and fed the boilers, while Cagey sang deep in his throat a song of fire.

"Hah, let 'er go back, Slim. Let 'er go . . . back . . . sides. That's where the steam is. That's her, Slim. Leave the crown-sheet alone. Light fires the lady wants. Put the hook to 'er. Hah!"

They fell back on their seat again, coming together with a slap of loose shoulders, their eyes half-shut, their glittering ribs waxing and waning. Slim might leave now, if he chose; yet he stayed. He seemed to see the scornful smile on Cagey's

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face that would follow him up the ladder. Also, he was pitching coal, against Shorty's prayers. The heat had come, and in a derisive spirit he was giving Cagey every chance. Why all this talk?

"Well," said Cagey, "me and a long bloke was travellin' together, an' he done me dirt, Slim, but did I complain? No, I ain't a guy to complain, Slim. I hung on, because I knew he had a dry battery box comin' to him all right, all right. We nailed two of 'em one night side by side. The long bloke wanted to travel in the ice-box of a refrigerator car, but not me, Slim. Not me. I know the game. 'Them hangin' beeves 'll get swingin' an' give you a wild ride,' I says. So I shoves him into the box, and draws the bolt on him. I draws the bolt on him, Slim, and gets in the other box and pulls her tight with the wire."

Cagey stopped. His head tilted back, and a peculiar wide fixity came into his eye.

"Well, what's up, what's up?" he roared.

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The second engineer was leaning down, from the lower fiddle.

"What's the matter with the steam, Cagey?" said the second. "The old man wants to race with a half-pig on the port side."

"Wants to race, does he?" howled Cagey. He stood up and straddled his legs, and hurled defiance out of the pit in a red language drawn from the high road and the high seas together.

"There you are," he concluded, "there you are. Tell him all that. I'll quit when he says. Any time. This ain't the only ship on the Lakes, is it? Well, is it? Him an' his half pig. Hey, Jim, tell him to work it into him. Old fox. Tell him I said so. For one swig I would shovel him in here. Or you too. Or you too. Well, come on, make up your mind."

The second engineer went back to his engine pits, where he could finger hot journals. He knew his master.

In the fire hole there was only a faint sound of sizzling, and hoarse breathing from the bodies of

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Slim and Cagey, slunk together in hostile mood, like black irreconcilable twins.

"What was I tellin' you," purred Cagey, looking at Slim with slant-eyed contempt. "Oh, about the long bloke. Well, there the son of a gun was in the box, and it was too short for him, see? It was about an inch short for me, but I could stand it. And he says pretty soon, 'Say there, unbolt it, I'm gettin' out.' 'Not yet, you ain't,' I says, 'you have got prayers to say, feller, that's what you got.' So I lies there, and hears the feller squealin' and threshin' inside and throwin' off his boots. 'Aw can it,' I says; 'you'll wake the passengers.' Along in the mornin' he was clean bughouse. Well, we'd been comin' twenty hours, see, an' him doubled up like a man in his coffin, suckin' his beard that way. We stops at a junction, and I leans out, and unbolts his lid, and out the long bloke shoots, and down the track, crazy as a loon. Ravin' mad, and jumpin' with both his legs at once. Well, he didn't have patience enough to let one leg alone at a time and

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run. You was thinkin' just now that ice was the stuff; but I tell you, when you been in a dry battery box twenty hours, it ain't ice, it's space, Slim. Nothin' to it but space. All a guy wants then is to draw back and hit the air with both fists. You know what I mean."

Slim nodded.

"No, you don't," bellowed Cagey. "No, you don't. You ain't been in one of them boxes yet. Think you'd like it?"

"It would be good gettin' out," said Slim.

"Hah," said Cagey, scenting philosophy. "You're the guy to sling the bull all right. Well, Slim, she's walkin' back. Put a touch of smoke around the skirts. Feed her light, and go lazy. Don't punish the boilers. They ain't done you no harm."

So his talk flowed, while the light beat on their faces, and they shoveled. Sinking back, Slim looked into the pail again, in a trance at sight of that glittering ice, now nearly gone, which brought its own atmosphere of frost along.

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“I’ll have to pull that other fire in a bit,” muttered Cagey. “That’s what’s up with the steam. That rotten dago playin’ his tricks. Well, I dunno if we can, Slim. I dunno if we can.”

He drew off his gloves slowly.

“Well, I’m tellin’ yer what a soft thing this is,” he went on. “Soft, Slim. . . . I stuck by that box a couple hours after the long bloke shied, and then out I jumps and nails a rod for Newark. It was cold by then—January weather. Oh, it was cold all right. I was all numbed up. I slammed myself up against three moving freights before I nailed that rod, and got knocked off like a punch-in’ bag. I was wise enough to hit the for’ard end of the car or I’d have gone under the wheels. Well, then I crawls under and I nails that rod, and the train starts up, and then I notices it’s a single rod . . . only one there. Too late, Slim. No gettin’ out then, what? So me and the rod goes on together, and the car jumps, and down I swings under the rod. Hard to keep on top of

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an inch pipe with freezin' wind an' sleet cuttin' into yer. Well, I hung on, and I was cold, Slim; cold, I tell yer."

He stared at Slim grotesquely through motionless heat, his arms folded on his midriff, his black face glittering. He spoke of that cold with an amazed earnestness. Yes, it had been cold, bitter cold. He hugged himself to think how cold; and all the while the sweat ran almost in a stream from the end of his nose. Slim could not imagine it. Even to talk of cold was folly. As he sat, he would have thrown his naked body into a drift of Arctic ice, fearing nothing. Anything but this. The hands of Cagey's watch proclaimed that two hours of the three had passed. One hour more and then release. His bunk. Already he felt his head sinking into the greasy pillow. Sleep would overtake him and find him willing. . . . He roused himself.

"There ain't no couch down here, Slim," said Cagey, whose eye saw everything. "No, I ain't

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never slung a hammock yet. . . . Well, I'm tellin' yer about the rod. Want to hear about the rod?"

"Yes," said Slim, agitating his dry throat.

"Well, I'm tellin' yer it was cold; but pretty soon the pain stopped, and then I was warm. Oh, I was warm, Slim, and then I swings under the rod, as I say. Well, that's all right; and then we pass over a heap of frozen cinders between the tracks; a long line of 'em dropped by a dirty engine, and froze good an' tight. Well, Slim, I tried to get on top of the rod, but I couldn't feel my arms, so I goes dragging along underneath and those cinders split me. They undressed me and put me to sleep, Slim. You know what I mean. They tickled me, and ripped the clothes off my back and the skin off the meat and then the meat off the ribs, Slim. I thought a shark had me. 'Bout half a mile of them cinders all told. They oughta fix it to have the entrance to hell framed up like that. . . ."

As this tale of blood and ice and cinders un-

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folded itself, Slim's fingers closed on the bench. Irresistibly there came into his head the details of that swept-up world of the Viking, of the soft world of men who live in houses and are loved by women and abide by law. He saw the smooth lawn under the moon, he heard sweet voices throbbing with select pathos . . . the faint crackle of cinnamon toast . . . he saw the coverlet domed over the Viking's belly, where he lay in a shining bed, reading himself to sleep . . . the firelight in the ravine reddening the soft cheek of Avis as she stood wrapt, lost in that sweet listening mood of love . . . the twinkling mystery of the gazing globe, secure on its fluted column, with its puzzling motive of sheer ornamentation. And side by side with these things he put this racked night of Cagey's winter-agony. Was there a weighing of all this?

"There's the mark of 'em on my back now," said Cagey. He leaned forward, and there in fact were faint striations clustered along the spine, which shone white and would not take dust.

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"His own fault," thought Slim. "He could have got a job."

But he saw that this explanation would not wholly do. And he saw further that Cagey took an extraordinary pride in this recital; this was his game of life, his dark glory of meaningless endurance; and he was bragging to Slim that he had played well. He had half solicited his torture. And why was that? Not yet had Slim discovered.

"I was warm then, Slim . . . blood warm all over; drippin' too . . . and I hung on to that rod. That took some doing, Slim. . . . Well, we rolls into some little town, and down I drops and rolls out and over to the station. The holes in my back had froze over by that time and it was like little guys was skatin' on 'em. I went to the police station; but I'm tellin' yer I hadn't any money and the bloke said there was nothin' doin' there; that was a jail, not a charity; and what was the good of his talkin' to a cleaned-out sailorman. He says to me, he says, 'You go out and knock some

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guy over the head and take his money and then we will let you in, feller.' Well, I knew that, Slim. . . . So I hoofs it out to a wood yard, where the feller said I could find a nickel flop; and that was there, all right, only I hadn't no nickel, and it was blowing and hailing somp'n fierce. So I has a go at the man in the flop, but the blood had all run out of me and he handled me like he would sawdust. You know what I mean.

