Bindloss Harold

The Secret of the Reef

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The Secret of the Reef:

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CHAPTER I – DISMISSED

The big liner's smoke streamed straight astern, staining the soft blue of the sky, as, throbbing gently to her engines' stroke, she clove her way through the smooth heave of the North Pacific. Foam blazed with phosphorescent flame beneath her lofty bows and, streaking with green and gold scintillations the long line of hull that gleamed ivory-white in the light of a half moon, boiled up again in fiery splendor in the wake of the twin screws. Mastheads and tall yellow funnels raked across the sky with a measured swing, the long deck slanted gently, its spotless whiteness darkened by the dew, and the draught the boat made struck faint harmonies like the tinkle of elfin harps from wire shroud and guy. Now they rose clearly; now they were lost in the roar of the parted swell.

A glow of electric light streamed out from the saloon-companion and the smoking-room; the skylights of the saloon were open, and when the notes of a piano drifted aft with a girl's voice, Jimmy Farquhar, second mate, standing dressed in trim white uniform beneath a swung-up boat, smiled at the refrain of the old love song. He was in an unusually impressionable mood;

and he felt that there was some danger of his losing his head as his eyes rested admiringly on his companion, for there was a seductive glamour in the blue and silver splendor of the night.

Ruth Osborne leaned on the steamer's rail, looking forward, with the moonlight on her face. She was young and delicately pretty, with a slender figure, and the warm coloring that often indicates an enthusiastic temperament. In the daylight her hair had ruddy gleams in its warm brown, and her eyes a curious golden scintillation; but now it arched in a dusky mass above the pallid oval of her face, and her look was thoughtful.

She had fallen into the habit of meeting Jimmy when he was not on watch; and the mate felt flattered by her frank preference for his society, for he suspected that several of the passengers envied him, and that Miss Osborne was a lady of importance at home. It was understood that she was the only daughter of the American merchant who had taken the two best deck rooms, which perhaps accounted for the somewhat imperious way she had. Miss Osborne did what she liked, and made it seem right; and it was obvious that she liked to talk to Jimmy.

"It has been a delightful trip," she said.

"Yes," agreed Jimmy; "the finest I recollect. I wanted you to have a smooth-water voyage, and I am glad you enjoyed it."

"That was nice of you," she smiled. "I could hardly help enjoying it. She's a comfortable boat, and everybody has been pleasant. I suppose we'll see Vancouver Island late to-morrow?"

"It will be dark when we pick up the lights, but we'll be in

Victoria early the next morning. I think you leave us there?"

The girl was silent for a few moments, and in her expression there was a hint of regret that stirred Jimmy's blood. They had seen a good deal of each other during the voyage; and it was painful to the man to realize that in all probability their acquaintance must soon come to an end; but he ventured to think that his companion shared his feelings to some extent.

"In a way, I'm sorry we're so nearly home," Ruth said frankly; and added, smiling, "I'm beginning to find out that I love the sea."

Jimmy noted the explanation. He was a handsome young Englishman of unassuming disposition, and by no means a fortune-hunter, but he had been bantered by the other mates, and he knew that it was not an altogether unusual thing for a wealthy young lady to fall in love with a steamboat officer during a long, fine-weather run. Miss Osborne, however, had shown only a friendly liking for him; and, as he would see no more of her after the next day, he must not make a fool of himself at the last moment.

"The sea's not always like this," he replied. "It can be very cruel; and all ships aren't mailboats."

"I suppose not. You mean that life is harder in the others?"

Jimmy laughed. He had been a *Conway* boy, but soon after he finished his schooling on the famous old vessel the death of a guardian deprived him of the help and influence he had been brought up to expect. As a result of this, he had been apprenticed to a firm of parsimonious owners, and began his career in a

badly found and undermanned iron sailing ship. On board her he had borne hunger and wet and cold, and was often worked to the point of exhaustion. Pride kept him from deserting, and he had come out of the four years' struggle very hard and lean, to begin almost as stern a fight in steam cargo-tramps. Then, by a stroke of unexpected luck, he met an invalid merchant on one of the vessels, and the man recommended him to the directors of a mail company. After this, things became easier for Jimmy. He made progress, and, after what he had borne, he found his present circumstances almost luxuriously easy.

"Steam is improving matters," he said; "but there are still trades in which mates and seamen are called upon to stand all that flesh and blood can endure."

"And you have known something of this?"

"All I want to know."

"Do tell me about it," Ruth urged. "I am curious."

Jimmy laughed.

"Well, on my first trip round Cape Horn we left the Mersey undermanned and lost three of our crew before we were abreast of the Falkland Isles; two of them were hurled from the royal yard through the breaking of rotten gear. That made a big difference, and we had vile weather: gales dead ahead, snow, and bitter cold. The galley fire was washed out half the time, the deckhouse we lived in was flooded continually; for weeks we hadn't a rag of dry clothes, and very seldom a plateful of warm food. It was a merciful relief when the gale freshened, and she lay hove to, with

the icy seas bursting over her weather bow while we slept like logs in our soaking bunks; but that wasn't often. With each shift or fall of wind we crawled out on the yards, wet and frozen to the bone, to shake the hard canvas loose, and, as it generally happened, were sent aloft in an hour to furl it tight again. Each time it was a short-handed fight for life to master the thrashing sail. Our hands cracked open, and the cuts would not heal; stores were spoiled by the water that washed over everything, and some days we starved on a wet biscuit or two; but the demand for brutal effort never slackened. We were worn very thin when we squared away for the north with the first fair wind."

"Ah!" exclaimed Ruth. "It must have been a grim experience. Didn't it daunt you, and make you hate the sea?"

"I hated the ship, her skipper, and her owners, and most of all the smart managing clerk who had worked out to the last penny how cheaply she could be run; but that was a different thing. The sea has a spell that grips you, and never lets go again."

"Yes," said Ruth; "I have felt that, though I have seen it only in fine weather and from a liner's saloon deck." She mused for a few moments before she went on. "It will be a long time before I forget this voyage, steaming home over the sunlit water, with the wind behind us and the smoke going straight up, the decks warm, everything bright and glittering, and the glimmer of the moon and the sea-fire about the hull at night."

There was an opening here for an assurance that the voyage would live even longer in his memory; but Jimmy let it pass. He

feared that he might say too much if he gave the rein to sentiment.

"Were you not charmed with Japan?" he asked.

Ruth acquiesced in the change of topic, and her eyes sparkled enthusiastically.

"Oh, yes! It was the time of the cherry-blossom, and the country seemed a fairyland, quainter, stranger, and prettier than anything I had ever dreamed of!"

"Still, you must have seen many interesting places."

"No," she said with a trace of graveness. "I don't even know very much about my own country."

"All the Americans I have met seemed fond of traveling."

"The richer ones are," she answered frankly. "But until quite lately I think we were poor. It was during the Klondyke rush that my father first became prosperous, and for a number of years I never saw him. When my mother died I was sent to a small, old-fashioned, New England town, where some elderly relatives took care of me. They were good people, but very narrow, and all I heard and saw was commonplace and provincial. Then I went to a very strict and exclusive school and stayed there much longer than other girls." Ruth paused and smiled. "When at last I joined my father I felt as if I had suddenly awakened in a different world. I had the same feeling when I saw Japan."

"After all, you will be glad to get home."

"Yes," she said slowly; "but there's a regret. We have been very happy since we left; my father has been light-hearted, and I have had him to myself. At home he often has an anxious look, and is

always occupied. I have some friends and many acquaintances, but now and then I feel lonely."

Jimmy pondered, watching her with appreciative eyes. She was frank, but not with foolish simplicity; quite unspoiled by good fortune; and had nothing of the coquette about her. Indeed, he wondered whether she realized her attractiveness, or if the indifference she had shown to admiration were due to pride. He did not know much about young women, but he thought that she was proud and of strong character.

"You must come to see us if you are ever near Tacoma," Ruth said cordially.

Jimmy thanked her, and soon afterward left her, to keep his watch on the bridge. As they were still out of sight of land he had no companion except the quartermaster at the wheel in the glass-fronted pilot-house. There was no sail or smoke trail in all the wide expanse his high view point commanded. Rolling lazily to port and starboard, the big boat cleft a lonely sea that was steeped in dusky blue save where a broad belt of moonlight touched it with glittering silver. The voices and laughter gradually died away from the decks below, the glow of light was lessening, and the throb of the screws and the roar of flung-off water grew louder. A faint breeze had sprung up, and the smoke stretched out, undeviating, in a broad black smear over the starboard quarter; Jimmy noticed this while he paced to and fro, turning now and then to sweep a different arc of horizon. The last time he did so he stopped abruptly, for the smoke had moved forward. For a

moment he fancied that the wind had changed, but a glance at the white-streaked wake showed him that the vessel was swinging round. Then he sprang to the pilot-house, and, looking in through the open door, saw the quartermaster leaning slackly on the small brass wheel. His face showed livid in the moonlight, and his forehead was damp with sweat.

"What's this, Evans?" Jimmy cried.

Pulling himself together with an effort, the man glanced at the compass in alarm.

"Sorry, sir," he said thickly, spinning the wheel. "She's fallen off a bit. Something came over me; but I'm all right now."

"It may come over you once too often. This isn't the first time," Jimmy reminded him.

A shadow obscured the moonlight; and, turning abruptly, Jimmy saw the captain in the doorway. The skipper looked at the compass and studied the quartermaster's face; then he beckoned Jimmy outside. He had come up in soft slippers which made no noise, and Jimmy was keenly concerned to know how long he had been there. Jimmy had never got on well with his captain.

"Evans had his helm hard over; was she much off her course?" the captain asked with an ominous calm.

"About thirty degrees, sir."

"How long is it since you checked his steering?"

Jimmy told him.

"You consider that often enough?"

"I had my eye on the smoke, sir."

"The smoke? I suppose you know a light breeze is often variable?"

"Yes, sir," said Jimmy. "She couldn't swing off much without my noticing it."

"One wouldn't imagine so after what I discovered. But I gathered that Evans had been seized in this way during your watch before."

"Yes, sir," Jimmy repeated doggedly.

"Didn't it strike you that your duty was to report the matter? You knew that Evans has a weakness of the heart that may seize him unexpectedly at any time. If it did so when we were entering a crowded harbor or crossing another vessel's course, the consequences might prove disastrous. In not reporting it you took upon yourself a responsibility I can't allow my officers. Have you anything to say?" Jimmy knew he could make no answer that would excuse him. When, as is now usual, a fast vessel's course is laid off in degrees, accurate steering is important, and he had been actuated by somewhat injudicious pity. Evans was a steady man, with a family in England to provide for, and he had once by prompt action prevented the second mate's being injured by a heavy cargo-sling.

"Perhaps the best way of meeting the situation," the captain said curtly, "would be for you to voluntarily leave the ship at Vancouver. You can let me know what you decide when you come off watch."

Jimmy moodily returned to his duty. He thought his fault

was small, but there was no appeal. He would have no further opportunity for serving his present employers; and mailboat berths are not readily picked up. He kept his watch, and afterward went to sleep with a heavy heart.

The next evening he was idling disconsolately on the saloon deck when he saw Miss Osborne coming toward him. He was standing in the shadow of a boat and stayed there, feeling in no mood to force a cheerfulness he was far from feeling. Besides, he had now and then, when the girl was gracious to him, found it needful to practise some restraint, and now he felt unequal to the strain.

"I have been looking for you," she said. "As I suppose everybody will be busy to-morrow morning, I may not see you then. But you seem downcast!"

Jimmy shrank from telling her that he had been dismissed; and, after all, that was a comparatively small part of his trouble. The girl's tone was gentle, and there was in her eyes a sympathy that set his heart beating. He wished he were a rich man, or, indeed, almost anything except a steamboat officer who would soon be turned out of his ship.

"Well," he said, "for one thing, the end of a voyage is often a melancholy time. After spending some weeks with pleasant people, it's not nice to know they must all scatter and that you have to part from friends you have made and like."

A faint tinge of color crept into Ruth's face; but she smiled.

"It doesn't follow that they're forgotten," she replied; "and

there's always a possibility of their meeting again. We may see you at Tacoma; it isn't very far from Vancouver."

Jimmy was not a presumptuous man, but he saw that she had given him a lead and he bitterly regretted that he could not follow it. Though of hopeful temperament, stern experience had taught him sense, and he recognized that circumstances did not permit of his dallying with romance. There was nothing to be gained and something to be lost by cultivating the girl's acquaintance.

"I may have to sail on a different run before long," he said.

She gave him a glance of swift but careful scrutiny. The moonlight was clear, and he looked well in his white uniform, which showed his solid but finely molded figure and emphasized the clean brownness of his skin. He had light hair and steady, dark blue eyes, which had just then a hint of trouble.

"Well," she responded, "you know best; but, whether you come or not, my father and I are in your debt. You have done much to make this a very pleasant voyage." She gave him her hand, which he held a moment. "And, now, since you wish it, good-by!"

When she turned away, Jimmy leaned on the rail, watching her move quietly up the long deck. He was troubled with confused and futile regrets. Still, he had acted sensibly: it was unwise for a dismissed steamboat officer to harbor the alluring fancies he had sternly driven from his mind.

CHAPTER II – A NEW VENTURE

The sun had dipped behind a high black ridge crested with ragged pines, when Jimmy, dressed in brown overalls and a seaman's jersey, sat cooking supper on a stony beach of Vancouver Island. In front of him the landlocked sea ran back, glimmering with a steely luster, into the east; behind, where the inlet reached the hillfoot, stood the City of the Springs, which then consisted of a shut-down sawmill, a row of dilapidated wooden houses, and two second-rate hotels. Shadowed by climbing pinewoods, sheltered by the rocks, the site was perhaps as beautiful as any in the romantic province of British Columbia, though man's crude handiwork defaced its sylvan charm with rusty iron chimney-stacks, rows of blackened fir-stumps, and unsightly sawdust heaps. For all that, giant, primeval forest rolled close up to it, and in front lay the untainted sea. The air had in it a curious exhilarating quality; the balsamic scent of the firs mingled with the sharp odors of drying weed, tar, and cedar shavings that lay about the camp; and Jimmy, stooping over his frying-pan, sniffed the air with satisfaction. These were odors that belonged to the sea and the wilds; and he had lately renounced the comforts of civilization and embarked upon an adventure that appealed to him.

Near him, a man with a rugged, weatherbeaten face was engaged in fitting a plank into the bilge of a hauled-up sloop. She

was a small but shapely vessel of about forty feet in length, and had been built after a design adopted by a famous yacht club on the Atlantic coast. Jimmy could see that she was fast; but she had been put to base uses, and had suffered from neglect. As a matter of fact, he never learned her history, and had always some doubt as to whether the man from whom he and his companion bought her had an indisputable right to sell her.

Moran had been a Nova Scotian lobster catcher before he came to British Columbia to engage in the new halibut fishery, which had proved disappointing. Bethune, who lay upon the shingle in garments much the worse for wear, was a "remittance man," with a cheerful expression and a stock of unvarying good humor. It was some time since he had engaged in any exacting occupation, and now, after using the saw all day, he was resting from his unaccustomed exertions and bantering Moran.

Jimmy had met them both in a second-rate Vancouver boarding-house, to which he had resorted after failing to find a ship, and working on the wharf. He might have sailed before the mast, but he knew that when he next applied for a berth on board a liner he must account for his voyagings, and the fact that he had served as able seaman would not recommend him. When there was no cargo to be handled, he worked in the great Hastings mill; but he promptly discovered that he would never grow rich by this means; and the unrelaxing physical effort, demanded by foremen who knew how to drive hard, began to pall on him. He could have stood it had he come fresh from the sailing ships, but

he frankly admitted that it was trying to a mailboat officer. He had, however, some small savings, and when Bethune proposed a venture, in which Moran joined, Jimmy agreed.

"Hank," Bethune drawled, after watching Moran for several minutes, "you Maritime Provinces people are a hard and obstinate lot, but you won't get the plank in that way if you stick at it until to-morrow."

Moran looked up with the sweat dripping from his brow.

"I surely hate to be beat," he admitted. "I can spring her plumb up lengthways, but her edges won't bend into the frames."

"Exactly. This isn't a cod-fishing dory or a lobster punt. Take your plane and hollow the plank up the middle."

After doing as he was instructed, Moran had not much trouble in fitting it into place.

"Why didn't you tell me that before?" he asked.

"I've known you some time," Bethune answered with a grin. "There are people to whom you can't show the easiest way until they've tried the hardest one and found it won't do. It's not their fault; I hold you can't make a man responsible for his temperament – and it's a point on which I speak feelingly, because my temperament has been my bane."

"How d'you know these things, anyway? I mean about bending planks. You never allowed you'd been a boatbuilder."

"Do you expect a man to exhibit all his talents? Here's another tip. Don't nail that plank home now. Leave it shored up until morning, and you'll get it dead close then with a wedge or two.

And now, if Jimmy hasn't burned the grub, I think we'll have supper."

The meal might have been better, but Moran admitted that he had often eaten worse, and afterward they lay about on the shingle and lighted their pipes. Bethune, as usual, was the first to speak.

"The lumber, and the canvas Jimmy gets to work upon to-morrow, have emptied the treasury," he remarked. "If we incur any further liabilities, there's a strong probability of their not being met; but that gives the job an interest. Prudence is a cold-blooded quality, which no man of spirit has much use for. To help yourself may be good, but doing so consistently often makes it harder to help the other fellow."

"When you have finished moralizing we'll get to business," Jimmy rejoined. "Though I'm a partner in the scheme, I know very little yet about the wreck you're taking us up to look for. Try to be practical."

"Moran is practical enough for all three of us. I'll let him tell the tale; but I'll premise by saying that when he found the halibut fishing much less remunerative than it was cracked up to be, he sailed up the northwest coast with another fellow to trade with the Indians for furs. It was then he found the vessel."

"The reef," said Moran, "lies open to the south-west, and I got seven fathoms close alongside it at low water. A mile off, and near a low island, a bank runs out into the stream, and the after-half of the wreck lies on the edge of it, worked well down in

the sand. At low ebb you can see the end of one or two timbers sticking up out of the broken water."

"Is it always broken water?" Jimmy interrupted.

"Pretty near, I guess. Though there's a rise and fall on the island beach, the stream ran steady to the northeast at about two miles an hour, the whole week we lay sheltering in the bight, and the swell it brings in makes a curling sea on the edge of the shoals."

"Doesn't seem a nice place for a diving job. How did you get down to her?"

"Stripped and swam down. One day when it fell a flat calm for a few hours and Jake was busy patching the sail, I pulled the dory across. I wanted to find out what those timbers belonged to, and I knew I had to do it then, because the ice was coming in, and we must clear with the first fair wind. Well, I got a turn of the dory's painter round a timber, and went down twice, seeing bottom at about three fathoms with the water pretty clear. The sand was well up her bilge, but she was holding together, and when I swam round to the open end of her there didn't seem much in the way except the orlop beams. I could have walked right aft under decks if I'd had a diving dress; but I'd been in the water long enough, and a sea fog was creeping up."

Moran apparently thought little of his exploit; but Jimmy could appreciate the hardihood he had shown. The wreck lay far up on the northern coast, where the sea was chilled by currents from the Pole, and Moran had gone down to her when the ice

was working in. Jimmy could imagine the tiny dory lurching over the broken swell, and the half-frozen man painfully crawling on board her with many precautions to avoid a capsize, while the fog that might prevent his return to his vessel crept across the water. It was an adventure that required unusual strength and courage.

"Why didn't you take your partner out with you?" he asked.

"I'd seen Jake play some low-down tricks when we traded for the few furs we got, and I suspicioned he wasn't acting square with me. Anyhow, he allowed he didn't take much count of abandoned wrecks, and when he saw I'd brought nothing back, he never asked me about her."

"But if she was lost on the reef, how did she reach the bank a mile away?"

"I can't tell you that, but I guess she shook her engines out after she broke her back, and then slipped off into deeper water. The stream and surge of sea may have worked her along the bottom."

"It came out that she had only a little rock ballast in her," Bethune explained. "There may not have been enough to pin her down; but the important point is that the strong-room was aft, and Hank says that part is sound."

Jimmy nodded.

"Suppose you tell me all you know about the matter," he said.

It was characteristic of both of them that when they first discussed the venture the one had been content with sketchily outlining his plans, and the other had not demanded many details. The project appealed to their imagination, and once they had

decided upon it the necessary preparations had occupied all their attention.

Leaning back against a boulder, Bethune refilled and lighted his pipe. His clothes were far from new, and were freely stained with tar, but he spoke clean English, and his face suggested intelligence and refinement.

"Very well," he said. "When Hank mentioned his discovery I thought I saw an opportunity of the kind I'd been waiting for; and I took some trouble to find out what I could about the vessel. She was an old wooden propeller that came round Cape Horn a good many years ago. When she couldn't compete with modern steamboats, they strengthened her for a whaler, and she knocked about the Polar Sea; but she burned too much coal for that business, and wouldn't work well under sail. It looked as if there wasn't a trade in which she could make a living; but the Klondyke rush began, and somebody bought her cheap, and ran her up to Juneau, in Alaska, and afterward to Nome. There were better boats, but they were packed full, fore and aft, and the crowd going north was not fastidious: all it wanted was to get on the goldfields as soon as possible. Well, she made a number of trips all right, though I believe her owners had trouble when the pressure eased and the United States passenger-carrying regulations began to be properly applied. It was probably because no other boat was available that a small mining syndicate, which seems to have done pretty well, shipped a quantity of gold down from the north in her. Besides this, she brought out a number of

miners, who had been more or less successful. Something went wrong with the engines when she had been a day or two at sea; but they got sail on her, and she drove south before a fresh gale until she struck the reef on a hazy night. It broke her back, and the after hold was flooded a few minutes after she struck. The strong-room was under water, there was no time to cut down to it; but they got the boats away, and after the crew and passengers were picked up, a San Francisco salvage company thought it worth while to attempt the recovery of the gold. It was late in the season when their tug reached the spot, and the ice drove her off the reef; the sea was generally heavy, and after a week or two they threw up the contract. The underwriters paid all losses, and that was the end of the matter. It is only the drifting of the stern half into shoal water that gives us our chance. Now I think you know as much as I do."

Jimmy sat thoughtfully silent for a few minutes, realizing that it was a reckless venture he had undertaken. The wreck lay in unfrequented waters which were swept by angry currents that brought in the ice, vexed by sudden gales, and often wrapped in fog. The appliances the party had been able to procure were of the cheapest description, and there was a risk in making the long voyage in so small a vessel as the sloop. Still, Jimmy's fortunes needed a desperate remedy, and he was not much daunted by the difficulties he must face.

"Well," he said, "I suppose we have some chance; but I don't quite see what made you so keen on taking up the thing."

"It's explainable," Bethune drawled, picking up a pebble and lazily flipping it out over the water. "Victoria's a handsome city, and the views from it are good. For all that, when you can find no occupation, and have spent some years lounging about the waterfront and the bars of cheap hotels, the place, to put it mildly, loses its charm."

"You could leave it. As a matter of fact, I met you at Vancouver."

"Oh, yes. I could leave it for a maximum period of thirty days, because, with the exception of Sundays and one or two holidays, I was required to present myself at a lawyer's office on the first of every month. Then I was paid enough to keep me, with rigid economy, for the next four weeks; but on the first occasion I failed to come up to time the allowance was to stop for good. It's a system that has some advantages for the people who provide the funds in the old country, since it assures the payee's stopping where he is – but it has its drawbacks for the latter. How can a man get a job and hold it anywhere outside the town if he must return at a fixed hour every month? When I was in Vancouver it cost me a large share of the allowance to collect it."

"And now, by going north, you throw it up?"

"Exactly," said Bethune. "It should have been done before, but, as I had never been taught to work or go without my dinner, the course I am at last taking needed some moral courage. It's sink or swim now."

Jimmy made a sign of agreement. All the money he possessed

had been sunk in the undertaking; and now, in order to get it back, he must succeed where a well-equipped salvage expedition had failed. Though the wreck had since changed her position, the prospects were not very encouraging.

"Well," he said, "we must do the best we can; but I wish our funds had run to a better supply of stores."

"Hank can fish," grinned Bethune. "In fact, he'll have to whenever there's anything to catch. Fortunately, fish is wholesome and sustaining. However, as this job must be finished to-morrow, we had better get to sleep early."

Jimmy sat smoking for a few minutes after the others went on board the sloop. It was getting dark, but a band of pure green light still glimmered along the crest of the black ridge to the west. The air was cold and very still, and gray wood smoke hung in gauzy wreaths above the roofs of the town. The tall pines were growing blurred, but their keen, sweet fragrance hung about the beach, and the smooth swell lapped with a drowsy murmur upon the shingle.