" 'Well,' he says, 'I would hand you one more, Jack, only then you would be sleepin' here for fair, and without me havin' no nickel to show for it. Well, here,' he says, 'go over there, and you'll find a joint with a roof and two sides, anyway,' he says; 'it'll be comfortable if the wind shifts, which is blowin' through it now,' he says. . . . So over I blows to a kind of lean-to with snow whirlin' through it, and a long bench on one side. I was finished. I sinks down on the bench, but it was narrow; and to prevent me rollin' off, I reaches up and puts both arms around a coil of pipe that was runnin' along half a foot over the bench. I

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couldn't feel nothin' then; but when I woke up at five in the mornin' and took them arms away, I left the flesh on the pipe. It was a hot pipe, Slim; not red hot, but just hot enough to get in its work overnight."

"God!" gasped Slim. The man had made a world for himself which was like the incredibly subtle device of an archfiend, aghast at the rebellion of his friends. And suddenly Cagey leaned forward and addressed himself with strange curiosity to Slim, the deckhand. It was as if he meant to force him to concede that he was unequal to all this; as if it was necessary to the self-respect of that vast fireman that Slim should turn and flee. For Cagey had contrived to drag this man down to share his torment, and now in a spirit of incomprehensible jealousy of Slim's admission to it, he wanted to frighten him away by a narrative of things yet worse. . . . His other plan he had abandoned.

"Think you better go back to the bank, Slim?" said Cagey.

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"Can't you? . . . Why don't you get a—a job . . . a . . . a job?" gasped Slim.

"I got a job," said Cagey. "I got the most independent job in the world, Slim."

His voice was full of triumph; but his eyes, half-closed, held a baffled and mournful light.

"God!" said Slim again, with a slack jaw.

"Gentleman ain't here," said Cagey, reaching for his shovel. "Put on some smoke, Slim. She's walkin' back. You let the old lady lie down, and she will faint, that's all. Won't know nothin'. Keep her ribs hot. Keep her legs active all the way. . . . Keep 'em sizzling. Hah."

Looking back, he called out, between thrusts,

"He took a look down here at us guys, and He was disgusted with His job."

Slim crouched again under the ventilator. This heat . . . this torment . . . was that why Cagey laughed at God?

"Maybe this was the best he could do," said Slim. They glared at one another sardonically.

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"Maybe this is the best any God could do," he elaborated. "Misery is good for a man."

The best of all possible worlds.

"Hah," said Cagey, unsatisfied.

"Yes," said Slim; and now he began to believe what he had said. "What good is your six hours off to you?" he whispered hoarsely. "No good. Idle time is no good; but this firing time winds you up to where you can get . . . relief. Yes . . . relief . . . that's the word. That's happiness . . . a flash of relief. . . . What? Bunk . . . drink . . . eat . . . cold air in your lungs . . . cold air . . . cold air."

He shrieked these words, and the arteries in his neck shook him forcibly. "You don't know what they mean until you have. . . . I tell you agony is good for a man . . . he lives then. . . ."

Cagey received this ancient doctrine with hostility. It was what Socrates had said in the years before Christ, when they took the chain from his leg and gave him the hemlock. An ancient doctrine which Cagey received with hostility.

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"Like it, do you?" he snarled.

Slim shook his head.

"Like it to stop," he whispered. "That'll be the fun. . . . Bunk."

"Bunk is right," muttered Cagey. To the man Slim it had been given by some strange irony of the gods, to find a philosophy of fire-toil. It was good for a man, then, because he was glad to be quit of it. Some part of Cagey's brain responded to this truth; and he laid a finger to his hawk's nose. Irony of ironies, was the moment for which he waited even here. Did these riches he thought to be far off linger in the flame that scorched him? And were these indeed the tenderest mercies of the world, because the cruelest . . . fire and sweat and strain?

And now to Cagey in his turn came the bright, inscrutable picture of Avis Wrenn, and a deep thought of that calm sphere of glass glittering under cloudless night, with its meaningless purity of sheer reflection. Was the road to peace a road of torture? Did he want peace, even? Now in the

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flame of his fiery love of that soft beauty shone faint like a weakness, of which by toil, by chastening toil, he could rid himself. But to what end should he extinguish these desires.

"You can certainly sling the bull, Slim," he said.

He pulled from a pocket his roll of pulpy bills and bent a mournful eye upon it.

"Heat's gettin' to 'em," he said. "You carry, 'em, Slim; I sweat more than what you do."

He brought his maul into a block of coal with terrific force.

"Altschuler gave that to me," he said. He licked his cruel lips, adding perversely, "a thousand more coming to me . . . maybe."

Slim stared at Cagey with blurred and fascinated eyes; so calmly, so casually, had the fellow hung this hideous thought between them.

"Why don't you finish me, then?" snarled Slim. "You've gone a long way around."

"I haven't said I would, have I?" said Cagey. "Well, maybe I won't. Saginaw Bay was the

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place. A bloke gets crazy with the heat, and jumps into that Bay; he don't come up, Slim. No, he don't come up."

They stood breathing hard and fast, the deep hostility of hostile types between them. Slim raised his arms, and knew in his heart that he could never stand against that power of might and malice.

"You've taken on the job," he cried. "Finish it."

"No," said Cagey. "I'm thinking. I'm thinking, Slim. That gay germ . . . your girl, Slim . . . well, she come to me while I was on deck, and she begged me to let you alone. I say, Slim, she put her arms around my neck—and you know—well, Slim, you know them eyes of hers—"

Cagey stood, lost; and then, recovering, said forcibly:

"I wouldn't bust up one of her toys for nothing. Not for nothing, I wouldn't. I ain't that kind of a guy."

"Liar," whispered Slim. "Her arms . . ."

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The pit of flame that had tormented him was gone; he saw nothing but that crag-like face, set on glistening shoulders, the cruel lips with their astonishing child's curve, their wistfulness, their satire. Slim leapt like a cat; but Cagey whirled sidewise, and brought out his elbow with maddening dexterity. Poor Slim went fairly to the plates.

Standing over him, Cagey said:

"Well, I have stopped. I have stopped, Slim. Now you can begin to . . . take it soft. Enjoyin' life now, Slim? Well, you know what you said. I have stopped punishin' you."

Slim came to his feet, wet, blinded, and ran his hands over the slippery body of the fireman. They fell; they rolled over and over, straining with twisted mouth and jerking arteries. With the exulting savagery of an animal, Slim felt that Cagey's strength had gone. The close heat had sapped him; despite the difference in bulk, the issue rested in their wills.

Then, half strangulated, with his head sunk

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under Cagey's ribs, Slim was conscious of a smell of burning rubber, and at the same time the soles of his feet glowed, and Cagey yelled woe-fully,

"Good-by, rubber shoes."

The tennis shoes were melting in live coals. In the midst of struggle, Cagey's instinct of a sailor cried out against the disintegration of those rubber shoes, though they shod the feet of his enemy. Suddenly he roared, "Look out, damn you. She's walkin' back."

The personality of the ship struck them apart at one blow; and they swayed to their feet. In that thick glow of heat they seemed to palpitate like sea-monsters, they swayed as if to the movement of deep tides; their glistening arms wavered like the blind tentacles of cuttlefish; their eyes stared without expression. And each saw that on the throat of the other huge cords stood out, as if the flesh had withered and fallen in between them; while bright streams of sweat ran tortuously in the valleys made by rising veins.

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"I'll pull that . . . other fire," gasped Cagey. "Get your water, Slim; get your water."

Suffocated, Slim thrust his head and shoulders into the barrel, but the water was nearly hot. He drew back, spluttering, and filled his pail.

But when he turned a strange sight was there. Cagey had drawn half of the clogged fire in one great blazing lump; and now he stood over it with reeling body, and in his savage eyes was mortal sickness. But even in this pass, he would not let go. He would never let go. He stepped back . . . vomited . . . and came on blindly again, and put his bare hands to the smoking tool. Grim loyalty this; not to men, in that moment, no concession to invisible chains, but a loyalty to the ship, which in return had filled him choking full of the agony he solicited, the red agony which was good for him, as it is said.

He swayed, right and left, grinding the tool along the grate, shaking his head, moving his lips. Lost. . . . The tide of fire rose in him with all the

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forces of disruption. Some hand huger than his own had clutched the base of his brain; his stomach revolved in him like a red hot chipped ball bearing; and he felt curiously as if the lower half of his ear drums had been rent.

The fight with Slim had drawn out of him just that ounce of strength he had needed to withstand the fire. Sliding forward on the bar, he checked himself, hung still, burning, twitched, swayed a little back, then sank. His knees ground into the white coals, and his head fell against the ash-pit door. . . .

This struggle of the great body with oblivion Slim had watched in silent amazement. Only when it fell limp did he come on with his water. Then indeed he threw it; a white cloud of steam rose; but stooping through this, he took the body of the fireman under the arms and dragged it clear of the fire. . . .