Jimmy loved the sea; and now he was to go afloat again, in his own vessel, bound by no restrictions except the necessity for making the voyage pay. This would not be easy; but there was a romance about the undertaking that gave it a zest.

CHAPTER III – THE FURY OF THE SEA

In the evening of the day on which they saw the last of Vancouver Island, Jimmy sat in the*Cetacea's* cockpit with a chart of the North Pacific spread out before him on the cabin hatch. It showed the tortuous straits, thickly sprinkled with islands of all sizes, through which they had somehow threaded their way during the last week, in spite of baffling head winds and racing tides, and though Jimmy was a navigator he felt some surprise at their having accomplished the feat without touching bottom. Now he had their course to the north plotted out along the deeply fretted coast of British Columbia, and rolling up the chart he rose to look about.

It was nine o'clock, but the light was clear, and a long, slate-green swell slightly crisped with ripples rolled up out of the south; to the northwest a broad stripe of angry saffron, against which the sea-tops cut, glowed along the horizon; but the east was dim, and steeped in a hard, cold blue. Shadowy mountains were faintly visible high up against the sky; and, below, a few rocky islets rose, blurred by blue haze, out of the heaving sea.

The sloop rolled lazily, her boom groaning and the tall, white mainsail alternately swelling out and emptying with a harsh slapping of canvas and a clatter of shaken blocks. Above it the

topsail raked in a wide arc across the sky. Silky lines of water ran back from the stern, there was a soft gurgle at the bows; Jimmy computed that she was slipping along at about three miles an hour.

"What do you think of the weather?" Bethune asked, as he lounged at the steering wheel.

"It doesn't look promising," Jimmy answered. "If time wasn't an object, I'd like the topsail down. We'll have wind before morning."

"That's my opinion; but time is an object. When the cost of every day out is an item to be considered, we must drive her. Have you reckoned up what we're paying every week to the ship-chandler fellow who found us the cables and diving gear?"

"I haven't; his terms were daunting enough as a whole without analyzing them. Have you?"

Bethune chuckled.

"I have the cost of everything down in my notebook; although I will confess that I was mildly surprised at myself for taking the trouble. If I'd occasionally made a few simple calculations at home and acted on them, the chances are that I shouldn't be here now." Bethune made a gesture of disgust. "Halibut boiled and halibut fried begins to pall on one; but this is far better than our quarters in Vancouver, and they were a big improvement on those I had in Victoria. I daresay it was natural I should stick to the few monthly dollars as long as possible, but it will be some time before I forget that hotel. I never quite got used to the two

wet public towels beside the row of sloppy wash-basins, and the gramophone going full blast in the dirty dining-room; and the long evening to be dawdled through in the lounge was worst of all. You have, perhaps, seen the hard-faced toughs lolling back with their feet on the radiator pipes before the windows, the heaps of dead flies that are seldom swept up, the dreary, comfortless squalor. Imagine three or four hours of it every night, with only a last-week's *Colonist* to while away the time!"

"I should imagine things would be better in a railroad or logging camp."

"Very much so, though they're not hotbeds of luxury. The trouble was that I couldn't come down to Victoria and hold my job. Once or twice when the pay days approximated, I ran it pretty fine; and I've a vivid memory of walking seventy miles in two days over a newly made wagon trail. The softer parts had been graded with ragged stones from the hillside, the drier bits were rutted soil – it needed a surgical operation to get my stockings off."

"It might have paid you better to forfeit your allowance," Jimmy suggested.

"That's true," said Bethune. "I can see it now, but I had a daunting experience of clearing land and laying railroad track. Dragging forty-foot rails about through melting snow, with the fumes of giant-powder hanging among the rocks and nauseating you, is exhausting work, and handspiking giant logs up skids in rain that never stops is worse. The logs have a way of slipping

back and smashing the tenderfoot's ribs. I suppose this made me a coward; and, in a sense, the allowance was less of a favor than a right. The money that provided it has been a long time in the family; I am the oldest son; and while I can't claim to have been a model, I had no serious vices and had committed no crime. If my relatives chose to banish me, there seemed no reason why they shouldn't pay for the privilege."

Jimmy agreed that something might be said for his comrade's point of view.

"Now I stand on my own feet," Bethune went on, with a carefree laugh; "and while it's hard to predict the end of this adventure, the present state of things is good enough for me. Is anything better than being afloat in a staunch craft that's entirely at your command?"

Jimmy acquiesced heartily as he glanced about. Sitting to windward, he could see the gently rounded deck run forward to the curve of the lifted bows, and, above them, the tall, hollowed triangle of the jib. The arched cabin-top led forward in flowing lines, and though there were patches on plank and canvas, all his eye rested on was of harmonious outline. The*Cetacea* was small and low in the water, but she was fast and safe, and Jimmy had already come to feel a certain love for her. Their success depended upon her seaworthiness, and he thought she would not fail them.

"I like the boat; but I've been mending gear all day, and it's my turn below," he said.

The narrow cabin that ran from the cockpit bulkhead to the stem was cumbered with dismantled diving pumps and gear, but there was a locker on each side on which one could sleep. It was, moreover, permeated with the smell of stale tobacco smoke, tarred hemp, and fish, but Jimmy had put up with worse odors in the Mercantile Marine. Lying down, fully dressed, on a locker, he saw Moran's shadowy form, wrapped in old oilskins, on the opposite locker, rise above his level and sink as the *Cetacea* rocked them with a rhythmic swing. The water lapped noisily against the planks, and now and then there was a groaning of timber and a sharp clatter of blocks; but Jimmy soon grew drowsy and noticed nothing.

He was awakened rudely by a heavy blow, and found he had fallen off the locker and struck one of the pump castings. Half dazed and badly shaken, as he was, it was a few moments before he got upon his knees – one could not stand upright under the low cabin-top. It was very dark, Jimmy could not see the hatch, and the *Cetacea* appeared to have fallen over on her beam-ends. A confused uproar was going on above: the thud of heavy water striking the deck, a furious thrashing of loose canvas, and the savage scream of wind. Bethune's voice came faintly through the din, and he seemed to be calling for help.

Realizing that it was time for action, Jimmy pulled himself together and with difficulty made his way to the cockpit, where he found it hard to see anything for the first minute. The spray that drove across the boat beat into his face and blinded him;

but he made out that she was pressed down with most of her lee deck in the water, while white cascades that swept its uplifted windward side poured into the cockpit. The tall mainsail slanted up into thick darkness, but it was no longer thrashing, and Jimmy was given an impression of furious speed by the way the half visible seas raced past.

"Shake her! Let her come up!" he shouted to the dark figure bent over the wheel.

He understood Bethune to say that this would involve the loss of the mast unless the others were ready to shorten canvas quickly.

Jimmy scrambled forward through the water and loosed the peak-halyard. The head of the sail swung down and blew out to leeward, banging threateningly, and he saw that the half-lowered topsail hung beneath it. This promised to complicate matters; but Moran was already endeavoring to change the jib for a smaller one, and Jimmy sprang to his assistance. Though the sail was not linked to a masthead stay, it would not run in; and when Bethune luffed the boat into the wind, the loose canvas swept across the bows, swelling like a balloon and emptying with a shock that threatened to snap the straining mast. It was obvious to the men who knelt in the water dragging frantically at a rope that something drastic must be done; but both were drenched and half blinded and had been suddenly roused from sleep. The boat was large enough to make her gear heavy to handle, and yet not so large as to obviate the need for urgent haste when struck with

all her canvas set by a savage squall. Though they recognized this, Jimmy and his comrade paused a few moments to gather breath. The jib, however, must be hauled down; and with a hoarse shout to Moran, Jimmy lowered himself from the bowsprit until he felt the wire bobstay under his feet.

The *Cetacea* plunged into the seas, burying him to the waist, but he made his way out-board with the canvas buffeting his head until he seized an iron ring. It cost him a determined effort to wrench it loose so it could run in, and when, at last, the sail swept behind him he felt the blood warm on his lacerated hand. Then he crawled on board, and when he and Moran had set a smaller jib it was high time to reef the mainsail; but they spent a few moments in gathering strength for the task.

She was down on her beam-ends, with the sea breaking over her. Jimmy could not imagine what Bethune was doing at the wheel. The foam that swirled past close under the boom on her depressed side lapped to the cabin top; it looked as if she were rolling over. They felt helpless and shaken, impotent to master the canvas that was drowning her. But the fight must be made; and, rousing themselves for the effort, they groped for the halyards. The head of the sail sank lower; gasping, and straining every muscle, they hauled its foot down, and then Jimmy, leaning out, buried to the knees in rushing foam, with his breast on the boom, knotted the reef-points in. It was done at last. Rising more upright, she shook off some of the water.

Moran turned to Bethune, who was leaning as if exhausted on

his helm, and demanded why he had not luffed the craft, which would have eased their work. Then the dripping man showed them that the boat they carried on deck had been washed against the wheel so that he could not pull the spokes round. They moved her, and when Bethune regained control of the sloop, he told them what had happened, in disjointed gasps.

"Wind freshened – but I – held her at it. Then there was a – burst of rain and I – let the topsail go – thinking the breeze would lighten again. Instead of that – it whipped round ahead – screaming – and I called for you."

Conversation was difficult amid the roar of the sea, with the spray lashing them and their words blowing away, but Jimmy made himself heard.

"Where's the compass?"

"In the cockpit, or overboard – the dory broke it off."

Moran felt in the water that washed about their feet and, picking something up, crept into the cabin, where a pale glow broke out. It disappeared in a minute or two and he came back.

"Binnacle lamp's busted," he reported. "She's pointing about east."

"Inshore," said Jimmy. "When you're ready, we'll have her round."

She would not come. Overpowered by wind and sea, she hung up for a few moments, and then fell off on her previous course. They tried it twice, not daring to wear her round the opposite way; and afterward they sat in the slight shelter of the coaming,

conscious that there was nothing more they could do.

"She may keep off the beach until daylight," Jimmy observed hopefully; "then we'll see where we are."

The glance he cast forward did not show him much. The long swell had rapidly changed into tumbling combers that rolled down upon the laboring sloop out of the dark. As she lurched over them, the small patch of storm-jib swept up, showing the sharply slanted strip of mainsail; but the rest of her was hidden by spray and rushing foam. She was sailing very fast, close-hauled, and was rushing toward the beach. Jimmy could feel her tremble as she pitched into the seas.

Morning seemed a very long time in coming; but at last the darkness grew less thick. The foam got whiter and the gray bulk of the rollers more solid and black, as they leaped, huge and threatening, out of the obscurity. Then the sky began to whiten in the east, and the weary men anxiously turned their eyes shoreward as they shivered in the biting cold of dawn. After a time, during which the horizon steadily receded, a gray and misty blur appeared on the starboard hand, and, now that they could see the combers, they got the *Cetacea* round. As she headed offshore a red flush spread across the sky, and rocks and pines grew into shape to the east. Then a break in the coastline where they could see shining water instead of foam indicated an island; and, getting her round again, they stood in cautiously, because she could make nothing to windward through the steep, white seas outshore. Reeling before them, with lee deck in the water

as she bore away, she opened up the sound, and presently her crew watched the rollers crumble on a boulder-sprinkled point. Moving shoreward majestically in ordered ranks, the waves hove themselves up when they met the shoal and dissolved into frothy cataracts. It was an impressive spectacle, and the sloop looked by contrast extremely small. Still, she drove on, and Jimmy, standing at the wheel, gazed steadily ahead.

"We'll have to chance finding water, because the lead's no guide," he said. "If there's anything in the sound, it will be a steep-to rock."

She lurched in past the point, rolling, spray-swept, with two rags of drenched canvas set. As Jimmy luffed her into the lee of the island there was a sudden change. The water, smoothing to a measured heave, glittered with tiny ripples; the slanted mast rose upright; and the sloop forged on toward a shelving beach, through variable flaws. Then, as she slowed and the canvas flapped, the anchor was flung over, and the rattle of running chain sent a cloud of birds circling above the rocks.

Half an hour later the men were busy cooking breakfast, and soon afterward they were fast asleep; but the night's breeze had made a change in their relations. Their mettle had been rudely tested and had not failed. Henceforward it was not to be mere mutual interest that held them together, but a stronger though more elusive bond. They were comrades by virtue of a mutual respect and trust.

CHAPTER IV – THE ISLAND

On a gray afternoon, with a fog hovering over the leaden water, they sighted the island where the wreck lay. What wind there was blew astern, but it had scarcely strength enough to wrinkle the long heave that followed the sloop; the tide, Jimmy computed, was at half flood. This was borne out by the way a blur on their port hand grew into a tongue of reef on which the sea broke in snowy turmoil, and by the quickness with which the long, gray ridge behind it emerged from the fog. Sweeping it with the glasses, Jimmy could distinguish a few dark patches that looked like scrub-pines or willows. Then, as she opened up the coastline, he noticed the strip of sloppy beach sprinkled with weedy boulders, and the bare slopes of sand and stones beyond. The spot was unlike the islands at which they had called on their way up; for they were thickly covered with ragged firs and an undergrowth of brush and wild-fruit vines; this had a desolate, forbidding look, as if only the hardiest vegetation could withstand the chill and savage winds that swept it.

The men were all somewhat worn by the voyage, which had been long and difficult. Their clothes were stiff with salt from many soakings, and two of them suffered from raw sores on wrists and elbows caused by the rasp of the hard garments. Their food had been neither plentiful nor varied, and all had grown to loathe the sight of fish.

"I've seen more cheerful places," Bethune declared, when Jimmy had handed him the glasses. "I suppose we bring up under its eastern end?"

Moran nodded.

"Pretty good shelter in the bight in about two fathoms. Watch out to starboard and the reef will show you where she is."

Jimmy turned his eyes in that direction, but saw nothing for a minute. Then the swell, which ran after them in long undulations nearly as smooth as oil, suddenly boiled in a white upheaval, and a cloud of fine spray was thrown up as by a geyser.

"One can understand the old steamboat's breaking her back," he said. "Where's she lying?"

"Not far ahead; but by the height of the water on the beach, there'll be nothing to be seen of her for the next nine hours."

"And it will be dark then!" Bethune said gloomily. Jimmy shared his comrade's disappointment. After first sighting land they had felt keen suspense. There was a possibility that the wreck had broken up or sunk into the sand since Moran had visited her; and, after facing many hardships and risks to reach her, they must go back bankrupt if she had disappeared. The important question could not be answered until the next day.

"Couldn't we bring up here and look for her in the dory when the tide falls?" Jimmy suggested.

"It sure wouldn't be wise. When you get your anchor down in the bight you're pretty safe; but two cables wouldn't hold her outside when the sea gets up – and I don't know a place where

it blows oftener."

"Then you had better take her in. I can't say that we've had much luck this trip; and we've been a fortnight longer on the way than I calculated. It will be something to feel the beach beneath our feet."

They ran into a basin with gray rocks and stones on its landward side, and a shoal on which the surf broke to seaward; and, soon after dropping anchor, they rowed ashore.

The island appeared to be two miles long, and nothing grew on it except a few patches of scrub in the hollows of its central ridge; but it had, as Moran pointed out, two springs of good water. Birds screamed above the surf and waded along the sand, and a seal lolled upon a stony beach; but these were the only signs of life, and the raw air rang with the dreary sound of the sea.

When dusk crept in they went back on board, and with the lamp lighted the narrow cabin looked very cozy after the desolate land; but conversation languished, for the men were anxious and somewhat depressed. Daylight would show them whether or not their work had been thrown away. With so much at stake it was hard to wait.

"As soon as we've found if she's still on the bank," Moran said, as they were arranging their blankets on the lockers, "we'll get out the net and all the lines we brought; then I guess we had better keep the diving pump in a hole on the beach."

"I suppose we must fish and save our stores," Jimmy agreed; "though the worst beef they ever packed in Chicago would be a

luxurious change. But what's your reason for putting the pump ashore?"

Moran was not a humorous man, but he smiled.

"Well," he said, "we certainly haven't a lien on the wreck, and if it was known where she's now lying, we'd soon have a steamboat up from Portland or Vancouver with proper salvage truck. This island's off the track to the Alaska ports; but, so far's my experience goes, it's when you least want folks around that they turn up."

"He's right," Bethune declared. "There's no reason why we should make our object plain to anybody who may come along. I don't know much about the salvage laws, but my opinion is that the underwriters would treat us fairly if we brought back the gold; and if we couldn't come to terms with them, the courts would make us an award. Still, there's need for caution; we have nobody's authority, and might be asked why we didn't report the find instead of going off to get what we could on the quiet."

They went to sleep soon after this, and awakening in a few hours, found dawn breaking; for when the lonely waters are free from ice there is very little night in the North. A thin fog hid the land, leaving visible only a strip of wet beach, and there was still no wind, which Moran seemed to consider somewhat remarkable. As the tide was falling, Jimmy suggested that they should launch the dory and row off at once to look for the wreck; but Moran objected.

"It's a long pull, and we don't want to lose time," he said.

"S'pose we find her? We couldn't work the pump from the boat, and we'd have to come back for the sloop. You don't often strike it calm here, and we have to get ahead while we can."

The others agreed; and after a hurried breakfast they hove the anchor and made a start, Moran sculling the *Cetacea*, Jimmy and Bethune towing her in the dory. They found the towing hard work, for stream and swell set against them and the light boat was jerked backward by the tightening line as she lurched over the steep undulations. Then, in spite of their care, the line would range forward along her side as she sheered, and there was danger of its drawing her under. Though the air was raw, they were bathed in perspiration before they had made half a mile; and Bethune paused a moment to cool his blistering hands in the water.

"This kind of thing is rather strenuous when you're not used to it," he grumbled.

Jimmy was glad of a moment's rest; but immediately there came a cry from Moran. "Watch out! Where you going to?"

Looking round, they saw the *Cetacea's* bowsprit close above their heads as she lurched toward them on the back of a smooth sea. Pulling hard, with the hampering rope across her, they got the dory round, and afterward rowed steadily, while their breath came short and the sweat dripped from them. It was exhausting work; but Bethune pointed out the fact that they had not embarked on a pleasure excursion.

At last Moran dropped anchor; and, boarding the sloop, the

men spent an hour of keen suspense watching the sea. The island had faded to a faint, dark blur, and all round the rest of the circle an unbroken wall of mist rested on the smoothly lifting swell. None of them had anything to say; they smoked in anxious silence, their eyes fixed on the glassy water which gave no sign of hiding anything below.

Bethune impatiently jumped up.

"This is too tedious for me!" he exclaimed. "Can't we sweep for the wreck from the dory with the bight of a line?"

"You want to keep fresh," Moran warned him. "If she's there, she'll show up before long."

They waited, Jimmy quietly glancing at his watch now and then; and at last Moran stretched out a pointing hand.

"What's that, to starboard?" he asked.

For a few moments, during which the tension set their nerves on edge, the others saw nothing; and then a faint ripple broke the glassy surface of the swell. It smoothed out and the long heave swung undisturbed across the spot for a time; but the ripple appeared again, with a dark streak in the midst of it.

"Weed!" cried Bethune. "It must grow on something!"

"I guess so," said Moran. "It's fast to a ship's timber."

Five minutes later the head of the timber was visible, and in keen but silent excitement they took out a line to it and hove the sloop close up. The diving pumps were already rigged, and when they had lowered and lashed a ladder, Moran coolly put on the heavy canvas dress. He said that, as the show was his, he would

go down first. It was with grave misgivings that his companions screwed on the copper helmet and hung the lead weights about him, for neither of them knew anything about the work except what they had learned from a pamphlet issued by a maker of diving apparatus. This they had diligently studied and argued over on the voyage up, but there was the unpleasant possibility that it might not contain all the information needful, and a small oversight might have disastrous consequences.

When the copper helmet sank below the surface and a train of bubbles rushed up, Jimmy felt his heart beat and his hand grow damp with perspiration. He held the signal line and knew the code, as well as the number of strokes to the minute that should give air enough; but he had not much confidence in the pumps. Though he had had to pay a heavy deposit on them, and their hire was costly, they were far from new. The bubbles moved, however, drawing nearer the weed-crusted wood.

Suddenly the line jerked, and Bethune looked at Jimmy sharply.

"More air!" he cried. "Give her a few more revolutions – he's all right so far."

It was a relief to both when the bubbles moved back toward the ladder, and when the diver crawled on board they eagerly unscrewed the helmet. Moran gasped once or twice and wiped his face before he turned to them.

"It's not too bad after the first minute or two," he said, and this was the only allusion he made to his sensations. "Now, so far as

I can make out, there's no getting into her from the deck. Poop's badly smashed, and you'd certainly foul the pipe or line among the broken beams; but it looks pretty clear in the hold. Guess we'll have to break through the after bulkhead; but it's sanded up and there's a pile of stuff to move. You're sure about the strong-room, Bethune?"

"I took some trouble to find out, and was told it was under the poop cabin. I couldn't get a plan of her."

"We'll try the bulkhead." Moran turned to Jimmy. "If you're going next, take the shovel and see if you can shift some of the sand."

Jimmy was not a timid man, but he felt far from happy as his comrades encased him in the dress and helmet. He found them an intolerable weight as he moved toward the ladder and went down it, clinging tightly to the rungs, and then, as a green mist crept across the glasses, he was conscious of an unnerving fear. Struggling with it, he descended, and was next troubled by a pain in his head and an unpleasant feeling of pressure. Something throbbed in his ears, his breathing did not seem normal, and he stopped, irresolute, at the foot of the ladder. He could see a short distance, but it was like looking through dirty, greenish glass, and the wavering light had puzzling reflections in it. He watched the air globules rush to the surface and the shadow of the sloop's bottom move to and fro; and then he fixed his eyes on a badly defined dark object which he supposed was the wreck.

As he reluctantly let go the ladder he was surprised by another

change. Instead of carrying a crushing weight, he felt absurdly light and, in spite of his weighted boots, it was difficult to keep his balance. His feet did not fall where he intended, and when he moved the shovel he carried, the motion of his arm was not perfectly controllable. It seemed to him that if the stream were strong, he must hopelessly float away; but he resolutely pulled himself together. He had not spent all his money and made a daring voyage to be daunted by a few unusual sensations. It was his business to break into the wreck; and he made his way cautiously toward her. Stopping at the place where her after-half had broken off, he saw in front of him a dark cavern, edged with ragged planking and parted timbers and garlanded with long streamers of weed. They uncoiled and wavered as the sea washed in and out, and Jimmy felt a strong reluctance to enter. The darkness might hide strange and dangerous creatures; for a few moments he allowed his imagination to run riot like that of a frightened child.

This, however, must be stopped. Jimmy remembered that he was supplied with an electric lamp. He fumbled clumsily with the switch, and, as a wavering beam of light ran through the water, he cautiously entered the hold. Sand had filled up the hollows among the stone ballast, and there was only a broken orlop beam in his way. He began to feel easier, reflecting that he was, after all, only a short distance beneath the surface; though he would have preferred more experienced assistants at the pumps. Making his way aft beside the shaft tunnel, he presently reached a bank of

sand which ran up to the splintered deck. The bulkhead shutting off the lazaret was obviously behind it, and Jimmy began to use the shovel.

It proved difficult work. A vigorous movement upset his unstable equilibrium, and he wondered whether the weight he carried and the pressure applied were adapted to the depth. This could be ascertained only by experiment; and Jimmy feared to make it. Gripping himself, however, he removed a few shovelfuls of sand; and then the pain in his head got worse, and, driving in the shovel deeper than before, he fell forward with the effort. Instead of coming to the ground, he made some ridiculous gyrations before he recovered his footing; and then the signal line, which he felt at to reassure himself, seemed tauter than it should be.

Grabbing up the shovel, Jimmy commenced his retreat. The line might be foul of something, and if so there was a danger of the air pipe's entanglement. It was disconcerting to contemplate the result of that. When he left the hull he felt a strong inclination to kick off his leaded shoes and try to swim to the surface instead of slowly mounting the ladder; but he conquered it and climbed up.

When at last the glasses were unscrewed and the air flowed in on his face, Jimmy was conscious of intense relief. For a minute he sat limply on the cabin top.

"I dare say we'll get accustomed to the thing," he said slowly to Bethune; "but you'll find out that one mustn't expect to do

much at first."

Bethune went down, and when he came up Moran asked him dryly:

"How much of that sand did you shift?"

"Three good bucketfuls, which I imagine is more than Jimmy did," Bethune answered with a grin. Then his face grew serious. "As there seems to be forty or fifty tons of it, we'll have to do better."