Looking down at that burnt and tortured face, Slim recalled those words of Cagey's, "Don't die

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on my hands. . . . Four measly coal-passers I've hauled up this season."

And this time it was Cagey the great, the terrible, the supercilious, who lay prone and quivering at his feet. Cagey was himself going to be hauled up.

But how? This slack bundle of flesh, lying under Slim's blurred eyes, presented no mean hoisting problem.

Rubbing his hands against his overalls, to wipe the sweat from the palms, Slim felt the roll of money which Cagey had given him to hold; the money which Cagey had taken from Altschuler as an earnest of Slim's death. And now by a turn of the irony that pursued the vast fireman into every corner of life, he lay smoldering at the mercy of this Slim, whom he had drawn down to destruction.

"Got to give him his chance to earn that thousand," thought Slim.

He felt no anger—no exasperation at Cagey's strength. Cagey had no strength now; he lay fore

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and aft with his arms extended, and his black head answering the vibrations of the ship.

"Tie him," Slim commanded himself.

He cut a strip from Cagey's jumper, and bound the wrists of the fireman together.

"I could lift the ship," he murmured.

He took Cagey under the armpits, feeling the choked arteries throb; and slowly lifting him, wheeled towards the ladder, settling the huge wet arms over his head so that the wrists came on his left shoulder.

Half choked, he closed his fingers on a steel rung. It was burning hot. Miserable folly. Too late he perceived that he had not put on his firing gloves. He eyed them, where they lay on the canvas seat a dozen feet away. He shook his head.

"Chance it," he murmured. The act of lifting Cagey was not one to be repeated.

Closing his hands on the steel rung again, he shut his eyes and surged up one step. Cagey's feet were still on the plates. Another step.

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Cagey's weight swung free, and Slim's fingers closed on the hot steel with all their strength, and the steel sank into them.

"Sweet hell," thought Slim. It was what a poet had said. A poet.

He took hold of another rung. Yet another. He could not rid himself of the fantastic thought that in reality there was no outlet to this pit; that the dream-profusion of crooked ladders was illusion; and that he would crawl against the black side of the place like a blind insect, until he dropped . . . dropped.

All in the day's work in summer Erie.

Once he had seen an ant shrivel its leg in a hot coal. ' All this . . . did it mean more to the world than the loss of the ant's leg? He dreamed strange dreams; visions of ruddy flame were open to him; faces of fiends swarmed in upper gloom, and there was a clanging below, as if the gates of hell were turning on their hinges. . . . This was the open door of the starboard fire, swinging idle.

The pain of fire and of strain now flashed out of

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his palms as far as his elbows; still the pitiable flesh continued to reach out for the rungs, though at each step it seemed as if his arms would part from his body. The body of Cagey swayed below him like a pendulum.

The hot rungs got greasier; and he felt his long fingers drawn horribly open. Would he fall on Cagey, or would Cagey fall on him? No matter. In his agony, the thought of this definite crash was strangely pleasant. To go languidly asprawl, every muscle lax. Final mercy. He took yet another step.

At this movement the body of Cagey slipped, and the tied wrists had him by the throat, throttling him, with an ironic suggestion of active malice. To die by the mere force of Cagey's clay.

"Gone," thought Slim. The downward pressure was now frightful; but as he swayed out a little, his head struck violently the sharp rim of the fiddley. Sweat had run into his eyes and blinded him to the fact that he was even now at his goal. He stiffened. His will charged his body with the

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last force possible to it. In half a second more he had left the rungs, and was crawling on hands and knees along the steel slats of the fiddley, with the body of Cagey limp over his back.

He dragged his burden over the iron lip of the starboard doorway, and rolled under the stars.

To the watchman forward, it was hot out there, and yet to Slim it was cold and fresh and sweet as a northern night. He felt it as if cold water had been flung over his body or some chilled perfume, wet and fragrant. To his dazzled eyes the stars drove overhead monstrous like comets; and yet the sense he had of being smothered by the pit ebbed slowly. Out of a black vault into a blue vault with golden rivets. . . . He choked, his throat unclosed, he coughed violently, and slid out of the dead embrace of his fireman, Cagey.

With infinite precaution he stood on his feet, and flung up his arms; his racked arms, with their cramped fingers, on all of which fat yellow blisters were rising. He put his hands on the warm iron of the ship's side; she seemed to pant and

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quiver and shift under his eyes, as her lean hull slid south, solid under the dead burden of iron, with its downward yearning. Iron. As this word rang in his head, he seemed to hear the iron falling into those rusty holds, with their gashed ribs and twisted lips. It was a symbol, shadowing the quality that men must have to come through fire. He grew rigid, and breathed deep; then, all in one gaping second, he was assaulted by the curious fact of space, blue dreaming space, inexhaustible, with mystifying stars broadcast in it, bearing each its burden of strain or agony, shining with a grave light as of sympathy on the torture of this world. He bathed in space, his black arms outstretched against the blue, his lean body throbbing; and then something was unbound about him; his eyes dimmed; he felt a loose freedom in his smarting bulk. If only now he might plunge down among the stars, and feel a wind fluttering on his cheek . . . a wind. Space . . . even as Cagey had said. Space . . . after the pit, desire of space.

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And yet philosophers have called this space a mode of thought.

Slim tugged the body of Cagey to a hatch. Wild exultation beat in him. He was master of the ship's movement; he was in charge of the fires. Looking on the face of the forlorn demon prone on the hatch, he knew him for the first time. Love was love, but life was life; love was soft, like a pillow; but life was sharp, like a sword, tempered in flame. . . . The very spirit of Cagey entered him; as if it had been cast out of Cagey's body, and now sought a lodging in his own. He knew the defiance, the sullen humor, the contempt for men which lay so deep in Cagey's heart. Altschuler. Wrenn. The Viking. He seemed to see that crowd of fat or pallid faces surging forward, clamoring for him in strange legal terms. Faugh. Incredible that they should reach out for him here; incredible that he should suffer the penalty for juggling their papers. He was hard; they were soft; he could knock their heads together. He had enrolled himself in another and underlying

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world; he was part of the red foundation of tormented might on which those flabby fellows built . . . what they built.

But this had been the very thought of Cagey, who lay now inert on the hatch. It was the philosophy of flame; the strange glowing malignancy of burning coals, sunk as by veritable contact into the hearts and purposes of men who feed the fires.

This thought had no moral tinge; the idea of doing penance fled before a whirlwind of disdain, which shook all the pitiful world into odd fragments among which he strode unheeding with his eyes hard and full of that remorseless vision. It was as if he had lost respect for the society which could tolerate this job; and won back his self-respect by kicking the social fabric to the four winds, for a thing that could lie still, while the tortured few, crowned with fire, did the things necessary to be done and shut their lips on it. For this is the disdainful song of hate that fire breathes into the ears of those who know its sting.

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Thus Slim to the unanswering stars. He was roused by the voice of the porter.

“Hey, what’s dis, Slim. What’s all dis?”

The little porter came yawning along, scratching his head, setting down his bare feet gingerly, and rolling himself a mid-watch cigarette. These hot nights he took his sleep in sections. Pouting his lips, he put his face down to the blaze of a match, and stared over his cupped hands, in the fingers of which light red blood was swarming.

He set his bare foot on Cagey’s right arm and rolled it; and then on the left arm and rolled it. He, too, exulted. And as he gazed down at those thick arms outstretched, at the still black face, with the lips parted and loose . . . the lips that had for so long spread terror on that ship—a sudden light came to the little porter, and he ran his hand through his hair, that had been ruined by the blonde in Buffalo. He breathed long and shrill.

“Christ!” he whispered, satisfied. “He looks like he was crucified, Slim.”

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Unclosing his eyes, Cagey rolled slowly to his elbow. Something he had dreamt, something he had known that second past, now puzzled him, as if it had knocked at the gates of consciousness, and fled away before he could open to it. Then, like a word coming to the tip of the tongue, it swarmed into full sense. It had been the soft pressure of a hand upon his heart.

Shuddering, he stood up, and bent his head, and saw faintly the print of a small palm on his left breast over the heart.

He swung his head to the forepart of the ship, and then he saw the girl coming towards him again with something in her hand. She had taken off her armor.

She grew before him; she came maddeningly close, holding out a black bottle . . . her chin marking a slight ripple of decision, her eyes overflowing with a brave sympathy, almost of understanding.

“Drink,” she murmured.

Cagey took the bottle, and while his fingers

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closed on it, his strange eyes were fixed on hers with their inscrutable cynicism which never could betray him. Again her hand, thrust out of star-space, had touched him, had plucked the tight cord of this passion that consumed him; and now when he felt the print of that palm still burning on his heart, all the walls of his body seemed to fall in on one another.

"I thought at first it was Alec," she whispered, "and then when I came close I thought you were dead, but I could feel your heart. . . . Drink."

He raised the bottle to his lips, and poured the fiery stuff into his throat. Then he saw sharp and clear. The smooth plane of the lake was burnished green, marvellously still, a perfect thing. There seemed no torment in the air above them; nothing in that endlessness but peace, golden peace, against which she gleamed like an unguarded jewel of the night.

Yet the arm that Cagey raised shook with the longing that sight can never satisfy nor yet por-

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tray to man; and again, as on that night in the ravine, he saw this black arm swollen, shaggy, scarred . . . and beyond it the fair slim body of her who brought him life, and yet would walk on his bones, as the fat steward had foretold. Without this arm of his, hers could never be. With rugged shoulders bent, he knelt under the world she pressed so lightly with those white-shod feet; and now, even as he knelt, she brought him life, she whom, in a ceaseless spirit of unrest and torment, he upheld on a glad eminence.

“Did he hurt you?” There she touched him on the raw. “Did Alec hurt you?”

Her sympathy was backed by a triumphant pride in Alexander’s feat.

“Hurt me? No,” said Cagey hoarsely. “The heat put me to sleep, that’s all. Heat done it. Slim must have lugged me out.”

Her eyes shone.

“You see,” she cried, “he is a good sport. Yet you would have —”

“No. . . . Well, wait,” cried Cagey suddenly.

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"He has got his nerve all right. Yes, Slim has got his nerve."

"Why is he here?" she cried fiercely.

"Let the guy say himself," muttered Cagey.

"He won't. He won't."

Cagey sank forward.

"No, that would be a rotten trick. Why, Slim is my mate."

"Yet you know. You know."

"Yes," said Cagey.

The girl trembled.

"Wait," said Cagey; "take your time. I will fix it, I will fix it up for you. Well, here, will you let a guy like me do something for you?"

"Yes," she murmured.

"You know I am a rough one."

"You are better than — what you do," she cried faintly, and pierced his heart with that at last.

"I will fix it up," he muttered again restlessly. "I know some things. . . . Who's that coming? Sweat's in my eyes again."

"Mr. Grant," she breathed.

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"Hah," said Cagey. "Go back. Stop him. Keep that bloke away from me now. To-morrow—I'm telling you."

She pressed him mournfully with wide eyes, he moved an arm, impatient; in an instant she had recollected the terrors of that ape-like thing, and fled before it.

Twisting back her head, she saw him bent nearly double, softly rubbing his burnt knees with one hand, and with the other holding the bottle to his lips.

A thrill of disgust shot through and through her. Then a flash of hope.

To Slim, lying in the firehole like a fish on a beach, came Tommy, gaping, twisting a dry sweat-rag about his throat—a fresh body, still full of sleep, but full of mysterious and ready resolution.

"Where the hell's the steam, Slim," he said jovially. "120. . . . You might as well go out there and turn the screw with your hands. Hit the deck."

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Slim hit the deck.

"Ah, me ould college chum," said Shorty, from the fantail. "Have ye had a restful time? But I see ye have not. Well, I have not slept mesilf."

The Irishman's face was white and wearied, but his eyes twinkled.

"Soon we will have it soft, me innocuous Shlim. Ah—ay. In Buffalo. I have certainly a dandy girl there, wid a fine job, too."

He sighed, thinking that he too would marry and escape all this and have it soft. But in a moment he pulled himself together and uttered melodiously,

"Look there, then."

Slim turned his head into the South, and on the dark horizon saw thick lights shining in a long chain.

"What's that?" cried Slim.

"The lights iv Cleveland," answered Shorty. "And now ye get no sleep at all. 'Twill be daylight be the time we tie up."

XV

THE *Yuly Yinks* did not tie up at all that night. She came to rest in the mud at the bottom of the Cuyahoga River, being too deeply laden for that filthy creek; and at dawn tugs grappled with her, and towed her to a dock on the water front, where she was lightened by a foot, and in the late afternoon returned to the creek.

As she swam up the creek, like a sluggish carp, firemen and deckhands sprawled on the after hatch; for now was their time of peace come again.

Slim and Cagey lay side by side on the hatch, and neither spoke. But Cagey knew that in the eyes of the men his supremacy was gone. He had been pulled out of the firehole by a coal-passer; and this ship must know him no more. Fighting, not firing, had put him to sleep; but he would not confess this either. And Slim, making no explanation, rested himself superciliously on the fact

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that he had thrown Cagey out on deck, and gone back to put the smoke to her. This, and this only, the men of the *Yuly Yinks* knew, and they marvelled silently, not venturing the least approach, openly, to this burning question of Cagey's shame.

But they noted with inward joy the rise of the new master-fiend Slim. At table he domineered over them, the deckhands looked aslant at him with admiring eyes, and even the two unspotted firemen, Joe and Tommy, favored him with their amused toleration. They knew of course that the full force of the thing had played on Cagey; and they knew that what took strength of soul and body was the drawing of fires, and that Cagey had drawn them, while Slim stood idle, conserving himself. Nevertheless, they affected to forget all this, and looked now and then at Cagey with embarrassed eyes, indicating unspoken pity for this one of their number whom the pitiless heat had overtaken in his mortal weakness.

"That was a bad watch all right," they said, sedately pouring butter into the pores of their

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bread from a central saucer. "Yep. It was a bad watch, feller. You won't see nothing worse than Erie, not in this world."

Cagey hung his face over his food without retort, writhing speechless in the heat of this overwhelmingly effective satire. Yes, he had hit the plates at last; he was driven from that ship. . . . But yet his spirit was in nowise broken; so that when Slim said, "Well, it wasn't so bad; that wasn't much," in a reflective tone, Cagey stopped his knife in midair, and a slow grin overspread his massive face.

"Nutt'n at all, was it, Slim?" he purred gently, so spiking Slim's guns even from the depths of that disheartening abyss in which he then had his being.

Now on the hatch they lay with sparring personalities, while the replete fiends of the *Yuly Yinks* whispered behind their hands, or argued in loud voices the question of the nearest bar.

And Slim, the grimy, dreamt this old dream of self-conquest, and was great. Lying all his lank length on the hatch, reared on his elbows, he made

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his own enjoyment, while a faint land breeze fluttered amongst his ribs, recharging his spent lungs. Heroic moment. It was as if he personally had given over the *Yuly Yinks* to the tugs, after acquiring her immensity. Odd and heavy solace to the heart of toil.

A strong white light of storm lay over Erie; and sharp against it he saw the black monumental elevators, and the angular iron miracles which stand in sullen ranks along the course of the stinking Cuyahoga. Gaping jaws he saw and slow-turning giant elbows, with languid movements gruesomely like living ones. Once he saw four lazy iron fingers lift high in air a steel car full of coal, and overturn it into a ship's hold. The wheels of the inverted car spun helplessly; then with grim care this thoughtful iron unit swung it back, paused and set it on the rails again.

What he saw here was the strange growth about us of considerable marvels, refined and wrought out of the ore into the age of iron, vast monuments hewn from the central impenetrable stuff of our

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merciless genius . . . unconscious deposits of the dust of struggle raised by fiery intellects . . . things about which we know nothing, save that they are, save that they move and clutch and communicate and strangle in ways hitherto undreamed of. Gifts of heaven or of hell, as the mind inclines, but gifts, always gifts, vast and amazing, tumbled out of the broad lap of satirical Mother Plenty, imposed upon us for use, but nowise within the grasp of our general intelligence. Almost they say, with Frankenstein's monster, "Give us a soul." . . . Excrescences then, hideous or splendid, on the plain material face of nature, growing outside the consciousness of our collective effort, whether or no making for general enlightenment, whether or no making for more than physical comfort, which is spiritual death, as surely as unenlightened misery is spiritual death . . . what man shall say?

So the philosophy of voluntary agony spoke in the ear of Slim, the philosophy of the ragged St. Francis of Assisi, going his woeful gait, with

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wasted body, and worn begging bowl, over the stubble and flint beds of his native Italy. Would not St. Francis, think you, have embraced in his deep heart this opportunity to feed the fires of his penance and increase the pleasant roar of hell in the ears of unregarding multitudes. Ah, but the age of iron was not yet beyond its infancy; and he must seek his agony in the open.

And in a moment of grim phantasy it came to Slim that just as these jangling mechanisms dealt with dead cargoes, so had the mechanism of modern life dealt with those who had built it. Men had poured their intelligence into the iron until they had none left themselves. They had gone about to make the world fool-proof; and what will make a world of fools quicker than a world of fool-proof things? The few that are forethoughted, standing like terrible beacons out of the immense blind tides of the unthoughted, that ebb and flow around them, moaning; while yet a further few remain who dare to put forth ships on such a sea for profit.

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So he thought fiercely as the black panorama of these iron toilers drew past him, menacing.

But Cagey lay on his back, flexing his arms, twiddling his toes, thinking other thoughts.