"That," agreed Moran, "is a sure thing."

They were silent after this, and Jimmy lighted his pipe. Though the day was chilly, it was pleasant to lie on the open deck and breathe air at normal pressure. The stream was not strong, the sea was as smooth as he thought it likely to be, and all the conditions were favorable to the work; but he shrank from going down again, and he imagined that his companions shared his unwillingness. Though he censured himself for feeling so, he was glad when the mist, which had grown thinner, suddenly streamed away and revealed a dark line advancing toward them across the heaving water.

"A breeze!" he exclaimed. "Perhaps we'd better get back while we can. There won't be much water up the channel at lowest ebb."

Bethune nodded agreement as a puff of cold air struck his face, and while they shortened in the cable small white ripples splashed against the bows. These grew larger and angrier as they ran the mainsail up; and, getting the anchor, they bore away for the bight with the swell crisping and frothing astern. Before they

ran in behind the sheltering sands it was blowing hard, and they spent the rest of the day lounging on the cabin lockers, while the sloop strained at her cable and the halyards beat upon the mast.

CHAPTER V – AN INTERRUPTION

For three days a bitter gale raged about the island, blowing clouds of sand and fine shingle along the beach and piling the big Pacific combers upon the shoals. The air was filled with the saltness of the spray, and even below deck the men's ears rang with the clamor of the sea. Then the wind fell, and when the swell went down they set to work again and found their task grow less troublesome. They learned the pressure best suited to the very moderate depth, their lungs got accustomed to the extra labor, and none of them now hesitated about entering the gloomy hold. Though they were interrupted now and then by the rising sea, they steadily removed the sand. Their greatest difficulty was the shortness of the time one could remain below. There was no sign of the bulkhead yet, and a gale from the eastward might wash back the sediment they had laboriously dug out. If this happened, they must try to break an opening through the side of the hull; and none of them was anxious to do that, because the timbers of a wooden ship are closely spaced and thick.

For a while nothing but the weather disturbed them; and then, one calm day when trails of mist moved slowly across the water, Jimmy saw a streak of smoke on a patch of clear horizon.

"Somebody farther to the east than he ought to be," he said, leaning on the pump-crank; and then he fixed his eyes on the spot where the bubbles broke the surface. Though he had grown

used to the work, the bubbles had still a curious fascination. It was difficult to turn his glance from them as they traced a milky line across the green water or stopped and widened into a frothy patch. So long as they did either, all was well with the man below.

An hour later, when the mist closed in again, Jimmy lay smoking on the deck. He had gone down and stayed longer than usual, and he felt tired and somewhat moody. Of late he had been troubled by a bad headache, which he supposed was the result of diving, and during the last few days he had found the sand unusually hard. The lower layers had been consolidated into a cement-like mass by the action of wave and tide. Moreover, the work was arduous even when they were not down at the wreck. It was no light task to tow the sloop out against the swell in the calms; and when the sea rose suddenly, as it often did, they were forced, if the tide was low, to thrash her out for an offing and face the gale until there was water enough to take them up the channel. Indeed, at times they dare not attempt the entrance, and lay to under storm canvas to wait for better weather. Then they sat at the wheel in turn while the hard-pressed craft labored among the frothing combers, and afterward lay, wedged into place with wet sails and gear, on the cabin lockers, while the erratic motion rendered sleep or any occupation impossible. The *Cetacea* was small enough to drift to leeward fast, and it sometimes took them hours to drive her back to the island against the still heavy sea when the wind began to lighten. It was a wearing life, and Jimmy felt his nerves getting raw.

Bethune had gone below and Jimmy was turning the crank of the pump when a dull, throbbing sound came out of the mist. Moran looked up sharply.

"That blame steamboat is coming here!" he cried, diving into the cabin to get their glasses.

The measured thud of engines was plainly distinguishable with the roar of water flung off the bows. Jimmy supposed the clank of the pump had prevented their hearing it before.

"She's pretty close! Keep turning, but bring him up; you have the line!" Moran exclaimed.

Bethune answered the signal; but as the bubbles drew near the sloop, the steamer appeared in an opening in the mist. Her white hull and small, cream funnel proclaimed her an auxiliary yacht.

"There's wind enough to move us, and we have to light out of this as quick as we can," Moran said, signaling again to Bethune.

When the copper helmet came into sight, they dragged Bethune on deck and then set to work to shorten cable. The yacht was now plainly visible about a mile off, and seemed to be moving slowly, which suggested that soundings were being taken preparatory to anchoring; but the sloop would not readily be seen against the land. There was, however, a quantity of heavy chain to get in before they hoisted sail, and Jimmy in haste slipped the breast rope that held them to the wreck. For convenience in picking it up, they had attached its outer end to a big keg buoy.

Getting under way, they headed for the bight, and presently saw a white gig following them.

"They won't stay long," said Bethune. "Want fresh water, or, perhaps, a walk ashore; but it's a pity we have no time to land and hide the pumps. The best thing we can do is to meet the party at the water's edge. It's lucky the big net is lying there."

Pulling ashore in the dory, they waited for the yacht's boat, which carried two uniformed seamen and a young man smartly dressed in blue serge with bronze buttons, and pipeclayed shoes. He had a good-humored look, and greeted them affably, glancing at the net.

"Glad to find somebody here; you're fishing, I suppose?" he said. "You'll know where there's water, and ours is getting short. The engineer has had some trouble with salting boilers and won't give us any. I'll take some fish, if you can spare it."

Bethune laughed.

"You can have all we've got," he said. "Any we keep we'll have to eat, and we're getting pretty tired of the diet. There's a good spring behind the ridge; we'll show you where it is."

The man beckoned the seamen, who shouldered two brass-hooped breakers, and the party set off up the beach. When they reached the spring the seamen returned with the breakers to empty them into the boat, using her as a tank to carry the water off, and Jimmy took the yachtsman into a hut they had roughly built of stones between two big rocks. Here they sometimes lived when wind or fog stopped their work. He gave them some cigars and told them that the yacht was returning from a trip to the North, where they had explored several of the glaciers. He was

a bit of a naturalist and interested in birds, and that was why he had come ashore; but the desolate appearance of the island had deterred his friends, who were playing cards.

"Have you noticed any of the rarer sea-birds here?" he asked.

"There are a number of nests some distance off," Bethune answered. "I don't know what kind they are, but after making two or three attempts to eat them, I can't recommend the eggs."

The yachtsman laughed.

"You may have made omelettes of specimens collectors would give a good deal for. Anyway, I'd be glad if you would show me the place. As we must take off as much water as she'll carry, the boys will be busy for some time."

"I'll go with you in a minute," Bethune said, giving Jimmy a warning look. "Have you the ball of fine seizing?" he asked his comrade. "There are some hooks to be whipped on to the new line."

Jimmy, understanding that Bethune wanted a word with him in private, went out, and Bethune followed.

"Well?" Jimmy queried.

"What do you think of the weather?"

Jimmy looked round carefully. The sky was clear overhead except for thin, streaky clouds, and the mist was moving, sliding in filmy trails along the shore.

"It won't be so thick presently, and we may have a breeze."

"That's my opinion. Has it struck you that it will be after half-ebb when our yachting friend leaves? Besides, it would look

inhospitable and perhaps suspicious if we didn't take him off to supper."

"Ah!" exclaimed Jimmy. "The wreck will be showing, the pumps are on board, and it's unfortunate we forgot to move our buoy."

"Sure! There's no reason for supposing the man's a fool, and I've no doubt he'll draw conclusions if he sees the diving truck and the buoy. It's certain that somebody on board the steamer has heard about the wreck; and any mention of our doings in the southern ports would lead to the sending up of a proper salvage gang. We might finish before they arrived; but I'm doubtful."

"You're right," said Jimmy. "What's to be done?"

"The best plan would be for you and Hank to get the pumps ashore while there's fog enough to hide you. Then you can slip the buoy and leave it among the boulders abreast of the wreck. I'll keep our friend away from the water; but the high ground where the nests are looks down on the beach and you'll have the steamer not far outshore of you."

Turning at a footstep, Jimmy saw the stranger leave the hut.

"My partner will take you to the nests," he said. "I have something to do on board."

Beckoning Moran, Jimmy turned away, and as the two went down to the beach he explained his object to the fisherman. Moran agreed that if news of their doings leaked out, they might as well give up the search. They must, however, be careful, because there was a chance of their being seen by anybody with

good glasses on board the yacht, which had moved close in to shorten the journey for the boat. Now and then they could see her white hull plainly, but it grew dim and faded into the mist again.

Boarding the sloop, they dismantled the pumps, and then found that with these, the lead weights, and the diving helmet, the small dory had a heavy load. The tide was, however, falling, and for some distance it carried them down a smooth channel between banks of uncovered sand. They had no trouble here, but when they reached open water they found a confused swell running against them. The fog had again thickened and they could see only the gray slopes of water that moved out of the haze. It was hard work rowing, and care was needed when an undulation curled and broke into a ridge of foam. If that happened before they could avoid it, the dory might be overturned; and the water was icy cold. They toiled across a broad shallow, sounding with the oars, until they lost touch of the bottom and pulled by guess for a spot where landing was safe.

Soon it seemed that they had gone astray, for they could see nothing of the beach and a harsh rattle broke out close ahead. Moran stopped rowing.

"Tide has run us well offshore," he said. "The yacht skipper's shortening cable or going to break out his anchor. Guess he's swung into shoaler water than he figured on."

While they waited and the tide carried them along, the rattle of the windlass grew louder; and when it stopped, a dim, white shape crept out of the fog. It increased in size and distinctness;

they could see the sweeping curve of bow, the trickle of the stream along the waterline, and the low deckhouse above the rail. There was no avoiding the yacht by rowing away without being seen, but the dory was very small and low in the water.

"They've hove her short and found another fathom, and I expect they're satisfied," Jimmy said; "but they'll keep good anchor watch. The best thing we can do is to lie down in the bottom."

They got down on the wet floorings, and Jimmy looked over the gunwale. They were close to the yacht, and he could make out a figure or two in front of the house. As they drifted on, the figures grew plainer, and it seemed impossible that they could escape being seen. For all that, nobody hailed them, though they were near enough to hear voices and the notes of a piano. The vessel's tall, white side seemed right above them, but they were abreast of the funnel now, and the ash hoist began to clatter; Jimmy saw the dust and steam rise as the furnace clinkers struck the sea. Still, they were drifting aft, a gray blotch on the water, and were almost level with her stern when Jimmy saw a man leaning on the rail. By the way his head was turned he was looking toward the dory, and for several anxious moments Jimmy expected his hail. It did not come; the graceful incurving of the white hull ended in the sweep of counter above the tip of a propeller blade, and the dory drifted on into the mist astern.

"Now we'll have her round!" Moran exclaimed, with relief in his voice. "I guess you've got to pull."

It was difficult to prevent her heavy load from swamping her as they approached the beach; but they ran her in safely, and, after carrying up their cargo, set off for the wreck. Their buoy was visible some distance off, for the mist was now moving out to sea; and their chief trouble was to get the awkward iron keg ashore. They had hardly done so when the steamer showed up plainly through a rift in the fog and a draught of cold air struck Jimmy's face.

"It's coming!" he cried. "We've no time to lose in getting back!"

The tide was beginning to ripple as they pulled off the beach, and the yacht was plainly disclosed, shining like ivory on the clear, green water. It did not matter now that they could be seen; their one concern was to get home before the freshening wind raised the sea. In a short time the spray was flying about the dory and frothing ridges ran up astern of her. These got steeper as they reached the shoals, and the men had hard work to hold her straight with the oars as she surged forward, uplifted, on a rush of foam. They had no time to look about, but they heard the steamer whistle to recall her boat, and presently a gasoline launch raced by, rolling wildly, through deeper water.

As they entered the channel into the bight, they met the launch coming out more slowly with the boat in tow, and somebody on board her waved his hand. Then she disappeared beyond a projecting bank, and Jimmy and Moran rowed on to the sloop.

"They were only just in time," Bethune said as they got on

board. “I suppose you saw our friend go; but if they don’t tow her carefully, it won’t be fresh water when it gets into their tank.” He paused with a laugh and showed them some silver coins. “Anyhow, we have earned something this afternoon. The fellow insisted on paying for the fish, and I thought I’d better let him.”