In the west a mooning spot of giant red leered at between the fat armored bodies of four blast furnaces. Huge joints, bloated grey elbows of hollow steel, writhed between them, connecting them together; from time to time astral flame crowned their tops; and just beyond stood red brown or ghastly grey portentous mountains of the ore itself; veritable mountains to the half-closed eye, with jagged tops, which, owing to the heavy cling of the stuff, had the look of the solid earth which came out of chaos, not at all the look of gross treasure dug by the hand of man and heaped there. A man could tell five miles away, thought Slim, whether a heap like that was ore or coal by the mere configuration of the sky line.

His eye fell on rusty stacks of iron pigs, strangely contrasting with the slack ore from which they came. A circular magnet, swinging

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from a crane, sank into them. When it rose, a dozen black pigs were clinging to it, spinning against its bottom, hairy, like the legs of spiders, with the iron shreds and filaments attracted to them. Indeed, against the dark red west, that bunch of hanging pigs looked not unlike some vast revolting spider; and even as they looked, the magnetic current was cut off and very faintly they heard the iron falling into the car.

“Well, that’s us,” said Cagey. “One minute we hold together; but the next we are all in pieces. Ain’t that so, Slim?”

Slim grunted indifferently, and Cagey lay glaring at him with pondering eyes. Either he or Slim must leave that ship.

In another moment they slid into the shadow of four steel contrivances, huger than any yet, and when the *Yuly Yinks* was fairly snubbed or checked in to the dock, there came a sound of groaning steel overhead, lights were swung, red-smearing men clambered over a black outwork of girders; and almost at once these four mysterious

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devices sank forward, and four stupendous shafts, crawling with greased chains, plunged into four hatches of the puny ship. At the bottom of each shaft an oval opening revealed within a chamber full of levers; and in each chamber sat a man, who, by selecting his levers, opened the jaws of the clam, thrusting them out on square blue necks of greasy steel, like heads of crafty turtles . . . closing them together, thus taking a seventeen ton bite out of the cargo in five seconds. And as these grisly things sank and rose and sank again, humming, they looked like nothing so much as appalling iron bees, sipping the unlikely honey of the north, filling their uncouth pouches with that rude earth-pollen, iron ore.

And Slim saw that this grotesque and amazing process was ultimate; that before and beyond the sorrows and agonies and plots of men comes the movement of the iron; for out of it must be wrought the bed plates on which the swept up world shall rest, since now old Atlas of the Greeks has spent his power, and sunk under the load.

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But yet as the clams swung and fell, grinding into the ore, it seemed to Slim, in the opulence of his youthful agony, in his strange imagination of the invisible chains which bound him to his freedom, that there was still an Atlas; and that he and Cagey and Tommy and poor Spanish Joe had wrought themselves into a quivering pillar of flesh, which upheld through blood and sweat and strain, that bright solid world gleaming above them through obscuring mind-mists; this world tolerable to the body by reason of fantastic comforts, which yet assaults the minds of those who live in houses, with nameless dreads and melancholies, bleak sins of the idle hour, joys like spurting flame, scaly monsters of the abyss, towards which they alone have time to turn their eyes. . . . Consciously or unconsciously, all men fear the withdrawal of this immense and even satirical charity of the unseen sons of Atlas.

Through this dream he heard the voice of Shorty,

“The man that invinted that business is livin’

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off the inth'rest iv his inth'rest; an' no enj'ymnt to him. A felly was tellin' me he wint clane out iv his head whin firrst he seen thim clams scooping the iron."

"Hah," breathed Cagey. Already the deep-seated fountain of his scorn was renewing him again.

XVI

THE deckhands lay asleep in their sodden bunks. They sighed; they dreamt astute dreams of plunder; they rasped their crusted fists against the bunk boards, and uttered curious whinings, burying their heads deeper in the dark pillows, twitching their lids as sweat filled the corners of their eyes. The radiator was still red-hot; and although they had draped all their underclothing about it, they acquired by that only a smell of burning interlarded with the heat.

At the very dead point of their oblivion, Cagey shook Slim's arm.

"Come on and drink," he said.

In rapid succession he wakened Shorty and the Other Guy, repeating to each of them these words of mystical assurance,

"Come on and drink."

No deckhand may refuse this offer on the part

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of those above him. It is a rule to drink when the word is passed.

The sodden three rolled out sleepily, and followed Cagey.

"How did you get yer money, man?" inquired Shorty, as they went down the ladder.

"I asked the old man for it," said Cagey. "Well, I'm not afraid of the guy."

His eyes rested on Slim, and he became thoughtful.

"Now I'll show you sump'n, Slim," he said. "You think you can eat heat, don't you? All right, I'll show you sump'n else. So keep your nerve, Slim. This ain't no evenin' walk, Slim; this is business."

It had become apparent that this sally from the ship was indeed business, of a kind known to these three. Something bold, something deep and vengeful, stood now even in the round eye of Shorty. He puffed his chest, and made wide circles with his arms, as if he were loosening them at the shoulders and taking on a muscular freedom.

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His circular felt hat, crushed low on his brow, made it seem, humorously, as if he had had shortness knocked into him along with everything else. Perhaps now he was going to get even. At least he had stopped babbling. They were all silent; and this silence was somehow preoccupied and sinister.

Very dimly Slim began to sense the strange mood looming close to him through the eyes and bodies of these three men. It was fundamental, that was certain; for these were fundamental men.

They were going down to drink. Was it no more than this? They had moved the iron; they had done their red part in the demolition of the visible hills; and this was their release. To Slim it seemed that all this was wild and strangely novel; and he thought that something had happened new in this world, and that damned spirits had been freed, by the melting of their chains. And all at once as if he had just now trod the floor of hell, he saw the world full and clear, with every

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ragged edge unturned, and he disdained it. As he swung forward a kind of independence got into his legs; movement was enough; he rolled in his gait; a wonderful fearlessness possessed him; he cared not who smote him flat; and now he saw why Cagey laughed at God and felt the impulse that drove him to solicit torture. For if of his own accord Cagey had sought out these savage adventures of the body, released, he looked beyond the laws of men, in his idleness as in his work, gigantesque, defiant. He did the work of the world and defied the world.

Stumbling over a vast plain, paved with rails glittering under red lights, half obscured by thick drifting smoke palls riven by the hell's glare of blast furnaces, Slim knew the battle-ground of life. By favor of this withering task of contemptuous men, the iron was moved and cast into stoves; and wheat was moved and ground into flour; and coal was moved and life kept in the bodies of those who lived in houses. And then he saw to be consummate charity, on a strange order, a giving of the

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strong to the weak, without material return, which yet made the strong more strong, although in evil.

For no man lives but could find other work than theirs. Ah, but this other work, as it is less terrible, less commensurate with the fierce freedom to which their souls aspire. It is here and here only that they may acquire the self-respect which holds them through the bitter days and nights of their winter-freedom. Defiance of life is what they found their pride upon; they fill the mouth of deep defiance up, and who among the men that live in houses is there who has not heard afar that menace and that roaring?

And in all this may be found a kind of wild logic or necessity, for they would be not quite so miserable in a state of nature, or natural anarchy. Civilization, to whom they are everything, is to them nothing, less than nothing, can have nothing to offer them, unless a jail; and jail, to these fiend spirits that rave, is a soft thing, as death itself is a soft thing, release, release from certain and with-

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ering fires to others, as we now know, highly problematical. . . . Their lives flow before them in broad and turbid channels; they breathe each breath deep, and dread nothing, until at last they are crushed or burnt or broken, as that dread Juggernaut, Nature, source of their disdain, shall bring to pass.

Suddenly Slim halted.

"By God," he said. "This is—I thought I knew it—this is near where I lived when I was a kid."

Cagey looked curiously back.

"Is that so, Slim? Well, I was spawned hereabouts myself. Swell place for a young guy, all right."

Slim stared.

"It's a hard neighborhood," he said slowly. "The old man hadn't made his pile then. But where did you live?"

"Over behind the oil tanks," muttered Cagey.

"I have seen worse," said the Irishman, shaking

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his head. . . . Yes, if there was any worse, Shorty had seen it.

Slim shook the hair from his eyes and trembled for sheer joy of this expedition, which led he knew not whither. He had caught the rich naïvete, the deep savagery of wonder that made them humorous men. The moral spring was gone out of them; they beheld statutes and restraints slide and totter, and laughed, as if they had seen a man jerked all his length on an ice pavement. It was strange and intoxicating in itself for them to plant their feet on the naked earth again, and to know that they would go wheresoever by simple act of will they steered themselves. Rails, cinders, rolling stock, red signals, all set on the immovable, or seemingly immovable roundness of a planet hung in center-most star space. Odd beyond words. Only in the waste of waters was there commonplaceness; here they saw variety and food for thought even in the crooked ruts of the road, when their feet sank in them.

Now to their left were ranged those grey

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drunken houses of the poor, behind the oil tanks. They were still far enough away so that there was a terrible beauty in the gleam of lights through bleared windows; for mocking night had settled the dark seal of living death on the brow of that forlorn hillside, with its myriad sunken lives.

A foul odor of rotten oil blew in their faces on a warm wind; and presently they saw the loom of the tanks, and halted in the shadow of them.

"Nice little merry-go-rounds," said Cagey. He pounded the dark round of the tank with the flat of his hand.

"Empty. Once I was three days hidin' from the police in one of them things, that had been stove in at the top; and the oil caught me asleep. Ever go swimmin' in oil?"

"Man, man," groaned Shorty compassionately.

"Aw, I don't know nothing, I don't," said Cagey. "Why, I can't even eat heat no more; not with Slim, I can't."

Cagey drew his fists out of his jumper.

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"Well, here," he said, very low, "there's the joint—Hefty Berner's. We are going to smash up this place. Three beers and then a rush, see? Jump the bar and take the guy over the head with the mug. That's all. Duck out back. You guys can take what you like; but what I'm after is a stuffed bird."

He closed his eyes, and his jaw sank as he reflected.

"One lousy stuffed bird," he said, and they all four went into Hefty Berner's low-browed place.

There were a dozen thickset journeymen of one kind or another there, drinking, yawning, talking earnestly of nothing at all; staring ox-eyed at bulging chromos of chaste women pirouetting on the smooth rounds of bottles. Where there was no action, there could be no thought; and so far there had been no action.

But as the four from the *Yuly Yinks* came in, they raised their heads, lowering, like cattle defending a range.

Hefty Berner himself did duty behind the bar,

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and he smiled, not without fear, when he saw Cagey.

"Hello there," he said genially. "Ain't seen you in God knows when, as the hen said."

"Beer," said Cagey, dropping money on the bar, and watching Hefty like a stolid cat. The bar-man went sopping up his rosewood with a dirty rag, sweeping it in wide circles over the shining brass drain. Slim stared, as in a trance, at the black streaks of hair laid pathetically across his shining skull. Was it possible that they were going to smash him up?

Hefty Berner brought up four schooners from a dark place; monumental goblets, huge of stem, with bell mouths—sober-seeming quarts for men. The beer foamed; and Slim's mind quailed before the incommunicable horror of the white celluloid slat with which Hefty slid the foam away.

"This is special," whispered the bar-man, looking through a rift in the smoke at the dogged sitters. Two of them had risen, and were poking the billiard balls about, on a board whose bed of

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slate had cracked squarely in the middle, under the momentum of some fight which had taken its course unluckily across the table.

"Hah," said Cagey. He raised the shining miracle of glass, felt it heavy under the beer, saw it misted and thumbed on its grooved surface, and put it to his lips. . . .

"Another one," he said, outbreathing. The glass was now colorless.

"Dry trip?" inquired Hefty gently.

"Yes," said Cagey. His eyes were on a stuffed peacock which stood proudly, with dusty blue-green bosom, on the shelf behind the bar-man. Beyond it was a tawny rabbit; itself a choice example of the art of taxidermy; and overshadowing the rabbit, a bunch of artificial sunflowers hung against the speckled mirror.

"Them ships is hot, I've heard," murmured Hefty sympathetically. "Why don't you get a job ashore?"

"Well, why don't I?" said Cagey savagely. "You're the guy that's askin'."

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"No one is tryin' to get your goat, old man," said Hefty soothingly. "How is the old woman?"

"When did she sell you that rotten bird?" said Cagey, pointing to the peacock.

"Oh, my God, I couldn't say," said Hefty. "It's a long way back now. I know she said at the time it was an unlucky bird, but I always said that what was one man's meat was another man's poison."

Slim heard the Other Guy breathing fast, and knew that the moment was at hand.

"It never done me no harm," said Hefty complacently.

"Well, give it time," said Cagey. "Give the lousy bird time, that's all. A peacock never done no man no good, and I know it."

"I have got along all right," Hefty reasserted.

"Yes, but will you get along all right. I'm asking, will you?"

Too late Hefty saw his plight. He began to move back, but in that same breath Cagey vaulted

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the bar, and dealt the wretched man a blow sickeningly hard.

"Give the lousy thing a chance, and it will get in its work," he muttered. "I never seen it fail."

The fellow dropped, quivering like a jelly-fish, with his mouth open; and Cagey took the peacock under his arm. Then Slim was at his side.

"Quick now. Out back," roared Cagey.

The dogged sitters had come to life; one of them hove a pool ball at the marauders, which went through the mirror. Shorty ducked his head and seized the rabbit; and Slim, perceiving it to be a night for trophies, took the sunflowers in his fist.

They crashed through a thin door into the rear of the saloon; felt their way among kegs and barrels, and came out tumultuously into the night. They were in an alley made by two rough brick walls, studded with iron spikes; an alley filled with nameless refuse. They ran full tilt through this, and came against a wooden door. Without stopping, Cagey slewed sidewise in his gait, and brought one mighty shoulder against it. It fell

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out, like a thing of cardboard, and they charged through, still clutching their amazing loot, and ran down the street. And the spirit of Slim, the deckhand, grew to a vast lordliness; he had done mischief for the first time in his life and he was glad. He went forward at a loose warlike stride, the sunflowers dangling from his clenched fist, and in his hard eyes leered the criminal, the man for whom these vague symbols and outworks of society were nothing. He was full of a destructive humor, a world-shattering disdain. The red malignancy of fire-watches burned in his heart like a live coal dropped there and now he thought he saw why other men clung to the rules. It was to preserve this malicious principle of life which he had scorned. They were soft, those fellows, they were banded together to hold up one another's hands; but he and Shorty and Cagey were full of an age-old spirit of barbarism. They lived from hand to mouth, from one moment to the next, they could cry quits with life, they could see red when they chose, because they were the red men writhing

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under all that show of progress. Yes, they were the crude gigantic blocks, crushed and invisible, at the base of the imposing pyramid.

Torture spoke to them like an oracle and bade them be free; and by the god of battles, they were free. They held their lives in the hollow of their hands; and as this world might snuff them out with every step, and death draw over them its hood of everlasting dark, so, on every hand, vilest things shone burning bright with meaning. There was not time for the idlest curiosity to stale. Poverty was as strange to them as wealth; houses were curious; wives a madness; and only beer, which was within their grasp, divine.

They turned into another road; the ugly ruts were dry and deep and beyond was a glitter of water and a great arching thing of tangled girders. A railroad bridge.

Hugging their strange possessions they went out at full speed upon the bridge. The moon had gone behind a cloud; and as they came near the little house, at the centre of the bridge, a man

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stepped out to bar their way. They checked themselves one moment.

"Av we had rubber shoes like Shlim, we could make a run f'r it," gasped Shorty. His fist closed on the belly of the rabbit and its ears moved.

"Man, 'tis a notorious animal," he cried in a voice besieged with terrors. "Sure, 'twas a crool thing to shtuff the beast before it died."

"Come on," roared Cagey.

The man ahead braced himself to argue; but now they would brook nothing short of death. It seemed to the mad Slim as if all three of them drove over him at once; on the instant they leapt away from his prone body, clearing the bridge like hounds in full cry, and heading for the docks.

And Slim knew that the sound bursting from his throat was savage laughter, which had been bottled up in him a thousand years. For the mind of each man is a deep tomb, where lie the dead impulses of his ancestors, even to remotest times, awaiting resurrection.

"By God, we mashed him," he shrieked. He

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whirled his arms, and the sunflowers dashed past his ear.

"This is fun," he gasped. "Some old fun, this is."

"Wake up, wake up," howled Cagey. "They'll be on top of us here."

Looking back, Slim could see an immense man galloping after them in a nonsensical fury. He was not the spoiled barman; what a fool then to pit himself against three men like these three men.

They came to the red skeleton of a tug that was building.

"This'll do," said Cagey. He set down his peacock against the dark keelson, and stepped through the heavy steel ribs of the tug, with Slim and Shorty following. And in another second, it seemed, the pursuer was on them, breathing hard,—a large man, very hairy. He put out his arms to swing himself up, and Cagey, snickering, stooped and pulled him through and locked him thigh to thigh. Then Slim and Shorty heard a sound of whistling breath, they saw Cagey's face

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set in an expression of terrific strain, while his huge arms rocked the man gently sidewise with a fatally slow twisting movement. In this second of dumb strain, Cagey held his head on one side, listening, like an expert; and in the next there came a crisp snap, and immediately Cagey relaxed and dropped the man contemptuously through the ribs of the tug, having wrung him like a dishrag.

"He had a crust," said Cagey. "Well, he had a crust all right. He will feel like a damned fool now, when he wakes up with that arm broken."

He stooped and picked up the peacock.

"'Tis a tidy evenin's wurrk," said Shorty, putting a timid finger in the belly of the rabbit. "It's certainly a dandy burrd ye have there, Cagey."

Cagey said suddenly,

"Here. Where's the Other Guy?"