“It was wise,” agreed Jimmy. “Moran and I have done our share, so it’s up to you to get supper.”

While they ate it, they heard the rattle of a windlass; and, looking out through the scuttle, they saw the yacht steam away to sea.

CHAPTER VI – BLOWN OFF

Though it was nearly eleven o'clock at night, the light had not quite gone and the sea glimmered about the sloop as she rose and fell at her moorings by the wreck. To the north the sky was barred with streaks of ragged cloud and the edge of the sea-plain was harshly clear; to the east the horizon was hidden by a cold, blue haze, and the tide was near the lowest of its ebb. An angry white surf broke along the uncovered shoals with a tremulous roar, and the swell, though smooth as oil on its surface, was high and steep. No breath of wind touched the water, but Jimmy agreed with Moran that there was plenty on the way.

A light burned in the low-roofed cabin where the men waited for the meal which Bethune was cooking. They felt languid as well as tired and hungry, for supper had been long deferred to enable them to continue diving, and they had been under water much oftener than was good for them during the day. The bulkhead they strove to clear of sand was still inaccessible, and, as bad weather had frequently hindered work, they felt compelled to make good use of every favorable minute. This was why they had held on to the wreck, instead of entering the bight before the falling tide rendered its approach dangerous. Moreover, their provisions were running low, and Bethune was experimenting with some damaged flour which had lain forgotten in a flooded locker for several days while they rode out a gale. The bannocks

he turned in the frying-pan had a sour, unappetizing smell.

"They may taste better than they promise," he said encouragingly. "If the sky had looked as bad at half-tide as it does now, I'd have made you take her in. We won't get much done to-morrow."

Moran stretched himself out listlessly on the port locker.

"We ought to tie two reefs in the mainsail handy, but I feel played out, and the breeze may not come before morning. It strikes me the most important thing is the question of grub. We can't hang on much longer if that flour's too bad to eat. I can't see how it went so moldy in a day or two. You can leave a flour-bag in the water for quite a while and then find the stuff all right except for an inch on the outside."

"That's so," Jimmy put in. "My notion is that the flour was bad when we got it. The ship-chandler fellow had a greedy eye. But when you deal with the man who finds the money you can't be particular."

"He's pretty safe," grumbled Bethune. "With a bond on the boat for his loan and a big profit on everything he supplied, the only risk he runs is of our losing her – though I'll admit that nearly happened once or twice. However, you can try the flour."

Taking the frying-pan off the stove, he served out a thick, greasy bannock and a very small piece of pork to each of his companions. The food was too hot to eat, and Jimmy, breaking his with his knife, waited with some anxiety while it cooled. If they could use the flour, it would enable them to remain a week

or two longer at the wreck; and he believed it would not take many days to reach the strong-room. Failing this, it looked as if he must return to his toil at the sawmill and the dreary life in the cheap hotels.

He believed that he had learned on board the sailing ships not to be dainty, but he sniffed at the food with repugnance and then resolutely cut off a piece. When he had eaten a bite of it he threw down his knife.

"It's rank!" he exclaimed.

Moran, reaching up through the scuttle, threw his bannock overboard.

"Very well!" said Bethune. "That shortens our stay. Perhaps we had better get the pumps down into the cockpit when you have finished the pork and tea."

They did so, grumbling, and then lay on the lockers, smoking and disinclined for sleep. There was a tension in the air, and something ominous in the roar of the surf, which seemed to grow louder and more insistent.

"Whether we'll find the gold or not is doubtful; the only thing certain is that we'll have an opportunity for doing a lot of work," Bethune observed after a while. "In a way, Hank's more to be pitied than either of us. He hadn't the option of taking things easily when he came out West."

"The big lobsters were most killed off; you couldn't make your grub with the traps," Moran explained. "Then I got some little books showing it was easy to get rich by fishing in British

Columbia. Wish I had the liars who wrote them out in a half-swamped dory picking up a trawl."

"I don't see that I had much more option than he had," Jimmy objected.

"You could have stayed on board the liner, wearing smart uniforms and faring sumptuously, with a Chinese steward to look after you, if you'd exercised a little tact and shown a proper respect for authority. When the skipper disapproved of a man with heart trouble steering his ship, as he had every right to do, you should have agreed with him."

"I'm glad I didn't," Jimmy said stubbornly. "Anyhow, you're no better off, even if you practise what you preach."

"That would be too much to expect; but then I admit that I am a fool," Bethune laughed. "If I doubted it, the number of times it has been delicately pointed out would have convinced me. After all, it's easy to conform outwardly, which is all that is required, and you can do what you like in private. A concession to popular opinion here and there doesn't cost one much."

"If you mean I ought to have got the quartermaster sacked after he'd prevented a ton of cargo from dropping on my head, I'd rather starve."

"There's a risk of your doing so if you persist in your foolishness. If you had stopped to reason, you would have seen it was your duty to agree with your skipper. Misguided pity is a dangerous thing."

"Moralizing of this kind makes my headache worse!" said

Jimmy disgustedly. “Drop it and light your pipe!”

“Let him alone; he has to talk,” Moran interposed. “It doesn’t matter so long as you don’t worry about what he means.”

“Well,” drawled Bethune, “I’ll conclude. Which of you is going to wash up?”

Moran picked up the dirty plates and thrust them into a locker.

“I’m played out and homesick! Wish I was back East, where I did my fishing in the natural way – on top of the water! But it’s a sure thing none of us will be down at the wreck to-morrow.”

There was silence except for the rumble of the surf and the occasional rap of a halyard against the mast. The sound became more frequent as Jimmy got drowsy, but he was used to the approach of bad weather. Stretched out comfortably on the locker, he soon fell asleep; and it was as dark as it ever is in the North in summer when he was rudely awakened by a terrific jar. The sloop seemed to be rearing upright, and Moran’s hoarse shouts were all but drowned by the rattle of chain on deck.

Scrambling out quickly, Jimmy saw the fisherman stooping forward where the cable crossed the bits, and a narrow stretch of smoking sea ahead. Individual combers emerged from it, and the sloop alternately reeled over them with a white surge boiling at her bows and plunged into the hollows. Jimmy, however, wasted no time in looking about; they had hung on to their moorings longer than was prudent, and prompt action was needed.

With Bethune’s assistance he close-reefed the mainsail and got the shortened canvas up; then all three were needed to break

out the anchor, and Jimmy crouched in the water that swept the forward deck as he stowed it while his comrades hoisted a storm-jib. After that she drove away before the sea, and the men anxiously watched for the entrance to the channel. Though dawn had not broken, it was by no means dark, and they could see the streaky backs of the rollers that ran up the shoals, and beyond them a broad, white band of surf. Presently a break opened up, but it was narrow and crooked, and it seemed impossible that the sloop could get through. When they had run on for a minute or two longer, Moran stood up on deck to command a better view.

"We'd have about two feet under her at the bend, and if she didn't luff up handy she'd sure go ashore," he said. "Seems to me the chances are too blamed steep."

They might reach shelter by taking the risk, and to refuse it meant a struggle with the sea; but Jimmy reluctantly agreed with Moran.

"Yes," he said; "we had better stand off. Look out while I jibe her round."

She swung on before the sea as he put up his helm, followed close by a comber that reared its crest astern, her boom flung on end with the patch of wet mainsail swelling like a balloon. Moran and Bethune were desperately busy with the sheet, for safety depended on their speed. Jimmy moved his wheel another spoke, and sail and heavy spar swung over, while the *Cetacea*, coming round, buried her lee deck in the sea. With a wild plunge she shook off the water, and, while Bethune and his comrade

flattened in the sheets, drove out to windward away from the dangerous shoal. Since they could not reach the bight, she would be safer in open water.

When dawn broke, ominously red, the *Cetacea* was hove to with a small trysail set, rising and falling with a drunken stagger, as the long, white seas rolled up on her weather bow. Though she shipped no heavy water, she was drifting fast to leeward: the island had faded to a gray streak on the horizon. It would be a day's work to beat back again, even if the wind abated, and it showed no sign of doing so. By noon the land was out of sight, and the sea had grown heavier. For an hour or two there was misty sunshine, and the oncoming walls of water glistened luminously blue beneath their incandescent crests. Some of them curled dangerously, and the trysail flapped, half empty, when the *Cetacea* sank into the trough. She lay there a few moments while her crew watched the comber that rose ahead. With slanted mast and rag of drenched sail she looked uncomfortably small; but somehow she staggered up the slope before the roller broke. Jimmy could not tell how far he helped her with the helm, but the sweat of nervous strain dripped from his face as he turned his wheel. Now and then she was a few seconds slow in responding to it, and when her bows swung clear her after-half was buried in a rush of spouting foam. It sluiced off, however, and the sharp swoop into the trough was repeated as comber after comber swept upon them.

When Moran relieved him, Jimmy felt worn out. He had had

only an hour or two's sleep after a day of exhausting work; his breakfast had consisted of a morsel of stale, cold fish, hurriedly torn with his fingers from the lump in the pan; and they had had no opportunity for cooking dinner.

"I'll try to make some coffee," he said, as he went below.

It was difficult to light the stove. The cabin trickled with moisture like a dripping-well. Grate and wood were wet; and when at last the fire began to crackle, Jimmy had to kneel on a locker as he held the kettle on, in order to keep his feet out of the water which washed up from the bilge. There seemed to be a good deal of it.

"Can't you start the pump?" he called to Bethune.

"I might. I don't know that it would do much good. The suction's uncovered, and the delivery under water half the time."

"Then come in and cook, while I get at it!"

"Oh, I'll try!" Bethune answered morosely; and Jimmy resumed his watch on the kettle and left his companion alone.

He knew the curious slackness which sometimes seizes men exposed to the fury of the sea. It differs from fatigue in being moral rather than physical, and it is distinct from fear; its victim is overwhelmed by a sense of the futility of anything that he can do. Determined effort is its best cure, and Jimmy smiled as he heard the clatter of the pump. He thought Bethune would feel better presently.

He made the coffee, found a few of the tough cakes Moran called biscuits, and recklessly opened a can of meat. After the

meal, which they all found a luxurious change from fish, Jimmy lay down, wet through as he was, on a locker, and, wedging himself fast with parts of the dismantled diving pump, sank into broken sleep.

It was midnight when he went up again to take the helm. There was no moon, and gray scud obscured the sea. Foam-tipped ridges came rolling out of it, and the *Cetacea* labored heavily. Jimmy watched Moran pump a while before he went below, and then he pulled himself together to keep his dreary watch. The slow whitening of the east brought no change. Dawn came, and throughout another wearing day they still lay hove to. The sloop did not give them much trouble, and they could easily pump out all the water she shipped; but toward evening they began to feel anxious. The gale had increased. They must already have made a good deal of leeway and they might be drifting near the land; if so, she would not carry enough sail to drive her clear, and there would soon be an end of her if she were blown ashore.

Jimmy was on deck at dawn the next morning, but saw nothing except a narrow circle of foaming sea and the flying scud that dimmed the horizon. Toward noon, however, it began to clear, and, getting out the glasses, he waited eagerly during an hour or two of fitful sunshine. The wind seemed to be falling, and the haze had thinned. Slowly it blew away, and a high, gray mass rose into view, four or five miles off. Moran called out as he saw it, but Jimmy quietly studied the land through his glasses.

"The head, sure enough!" he said. "If it had kept thick, we'd

have been ashore and breaking up long before dark. Now we have to decide what it's best to do. She might stand a three-reefed mainsail."

"It would take us a week to beat back to the island, and we wouldn't have many provisions left when we got there," Bethune pointed out. "I don't feel keen on facing the long thrash to windward."

"She wouldn't be long making Comox with this breeze over her quarter," Moran suggested. "We might get somebody to grubstake us at one of the stores."

"Considering that there's a bond on her, it isn't likely," Jimmy replied.

They let her drift while they looked gloomily to windward, where the island lay. It would need a stern effort to reach it unless the wind should change; a long stretch of foaming sea which the sloop must be driven across close-hauled divided the men from the wreck. They were all worn out and depressed; and neither of Moran's comrades protested when he got up abruptly and slacked off the mainsheet.

"I guess we'll go where there's something to eat," he said. "You can square off for the straits while I loose the mainsail."

Jimmy put up his helm with a keen sense of relief, and the *Cetacea* swung away swiftly for the south with the sea behind her. It was nervous work steering, and Jimmy advised Moran to leave the mainsail furled; but the worst of the strain had passed, and rest and shelter lay ahead.

CHAPTER VII – GRUBSTAKED

A light wind faintly ruffled the landlocked water when the *Cetacea* crept up to her anchorage off a small lumber port on the eastern coast of Vancouver Island. A great boom of logs was moored near the wharf, and stacks of freshly cut lumber and ugly sawdust heaps rose along the beach. Behind these were tall iron chimney-stacks, clusters of wooden houses, and rows of fire-blackened stumps; then steep, pine-clad hillsides shut the hollow in. Though there were one or two steamers at anchor, and signs of activity in the streets, the place had a raw, unfinished look; but the*Cetacea's* crew were glad to reach it. Cramped by their narrow quarters on board, it was a relief to roam at large; and the resinous smell that hung about the port was pleasant after the stinging saltness of the spray.

But they had come there on business, and Bethune presently stopped a man they met.

"Which is the best and biggest general store in the town?" he asked.

"Jefferson's; three blocks farther on. He's been here since the mills were started."

"Is it necessary to go to the best store?" Jimmy inquired as they went on.

Bethune laughed.

"Oh, no! Now that we've found out which it is, we can try

somewhere else. I've a suspicion that our business won't have much attraction for a prosperous dealer who can choose his customers. It's the struggling man who's readiest to take a risk."

"We'll leave it to you," Jimmy said confidently. Bethune had arranged their commercial transactions with tact and shrewdness, and they had discovered that it was far from easy to obtain supplies without paying cash for them.

After strolling through the town, they entered a small, wooden store, which had an inscription, "T. Jaques: Shipping Supplied," and found its proprietor leaning idly on the counter. He was a young man with an alert manner, but, although he was smartly dressed, Bethune, studying him, imagined that he had not yet achieved prosperity. Indeed, he thought he saw signs of care in the man's keen face.

Taking out his notebook, he enumerated the supplies they wanted, and examined samples. The provisions were good; the store was neatly kept and fairly well stocked; but Jimmy, leaning on the counter and looking about, thought the goods had been arranged with some skill to make the biggest show possible, which implied that the dealer had not much of a reserve. Then, while the man talked to Bethune, Jimmy noticed a woman approach the glass door at the back and stop a moment as if she were interested in the proceedings. All this suggested that his comrade had offered their custom at the right place. The provisions would not be a large item, but they needed ropes, chain, and marine supplies, which would cost a good deal more.

"I can send the small stores off whenever you want, but I can't give you the other truck until the Vancouver boat comes in, and that won't be for four days," Jaques said. He looked rather eager as he added: "I guess you can wait?"

"Oh, yes. I expect it will be a week before we get off."

"Then, I'll wire the order. You'll pay on delivery?"

"That," answered Bethune, smiling, "is a point we must talk about. I think I could give you ten dollars down."

The dealer's face fell and he looked thoughtful.

"Well," he said slowly, "I'd certainly like this order. What's your proposition?"

"I don't know that I have one ready. Perhaps I'd better tell you how we stand and leave you to suggest a way out of the difficulty."

"Come into the back store and take a smoke," invited Jaques; and they followed him into an apartment which seemed to serve as warehouse, general living room, and kitchen. A young woman was busy at the stove, and after looking up with a smile of welcome she went on with her cooking; but Jimmy felt that she had given him and his comrades a keen scrutiny.

Jaques brought them chairs and laid a few cigars on the table.

"Now," he said to Bethune, "you can go ahead."

"First of all, I want your promise to keep what I tell you to yourself." Bethune glanced quietly toward the woman.

"You have it, and you can trust Mrs. Jaques. Susie does all her talking at home; and there's a good deal of her own money in

this store. That's why I brought you in. I allow she's sometimes a better judge than I am."

Bethune bowed to Mrs. Jaques; and then, to Jimmy's surprise, he began a frank account of their financial difficulties and their salvage plans. When it came to their doings at the wreck, he made a rather moving tale of it, and Mrs. Jaques listened with her eyes fixed on the speaker and a greasy fork poised in her hand. Jimmy wondered whether Bethune was acting quite judiciously in telling so much. The storekeeper leaned an elbow on the table, his brows knitted as if in thought; and Moran sat still with an expressionless brown face. Except for Bethune's voice it was very quiet in the small, rudely furnished room, and Jimmy surmised that the projected deal was of some importance to its occupants. It was certainly of consequence to his own party, for they could not continue operations without supplies.

"There's a bond on your boat already," Jaques objected, when Bethune paused.

"For about half her value. We could demand a public sale if she were seized, and the balance would clear your debt."

"It's hard to get full price for a vessel that's too small for a regular trade. You allowed you bought her cheap?"

"We did," Bethune carelessly answered. "Still, one has to take a risk."

They were interrupted by a knocking, and Jaques went into the store and did not return for some minutes.

"Nolan, the river-jack," he explained, as he came in. "Wanted

gum-boots, and I thought I'd better let him have them; though he hasn't paid for the last pair yet."

"That," Bethune smiled, "bears out my argument."

Jaques looked at his wife, and she made a sign of assent, as if she understood him.

"Supper's nearly ready, and you had better stay," he said. "It's plain fare, but you won't find better biscuits and waffles than Susie's in the province. Besides, it will give us time to think the thing over."

They were glad to accept the invitation, and no more was said about business while they enjoyed the well cooked and daintily served meal. Jimmy was conscious of a growing admiration for his neat-handed hostess, with her bright, intelligent face, and her pretty but simple dress, and he tried to second Bethune in his amusing chatter. Jaques did not say much, but he looked pleased. As for Moran, he steadily worked his way through the good things set before him. His one remark was: "If we strike grub like this, ma'am, we'll want to stop right in your town."

"Then my husband will lose his order," Mrs. Jaques replied, and though she laughed, Jimmy thought her answer had some significance.

When she cleared the table Jaques lighted a cigar and smiled rather grimly when Jimmy inquired if trade was good.

"Well," he said, "it might be better – that's one reason why I'd like to make a deal with you. There's less money in keeping store than you might suppose. I've been two years in this town, and my

customers are mostly of the kind the beginner gets – those who can't pay up in time, and those who don't mean to pay at all. The ones worth having go to the other man."

"Where were you before?" Jimmy asked.

"In Toronto. But the wages I was making in a department store were not enough to marry on. With a few dollars Susie had left her and with what I'd saved we thought we might make a start; but there's not much room for the small man now in the eastern cities, and we came out West. It's a pull all along; but we'd make some progress if the blame bush settlers would pay their bills."

Jimmy felt sympathetic. The man did not look as if he found the struggle easy.

"Have you got your business fixed?" Mrs. Jaques asked, coming in from an adjoining room.

"Not yet," Bethune answered. "I've a suspicion that your husband was waiting for you; and I couldn't object, because I ventured to believe you would say a word in our favor."

Mrs. Jaques studied him keenly. He was a handsome man, with graceful manners, and she thought him honest; and it was difficult to associate duplicity with Jimmy's open face.

"Well," she promised, "I'll go as far as I can."

"Then we'll get down to business." Jaques turned to his guests. "You feel pretty sure you'll find the gold when you get back?"

"No," said Jimmy frankly. "We hope so; but we can't even be sure we'll find the wreck. The gale may have broken her up and buried her in the sand."

"Then, if your plan falls through, I won't get paid."

"That's taking too much for granted. There'll be something left over if we have to sell the boat, and we're able to earn more than our keep on the wharf or in the mills. Your debt would have the first claim on us."

"It would take you a long time to wipe it off on what you'd save out of two dollars a day."

"Very true," Bethune admitted. "To clear the ground, I suppose you believe we'd try?"

"We'll take it that you mean to deal straight with me. Anyway, you believe you have a pretty good chance of getting at the gold?"

"I think it's a fair business risk. In proof of this, we're going back to do our best if you will give us the supplies we want. We wouldn't be willing to incur the liability unless we had some hope of success."

"Very well; you don't suggest my letting you have the truck and taking a partner's share on the strength of it?"

"No," Bethune answered decidedly; "not unless you press the point."

Mrs. Jaques nodded as if she had approved of the question and found the answer reassuring. It implied that the adventurers thought the scheme good enough to keep to themselves.

"I'd rather my husband stuck to his regular line," she said.

"Then," said Bethune, "this is my proposition: Give us the goods, and charge us ten per cent. interest until they're paid for. You'll get it as well as the principal, sooner or later."

Jaques looked at his wife; and she made a sign of assent.

"Well, it's a deal!"

A half-hour later, when they rose to go, Jimmy turned to his hostess.

"While your husband has treated us fairly," he said, "we have to thank you, and that makes it a point of honor to show you were not mistaken."

He noticed now that there were wrinkles which suggested anxious thought already forming about her eyes, and that her hands were work-hardened; but she smiled at him.

"One learns in keeping store that a customer's character is quite as important as his bank account."

"That's the nicest thing I've had said about me since I came to British Columbia!" Bethune declared gaily.

Mrs. Jaques smiled.

"If you find the evenings dull before you sail, come in and talk to us," she said.

When they went outside, Bethune made a confession.

"I felt strongly tempted to take our custom somewhere else. They're nice people, and it looks as if they found it hard enough to get along."

"Whatever happens, they must be paid," Jimmy declared.

"Yes," agreed Moran, who seldom expressed his opinion except on nautical matters; "that's a sure thing!"

"How would it do to ask them to a picnic on one of the islands?" Bethune suggested. "It would be an afternoon's outing,

and it's generally smooth water here. I shouldn't imagine Mrs. Jaques gets many holidays."

The others thought it a good idea; and when the sloop was refitted and ready for sea, Bethune put his suggestion into practice. His guests were pleased to come, and with a moderate breeze rippling the blue water, they ran up the straits in brilliant sunshine. Jimmy laid a cushion for Mrs. Jaques near the wheel, and her rather pale face lighted up when he asked if she would steer. He saw that she knew how by the way she held the spokes.

"This is delightful!" she exclaimed, as they sped on swiftly. "I used to go sailing now and then at Toronto, but all the time we have lived here I've never been on the water."

She glanced in a half-wistful manner at the sparkling sea. A gentle surf made a snowy fringe along the shingle beach, and beyond that dark pinewoods rolled back among the rocks toward blue, distant peaks. Overhead, the tall, white topsail swayed with a measured swing across the cloudless sky. Silky threads of ripples streamed back from the bows, and along the *Cetacea's* side there was a drowsy gurgle and lapping of water.

"You're to be envied when you sail away," Mrs. Jaques said, with something that was almost a sigh. "Still, it isn't all sunshine and smooth water in the North."

"By no means," Jimmy assured her. "I can think of a number of occasions when I'd gladly have exchanged the sloop for your back room, or, for that matter, for a yard or two of dry ground."

"One can imagine it," she laughed. "Well, you have to face the

gale and fog, while we try not to be beaten by Jefferson and to meet our bills. I don't know which is the harder."

Jimmy felt compassionate. She was young, but she had a careworn look, and he surmised that she found life difficult in the primitive wooden town. It seemed to be all work and anxious planning with her; there was something pathetic in the keen pleasure she took in her rare holiday.

Late in the afternoon they dropped anchor in a rock-walled cove with a beach of white shingle on which sparkling wavelets broke. Dark firs climbed the rugged heights above, and their scent drifted off across the clear, green water. Bethune, who had been busy cooking, brought up an unusually elaborate meal and laid it out on the cabin top with the best glass and crockery he had been able to borrow. His expression, however, was anxious as he served the first course to his guests.

"I've done my best. I used to think I wasn't a bad cook; but after the supper Mrs. Jaques gave us, I'm much less confident," he said. "It's easier to get proud of yourself when you have nothing to compare your work with, and your critics are indulgent. Jimmy's been very forbearing; and it's my opinion that Moran would eat anything that's fit for human food."

"I've had to," Moran retorted. "Anyway, I've seen you set up worse hash than this."

There were no complaints, and the appetite every one showed was flattering. They jested and talked with great good humor; until at last Moran indicated the lengthening shadow of the mast

which had moved across the deck.

"It's mighty curious, but we've been an hour over supper, and there's something left. Guess I never spent more'n about ten minutes at my grub before."

Bethune took a bottle from a pail of ice in a locker and filled the borrowed glasses.

"To our happy next meeting!" he proposed. "Our guests, who have made the trip possible, will not be forgotten while we are away."

The glasses were drained and filled again, and Mrs. Jaques turned to her hosts with a cordial smile.