They looked about them.

"Gone some other way, I guess," said Slim.

That was true. Here You lay on the floor of

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the saloon, with his repellent mouth wide open, and his soul emptied from his nameless body. . . . One of the sitters had made an occasion of the rumpus to thrust a merciful knife into him, and relieve him of the forty-seven cents with which he had intended to buy liniment for his throat.

XVII

THE three remaining jogged on towards the black docks in a glow of reminiscence.

"How did you come to take a fancy to the burrd, though, Cagey," said Shorty. "'Tis a dandy burrd wid the shpotted tail iv two feathers, that there's no denying. And thin the proud look iv ut. But Cagey, lad, how came ye to have an eye to it . . . that is, as it were, to make a selection iv ut anyyways?"

But Cagey turned to Slim.

"You're paid off, Slim, tomorrow," he said very low and thick. "You can leave if you want to."

Slim's eye flashed.

"Oh, well," he said, "I'm satisfied. This ship is as good as any."

But Cagey saw him in a dry light.

"He is one of these guys that eat heat," he re-

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flected aloud. Through the gloom his voice was sad, sepulchral. "Yep. Slim had rather eat heat than Sunday chicken on a Steel boat. Some guy all right."

Slim yawned.

"Maybe I will get a fireman next trip that can stand up under the heat. Of course, where a man has to pass his own coal, and feed the smoke too, it makes a real job. Yes, it makes a real job."

Slim had caught Cagey's very breath of life, his self-communing satire, his dark ignoring of mere other selves. He loomed large in his own consciousness, merciless . . . as Cagey would be merciless.

At that cruel jibe, the veins in Cagey's thick bent arm stood out hard, but holding his voice in reason, he said,

"No, Slim. Not in two weeks you ain't learned to eat heat. Naw, not in two weeks, feller. You have got a line of queer talk, and no mistake; but you don't mean that you would

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rather sweat than have it soft. You can sling the bull all right, Slim, but you don't mean that."

They dodged a headlight which swam ferociously down on them between the glitter of rails. Then, as the cars clanked by, Slim shouted,

"Agony is good for a man," like a war-cry.

They glared at one another, oppressed and irreconcilable.

"You are a new kind of a fool," said Cagey.

"Well, you are the old kind," said Slim.

They quivered slightly, but the Irishman begged,

"Boys, oh, boys, not in the midst iv all this business here. Come away to the ship."

"I'm speakin' of that germ of yours," said Cagey. "You wouldn't go back to her?"

"No," said Slim. "That's all past, I tell you; I have shut down on all that."

"Hah," said Cagey. "You think it is easy. . . . Why, damn you, they have . . . they have put you together to satisfy her. Can she spend all her time star-gazin' in that damned glass-thing.

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No, she must have a man. How would I do for her pardner, Slim?"

He raised his brows, leering; and the terrible concession that he would never do shone in his blue eyes, and the thought seemed fatal to him, like a true bullet. He talked in feverish whispers, his huge fist lightly on Slim's arm as he urged him away from the *Yuly Yinks*. One of them must go; and that one must not be Cagey.

"You can have it soft, Slim," he argued, "bed as soft as a cat, no watches, no fires but what is in your pipe. Hah. Take her. Them silks. . . . She is no bigger than . . . Soft, Slim. She will wrap them arms round you, put them lips on yours. Hah. You will think you are a man in a storm. Go back, Slim. You don't need no persuasion."

He spoke as if Slim was in fact his mate, who knew nothing of these things, save as Cagey glimpsed them for him. . . . All at once Slim's mind reverted to his father's estate. He saw the massive iron gate, and beyond the portico twin-

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bling with fluted pillars, its floor strewn with rugs and pillows, these stuffed with pleasantly grating balsam, yielding chairs, books, tender vines down-curling, casting shadows. . . . Ah, that swept up world where the mind, hanging at dead point, is urged neither back nor forward. And within the Viking, sunk in his deep bed, gross, tattooed, hoarse breathing, as he had seen him last—a fellow with this same compelling power of savagery that leapt from Cagey's eyes, but refined, harnessed, bending under the yoke of fortunate enterprise . . . ever an interloper in that swept up world where even the ash cans are fitted with covers, and dross is a name—till death falls.

"I say it's intolerable," cried Slim, irresolute. "Besides I can't go back; and—well, you know it. They'd jail me."

"No," said Cagey, and he drew the tail feathers of the peacock between thumb and forefinger. "No, Slim. I can fix it up."

They stumbled into the shadow of the *Yuly Yinks*.

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"Glad I am to see the sweet stern of her," mumbled the Irishman. "That half-pig across the creek has put her shnout into the coal. She's settlin'."

Over their heads those monstrous bees were humming, darting down and back, with ponderous and unthinking decisiveness, scooping the ship clean. Already the ladder had a sharper angle against the ship's side.

"Fix it up?" cried Slim. "How?"

"Hah," breathed Cagey. "Wait, Slim, wait."

His fingers closed on the neck of this bird, with its two tail feathers reminiscent of a once spreading glory, and swayed silently up the ladder. After him came Slim and Shorty. In Slim's soul was now a foaming effervescence of the outrage; they were dark figures flung awry over the world of men like leaded scourges; they had struck, and were returning whence they came. And with immense pride he took note of his connection with this ship. Long and black and clamorous she lay at her berth like a triumph of his will, which had

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driven her hither, bearing deep in her fire-lapped bowels his own smoldering body. A little smoke trailed from her stack; the square coal which had been built into a wall around the bunker hatches had now sunk to a perpetual teasing forty feet below; the fires were dying. Respite. A swaggering period of insolent release from torture; a chance to visit themselves wrathfully upon those who would profit by all this.

Deep in this murk of thought, Slim put his legs over the wire railing, and stood on the deck. Shorty rolled past him, steering for his bunk. He went down singing, and stroking his rabbit.

Then Slim, standing beside Cagey, saw coming towards them the woman of the galley, the second cook, her bright hair falling on her neck, which showed bitter cords from the weight of the block-ice she was carrying.

"Danaide," thought Slim; his throat ached; some vague premonition, some impulse rooted in his very infancy, swept him and left him trembling. But the eyes. What was it that looked

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out of those eyes, besides the worship of sorrow?

Even as she stood watching, the misery of yearning in them fled before wild terror; and the ice shattered on the steel deck.

"What you got?" she whispered to the fireman.

"Nutt'n," said Cagey, "go on in and shut the door."

"No," she cried, pressing closer, "I won't. You're up to something now."

"Stand back," said Cagey harshly. "Who's doing this? Well, who's doing this?"

"Where did you get—that?" she cried fiercely.

But Cagey said nothing, holding the bird in one hand, and stroking his forearm with the other.

"That's all right," he uttered presently.

"That's all right."

His brilliant eyes stared up the rising line of the deck; and now Slim, hardly breathing, saw that the Viking was coming down on the port side, looking into the hatches one by one. And suddenly there shot through and through him, like the

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numbing sting of an unlooked for bullet, the conception of a strange likeness between the Viking and the man Cagey who lay in wait for him with that stuffed bird: in the rock to their massive shoulders, in the slight crook of their legs, in their loose-hanging gorilla-like arms.

His jaw sagged, he stared at Cagey like a man groping blindly towards a light; and at that moment the Viking turned the corner of the after hatch, and stood twisting his cigar about and about in his mouth, rending it unconsciously with the yellow light of the starboard lantern strong in his heavy face. And on his face there sat that closed-in far-seeing look of contemptuous calculation, the serene look of a man unavoidable in the right by reason of his power. What he heard standing there superciliously in the roar of steel and iron ore was the reverberation of his profits, the tumultuous and gargantuan tribute of noisy praise paid by the instruments of toil to his mastery of earth's resources.

With a sudden slashing movement of disdain,

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Cagey hurled the peacock at the feet of Bartholomew Grant, and stepped into the light. The woman behind Slim moaned faintly, and reeling, put out her hand to his shoulder.

"What's this, my man," snapped the Viking viciously.

"Your man, yes, by God," hissed Cagey. "Your man is right."

It was extremely unpleasant. The Viking hung out his jaw, and suddenly he began to open and shut his lips as if a bitter bad taste had come into his mouth.

"How about it, Mr. Grant," purred Cagey. "You threw it out, what? Yes, you threw it out, and that's a long time back, when you threw my mother out'n your house; but I ain't forgot. Not me. That ain't my nature. I don't complain, but I don't forget, feller. No, I don't forget. Your damn bird brought you bad luck and you threw it out, and your woman with it. But I swore by all hell it would come back to you some day, and here it is. Well, here it is."

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The Viking's lips moved, but no words came to him. The snarl of the descending clams continued. The fingers of the woman at Slim's shoulder sank into his flesh; and he knew. Then he saw that his father was saying something.

"What do you want? What do you—want?" muttered the Viking.