"May you win the success you deserve!" she responded; and a few minutes afterward Bethune, beckoning Moran, went forward to raise the anchor.

The light was fading when they hove the *Cetacea* to near the wharf and a boat came off. With many good wishes Jaques and his wife went ashore, and the sloop stood away for the lonely North.

CHAPTER VIII – PUZZLING QUESTIONS

Hot sunshine poured into the clearing on the shore of Puget Sound where Henry Osborne had his dwelling. The pretty, wooden house, with its wide veranda and scrollwork decoration, was finely situated in a belt of tall pine forest. The resinous scent of the conifers crept into its rooms; and in front a broad sweep of grass, checkered with glowing flower-beds, ran down to the shingle beach. Rocky islets, crested with somber firs, dotted the sparkling sound, and beyond them, climbing woods and hills, steeped in varying shades of blue, faded into the distance, with behind them all a faint, cold gleam of snow. The stillness of the afternoon was emphasized by the soft splash of ripples on the beach and the patter of the water which the automatic sprinklers flung in glistening showers across the thirsty grass.

Caroline Dexter, lately arrived from a small New England town, sat in the shade of a cedar. She was elderly and of austere character. The plain and badly cut gray dress displayed the gauntness of her form, and her face was of homely type; but her glance was direct, and those who knew her best had learned that her censorious harshness covered a warm heart. Now she was surveying her brother-in-law's house and garden with a disapproving expression. All she saw indicated prosperity and

taste, and though she admitted that riches were not necessarily a snare, she hoped Henry Osborne had come by them honestly.

She had never been quite sure about him, and it was not with her goodwill that he had married her younger sister. She thought him lax and worldly; but after his wife's death, which was a heavy blow to Caroline, she had taken his child into her keeping and tenderly cared for her. Indeed, she ventured to believe that she had molded Ruth Osborne's character and won her affection. The girl might have fallen into worse hands, for, in spite of her narrow outlook, Caroline Dexter was unflinchingly upright.

Sitting stiffly erect in the garden chair, she turned to her niece, who reclined with negligent grace in a canvas lounge. This, Caroline thought, was typical of the luxurious indolence of the younger generation, but, for all that, Ruth had some of the sterner virtues. The girl was pretty, and though her aunt believed that beauty is a deceptive thing, it was less dangerous when purged of pride and vanity. Caroline hoped that the strictness with which she had brought up her niece had freed her of these failings.

"Well, dear," she said, "this is a pretty place; and your father's affairs have evidently improved. It's sad your dear mother didn't live to enjoy it."

Though her dress and appearance were provincial, the austere simplicity of her manner had in it something of distinction, and her accent was singularly clean.

Ruth looked up at her with an air of thoughtful regret.

"Yes; I often feel that, when I think of the hard struggle she

must have had. Though I was very young then, I can remember the shabby boardinghouses we stayed in, and my mother's pale, anxious face when she and my father used to talk in the evenings. He seldom speaks about those days, but I know he does not forget."

"It is to his credit that he never married again," Miss Dexter remarked with a bluntness in which there was nothing coarse. "He loved your mother, and one can forgive him much for that."

"But have you much to forgive? And, after all, men do sometimes marry twice."

"And sometimes oftener! No doubt they're good enough for the women who take them; but the love of a true man or woman is stronger than death!"

There was a warmth in the voice of this apparently unsentimental aunt that surprised Ruth.

"You seem to speak with feeling," the girl said, half mockingly.

A shadow crept into Miss Dexter's eyes as she gazed, unseeingly, at a seabird poised over the water; but almost immediately she turned to her niece with her usual matter-of-fact calm.

"We were talking of your father's affairs," she said. "I notice a sinful extravagance here: servants you do not need, a gasoline launch, and two automobiles."

Ruth laughed.

"Father must get to town quickly, and cars sometimes break

down; besides, I believe he can afford them all. I sometimes think you are rather hard on him."

"I'll admit that I have often wondered how he got his money. One cannot make a fortune quickly without meeting many temptations. I suppose you know your Uncle Charles had to lend him a thousand dollars soon after you were born, and it was not paid back until a few years ago? Does your father never tell you anything about his business?"

"I haven't thought of asking him," Ruth answered with some warmth. "He has always been very kind to me, and I know that whatever he does is right."

"A proper feeling," her aunt commented. "No doubt, he is no worse than the others; but men's ideas are very lax nowadays."

Ruth was more amused than resentful. Though she was her father's staunch partisan, she believed her aunt distrusted the makers of rapid fortunes as a class rather than her brother-in-law in particular, and that her frugal mind shrank with old-fashioned aversion from modern luxury. For all that, Caroline Dexter had roused the girl's curiosity as to her father's fortune and she determined to learn something about his years of struggle when opportunity offered.

A moving cloud of dust rose among the firs where the descending road crossed the hillside, and a big gray automobile flashed across an opening. Ruth knew the car, and there was only one man of her acquaintance who would bring it down the water-seamed dip at that reckless speed.

"It's Aynsley," she said, with a pleased expression. "I'll bring him here."

"And who is Aynsley?"

"I forgot you don't know. He's Aynsley Clay, the son of my father's old partner, and runs in and out of the house when he's at home."

Turning away, she hurried toward the house, and as she reached it a young man came out on the veranda. He was dressed in white flannel, with a straw hat and blue serge jacket, and his pleasant face was bronzed by the sea.

"I came right through," he said, holding out his hand. "It was particularly nice of you to leave your chair to meet me."

"I'm glad to see you back," Ruth responded. "Did you have a pleasant time? When did you get home?"

"Left the yacht at Portland yesterday, and came straight on. Found the old man out of town, and decided I'd stop at Martin's place. I'm due there this evening."

"But it's twenty miles off over the mountains, and this isn't the nearest way."

Clay laughed, with a touch of diffidence that became him.

"What's twenty miles, even on a hill road, when you're anxious to see your friends?"

He watched her as closely as he dared, for some hint of response, but he was puzzled by her manner.

"It isn't a road," she laughed. "Some day you'll come here in pieces."

"I wonder whether you'd be sorry?"

"You ought to know. But come along – I believe my aunt is curious about you."

When he was presented, Miss Dexter gave him a glance of candid scrutiny. Aynsley was marked by a certain elegance and careless good humor, which were not the qualities she most admired in young men, but she liked his face and the frankness of his gaze. If he were one of the idle rich, he was, she thought, a rather good specimen.

"What is your profession?" she asked him bluntly, when they had talked a few moments.

"It's rather difficult to state, because my talents and pursuits are varied. I'm a bit of a naturalist, and something of a yachtsman, while I really think I'm smart at handling a refractory automobile. When I was younger, it was my ambition to ride a raw cayuse, but now one grapples with the mysteries of valves and cams. The times change, though one can't be sure that they improve."

"Then you don't do anything?"

"I'm afraid you hold my father's utilitarian views, but there's room for a difference of opinion about what constitutes hard work. To-day, for instance, I spent two hours lying on my back beneath the car and fitting awkward little bolts into holes; then I drove her fifty miles in three hours over a villainous road, graded with rocks and split fir-trees. As I've another twenty miles to go, my own opinion is that I'll have done enough for any ordinary

man when I get through."

"And how much better off is the community for your labors?"

"It's some consolation that nobody's much the worse, but I've known the community suffer when it was slow in getting out of the way."

Though she shook her head disapprovingly, there was a gleam of amusement in Miss Dexter's eyes.

"I suppose you're a product of your age, and can't be blamed for the outlook your environment has forced upon you. After all, there are more harmful toys than cars and yachts; enjoy them strenuously while you can. It may fit you for something sterner when you lose your taste for them. And there's something in your look which makes me think that time may come."

A half-hour later Ruth and Aynsley were strolling together through a grove of pines by the water's edge.

"What did you think of my aunt?" she asked.

"I think Miss Dexter is a very fine lady. What's more, I begin to see where you got something I've noticed about you. I suppose you know that you and she are not unlike?"

Ruth smiled. Her aunt was hard-featured and very badly dressed; but she knew that these were not the points which had impressed him.

"The good impression seems to have been mutual," she said; "and to tell the truth, I was slightly surprised. She's generally severe to idlers."

"I knew she'd spot me by my clothes, and I played up to the

part. It pleases people when you fall in with the ideas they form about you. But speaking of idlers reminds me that before I went away the old man was getting after me about wasting my talents; opined it was time I did something, and said he'd stand for the losses I'd no doubt make in the first two years if I'd run the Canadian mill he's lately bought. I pointed out that it might cost him more than the boats and cars, and he answered that he'd consider it as a fine for the way he brought me up. However, we won't talk about that. It's too fine a day."

This was characteristic of him and Ruth laughed. He was careless and inconsequent, but they had been friends for a long time and she liked him. It was perhaps curious that she had never troubled herself about his feeling for her, and had gone on taking his unexacting friendship for granted. It was seldom that he became sentimental, and then she had no trouble in checking him.

"Well," she said, "you have told me nothing about your voyage. You must have seen something of interest, and had a few adventures."

"It's a good rule to avoid adventures when you can, and we followed it. Perhaps the most interesting thing was my meeting with three men who were fishing on a lonely island far up to the north."

"Fishing? That doesn't sound very exciting."

They sat down where an opening in the pines gave them a view of climbing forests and sparkling sound, and Aynsley lighted a

cigarette.

"That's what they seemed to be doing, but I've had my suspicions about it since. If they caught anything, it would be a long way from a market, and, though they were dirty and ragged enough, two of them hadn't the look of regular fishermen. One rather amusing fellow was very much of the kind you'd meet at a sporting club, and the other had the stamp of a navy or first-class mailboat man. He was English."

Ruth looked up quickly. Jimmy had often been in her thoughts since she had last seen him; although, as he had shown no anxiety to avail himself of her invitation, she had made no inquiries about him. Osborne, however, had visited Vancouver, and, seeing the vessel at the wharf, had inquired about Farquhar and learned that he had left the ship on her previous voyage. Ruth resented his silence, but she could not forget him.

"What was the man like?" she asked.

"Which of them?"

"The last one; the navy man." She found it slightly embarrassing to answer the question.

Aynsley gave her a keen glance.

"So far as I can recollect, he had light hair, and his eyes were a darker blue than you often see; about my age, I think, and unmistakably a sailor, but he had a smart look and the stamp of command. Do you know anybody like that?"

Ruth did not answer with her usual frankness; although she did not doubt that this was the second mate with whom she had

spent many evenings on the big liner's saloon deck.

"Oh, of course, we met several steamboat officers, and they're much of a type," she answered in an indifferent tone.

Aynsley saw that she was on her guard. Girls, he understood, often had a partiality for mailboat officers who were generally men of prepossessing appearance and manners. However, he kept his thoughts to himself, for he was usually diffident with Ruth. Although he had long admired her, he knew that he would not gain anything by an attempt to press his suit.

"Anyway," he said, "they were pleasant fellows, and seemed to be having a hard time. Between the ice and gales and fog, it's by no means a charming neighborhood."

"Wasn't it on one of those islands that my father was wrecked, and lost the gold he was bringing down?"

"Somewhere about there. Islands are plentiful in the North." Aynsley paused and laughed. "Still, as my respected parent had some interest in the gold, I shouldn't imagine they lost much. Losing things is not a habit of his. I believe he had a share in the vessel, too."

"But she went down."

"That wouldn't matter. The underwriters would have an opportunity for paying up – probably rather more than she was worth. Considering my parentage, it's curious I have no business talent."

"Your father and mine have had dealings for a long time, haven't they?"

"They have stood by each other for a good many years. It looks as if you and I were destined to be friends; but I sometimes think you don't understand just what your friendship is to me."

"Of course, we are good friends," Ruth said carelessly; "but you have plenty others."

"I have a host of acquaintances; but you're different from the rest. That doesn't sound very original, but it's what I feel. There's an intangible something that's very fine about you; something rare and old-fashioned that belongs more to the quiet corners of the New England States than to our mushroom cities. It comes of long and careful cultivation, and isn't to be found in places that spring up in a night."

"Both my father's and my mother's people lived frugally in a very provincial Eastern town."

"It proves my point. I know the kind of place: a 'Sleepy Hollow,' where nothing happens that hasn't happened in the same way before, left as it was when the tide of American life poured West across the plains. One can imagine your mother's people being bound by old traditions and clinging to the customs of more serious days. That, I think, is how you got your gracious calm, your depth of character, and a sweetness I've found in no one else."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.