"Now the guy is talkin'," sneered Cagey. "Yes, now he is talkin'. What do I want? Well, I don't want nutt'n but what you will give me. Here, who's this. Well, who's this?"

He moved aside, and the Viking for the first time saw Slim, who stood shadowing the woman.

"Alexander!" said the Viking. "What's this? What are you doing here?"

"Hold on," said Cagey. "That's my business. I invited him to have a ride, that's how. Well, here, I'll tell you how. You put the little sea-cook in a bank, didn't you. Hey? How many years have I been watchin' you down here, for nutt'n. Yes, you put him in a bank, and he took the bones out'n the bank. Well, I seen him one

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night at Ladd's joint, and a feller told me who he was. Grown some since I seen him last. So I put a friend of mine on his trail, and he hit the tables, and as fast as he took the bones out'n the bank, they lifted 'em. And then they put it up to me to finish the job!"

Cagey's voice fell; he stood rigid as iron, out-facing Bartholomew Grant.

"Well, I wanted the job all right. I wanted some damn soul to prod up . . . down there. Hey? Well, I was lonesome. But he is game, Slim is. Yes, he is game. He come near finishin' me instead. I wouldn't do it; I wouldn't do it for no man."

"Where is she? Where's your—mother?" said the Viking in a dead tone. His heavy cheeks trembled; and his head hung forward on his fat shoulders.

"Hah," said Cagey.

The woman shrank away; and Bartholomew Grant saw her; saw the head that had once lain on his shoulder staring at him out of shadow, like

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a beautiful haggard ghost of the dead years. The weak link in his heavy chain of conquests had snapped. Decision was gone out of him; he coughed, and took heavy steps towards her. But Cagey thrust out his ape's arm fiercely.

"Wait. I'll chuck you in the hold. You threw her out, see? She's nutt'n to you. I'm nutt'n to you. You can't do nutt'n for us, feller. You've done for us already, that's God's truth. Get down to business. Slim, here, wants to come back. Yes, he'll come back quick enough, if you will put them bones back in the bank. That's what I'm askin' you. Fix it up for Slim. He ain't built for this job. He wasn't started early enough. Well, how about it?"

The Viking's face was like grey stone; and he fumbled his cigar.

"I can bring proofs of what happened back in the kitchen that night," said Cagey. "Yes, I can bring proofs. But you don't need 'em. Will you fix it up for Slim?"

"God!" said the tortured Viking. "Yes."

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"That's all," said Cagey swiftly. "You will, all right. Yes, you will. Go forward. Go on, Slim. Go on."

Cagey's eye travelled forward; and suddenly the ridge of muscle over his shoulders rose.

"There she is," he whispered. "God's curse, stop her. Take her, Slim, damn you, take her. Take her back where she can look in the glass-thing. Hah."

Slim's eye was fixed on the distant figure of Avis Wrenn, and then a softness came about him again; by a subtle process his speeding imagination of the world began to glide the other way, as a traveler who thinks he has been riding backwards sees curiously on a sudden that he is going forward. The ship was all at once a black horror to him; the lean tentacles of steel plunging into her holds menaced him; the world in action became more harsh than death; grating of doors, clanging of bars, thundering of flame echoed in his brain awfully; he felt that he had reeled over an abyss and saw it yawning . . . yawning for him.

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And in that moment from the fantail came the lamentable voice of Shorty, speaking in words of no meaning the shadows and gruff echoes of this world.

“Ninety days and ninety ways
And Riley needs the beer,”

sang the Irishman to the chaste stars.

Shorty knew, thought Slim; and it had been Shorty's aim to have it soft. There were not too many men like Cagey. Not too many. Men must have it soft. They yearned for sheets and security. The philosophy of agony stood only while the necessity for it stood.

The woman behind him moaned again. Turning, he saw her sink to her knees, and his position became intolerable to him. The eyes of the woman were burning on him with a heart-burdening timidity, a strange mother-love that could not find itself; he began to stoop towards her, putting out his arms; but Cagey struck him fiercely back.

“None of that,” he cried. “You and me part

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here. Go for'ard; take her, Slim, curse you, let it go at that."

Stooping, he lifted the body of his mother, almost with tenderness, and looking back once, to check them, bore her out of their sight, going towards the galley.

The two men remaining, Alexander and his father, stood stockstill, staring at one another with hideous spiritual awkwardness. . . . Then Alexander became aware that his father had said twice over to him, "Well, let it go at that. . . . Let it go at that . . ."

With blurred eyes as if awakening from a trance, Alexander began to walk up the deck towards Avis; and after him, shuffling, came the Viking.

The peacock lay capsized on the deck, with a glittering eye on them, and one scaly claw advanced. . . .

At the hour for banking fires, Cagey stepped out of the fantail in company with the little porter.

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"Yes, she is one little queen, all right," the porter was saying. "Nutt'n to it. Nachrel curly hair and all. If I could once snake her out'n Buffalo, I would go to Toronto and have it soft. She is learnin' dressmaking."

Happy porter, with his connivances, and his uncanny knowledge of queens. To his imagination, which condoned all pitiful details, the streets swarmed with queens, whom the fastidious may never see.

"I was tellin' her only the other day, I could get a job in Toronto for the winter as an entertainin' waiter—tryman with three songs in my nut. If I had my hair they would be nutt'n to it, Cagey. I'm there, that's all. Yes, I'm there."

"Can it," said Cagey. "Can it."

He struck a match savagely, broke off its head, swore, and struck another.

"I certainly did have an elegant head of hair," said the porter ruefully. "But I will have it soft all right in a year or two, hair or no hair."

"Lessee your hand," said Cagey. The porter

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put it out; the corded hand of a man steeped in toil hung on the slender wrist of a child.

"No, you will never have nutt'n soft but your nut," muttered Cagey.

"Aw, hell," said the porter; "who has got your goat?"

He glided into the galley petulantly, his faun's eyes slanted in his narrow head. Cagey took a breath which swelled his chest out and out, until it parted his jumper, and showed white and massive with its immense double arch.

While he stood with every sense alert, he heard the iron clams grunting in the holds, and the roar of falling ore. He saw across the creek the four stolid blast furnaces, out of whose tops leapt darting tongues of tawny flame, illuminating the ingrowing sides of the half pig freighter, and throwing snaky lines of red athwart the swirling eddies of the black creek. Everywhere about swarmed haggard men in twisted shapes, straining against weights, streaming sweat on red-smear'd faces. Sweat, slime, blood, fire, on a ground of death.

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Suddenly the plungers were withdrawn, sliding on narrow tracks towards the forepart of the ship; and in that instant of comparative silence, Cagey thought he heard a voice, wandering in the dark, distant, sweet, a little flutter of compelling sound, falling on his heart in warm dense waves of an emotion beyond words.

That clear carolling of unmolested happiness died, or was cut short in the renewed snarling of the clams; and Cagey, blinking smoke from his eyes, went down to his fires, swaying on the ladder from side to side . . . like an ape.

Standing on the bottom of the ship, he paused a moment, still listening; then opened the door to his starboard wing fire. And for an instant he felt with a solid thrill, as if it had been real, the pressure of a soft palm against his heart, which beat heavily; and as he stood, gleaming, a smile of ultimate puzzlement touched his lips, relieving their cruelty with a child's wistfulness.

The thought pressed him again and again, that where he had blackmailed the old man in Slim's

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interest, he might have done so in his own instead. Had he chosen, he might have come out of the hole for good and all. Had he chosen. . . .

"No, it wouldn't have done me no good," he muttered. He looked at his scarred fist, and down at his hairy body, with its all but invulnerable ramparts of the flesh, the racking flesh.

"Slim's woman. Hah."

He wanted to suffer, to forget. . . .

Drooping forward a little he stared with narrowing eyes into that long lane of yellow fire; and the sting on his chest melted or unbound for a time the invisible irons that had clamped him there. Slowly there crept into his face that old light of a rebellious fiend, secure on the floor of hell; that voice, ancestral and barbaric, stirred in his dark heart of toil, and swinging open the door wider, he began to put the smoke to her with lazy thrusts of the shovel, laying it well back and along the sides, and banking it in front.

When he had shut the last door, he scraped the coal towards the bunkers, with his instinct for tidy-

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ing up. He smiled another smile now; a smile of craft and triumph. He was alone with his fires. By bringing to bear on Slim that intolerable pressure of a life of ease in prospect, he was still supreme. Of his own will he could go on in torment, though the world beckoned. He had vindicated his intimate right to the dread embrace of this consuming toil, by which alone he lived, wrapped in whose fiery heart of flame he might meet with peace at length in the shadowy rear-guard of all hope and all desire.

Presently he sat back on his bench of black canvas, and putting the shovel between his legs, sank forward with his chin on his fist and his elbow on his knee, staring with hard eyes into the hot blackness between the dusty boilers.

"Hah," he said aloud, "some guy has got to get the steam."

THE END

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