

Forbes John Maxwell

Doubloons – and the Girl



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John Maxwell Forbes

Dobloons—and the Girl

CHAPTER I

ON THE BLIND SIDE OF CHANCE

Allen Drew, glancing carelessly about as he started for the shore-end of the pier, suddenly saw the girl coming in his direction. From that moment – dating from the shock of that first glimpse of her – the current of his life was changed.

Women were rare enough down here on the East River docks; one of the type of this gloriously beautiful girl seemed an impossibility – an hallucination. Curiosity was not even blended with his second glance at her. An emotion never before conceived in his heart and brain gripped him.

Somehow she fitted the day and fitted, too, his mood. The very spirit of April seemed incarnated in her, so springy her step, so lissom the swaying of her young body, so warm and pink the color in her cheeks. Her dress, of some light gray material, had a dash of color lent to it by the bunch of violets at her waist. Her figure was slender and slightly above the middle height. A distracting dimple dented the velvet of her right cheek, and above her small mouth and perfectly formed nose a pair of hazel eyes looked frankly out upon the world. Her oval face was surmounted by a dainty toque, from under which a vagrant tendril of hair had escaped. This blew about her ears, glistening like gold in the sunshine.

Drew saw beautiful women every day of his life. He could not fail to do so in a city where they abound. But aside from the day and his mood, there was much about this slip of a girl that stirred him mightily and set his pulse to galloping.

He had lunched heartily, if not sumptuously, at one of the queer little restaurants that seem to have struck their roots into Fulton Market and endured for generations. There were no shaded candles on the table, and finger bowls would have evoked a puzzled stare or a frown from most patrons of the place. But the food was abundant and well cooked, and at twenty-two, with a keen appetite and the digestion of an ostrich, one asks for little more.

Drew paid his check and stepped out into the crooked side street that led to the East River, only a block distant. From force of habit, his steps turned in the direction of the chandlery shop where he was employed. On reaching South Street, he remembered a commission that had been given him to execute; so, turning to the right, he walked briskly toward the Battery.

It was a glorious day in early April. A sudden shower, vanishing almost as quickly as it had come, had washed the rough pavement of the old street to a semblance of cleanliness. In a very real sense it had also washed the air until it shimmered with the translucence of a pearl. A soft wind blew up from the south and the streets were drenched with sunshine.

It was a day that might have prompted a hermit to leave his cave, a philosopher to renounce his books, a miser to give a penny to a beggar. It spoke of youth and love and growing things, of nest building in the trees, of water rippling over stones, of buds bursting into bloom, of grass blades pushing through the soil.

Yet, despite this – or perhaps because of it – Allen Drew was conscious of a vague restlessness. A feeling of discontent haunted him and robbed the day of beauty. Something was lacking, and he had a sense of incompleteness that was quite at variance with his usual complacent outlook on life. He was not given to minute self-analysis, but as this feeling persisted and bothered him, he began harking back to the events of the morning in the hope of finding an explanation. Was there anything

he had done that was wrong or anything that he had neglected to do that came in his province? He cudged his brains, but thought of nothing that should give him uneasiness.

He had corrected that imperfect invoice and sent it on to White & Tenny. He had reminded his employer that their stock of compasses was low and should be replenished. He had directed young Winters to answer that cablegram from Kingston. Try as he would, he could think of no omission. The books were strictly up to date and everything was moving in the usual routine.

Ah, there he had it! Routine! That was the key to the enigma. It was just that unvarying smooth routine, that endless grinding away at the same familiar things that to-day, when everything about him spoke of change and growth and freedom, was making him restless and perturbed. He was just a cog in the ever-turning wheel. He was a slave to his desk, and not the less a slave because his chains happened to be invisible.

"It won't do," he murmured to himself. "I've got to have a change – some excitement – something!"

With the springtime fermenting in his blood and stirring him to rebellion, he went on, turning out now and then to avoid the trucks that, with a cheerful disregard for police regulations, backed up on the sidewalks to receive their loads from the warehouse doors, until he reached Wall Street. Just beyond was Jones Lane, whose sylvan name seemed strangely out of place in the whirl and hubbub of that crowded district. Here he turned, and, picking his way across the muddy street, went out on the uncovered pier that stretched for five hundred feet into the river.

The pier was buzzing with activity. Bales and boxes and barrels by the thousands were scattered about in what seemed to be the wildest confusion. Gangs of sweating stevedores trundled their heavy burdens over the gangplanks of the vessels that lay on either side, and great cranes and derricks, their giant claws seizing tons of merchandise at a time, swung creakingly overhead to disgorge their loads into yawning hatchways.

Drew threaded his way through the tangled maze until he reached the end of the pier where the bark *Normandy* was lying.

"Captain Peters around anywhere?" he asked of the second officer, who was superintending the work of the seamen, and had just relieved himself of some remarks that would have made a truck driver envious.

"Below in his cabin, sir," was the answer, and Drew went aboard, walked aft, and swung himself down the narrow stairs that led to the captain's quarters.

He found the skipper sitting at his table, looking over a sheaf of bills of lading.

"Good afternoon, Captain Peters," was Drew's greeting.

"Howdy," responded the captain. "Jest sit down an' make yerself comf'table. I'll be through with these papers in jest a minute or two."

His work concluded, the captain shoved the bills aside with a sigh of relief and looked up.

"I s'pose ye come to see me about that windlass?" he remarked. "But first," he added, as Drew was about to reply, "won't ye have somethin' to wet yer whistle?"

He reached for a decanter and a couple of glasses. Drew smilingly declined, and the captain, nothing daunted, poured out enough for two and drank it in a single Gargantuan swallow.

"I just came to say," explained Drew, as the captain set down the glass, smacking his lips complacently, "that we'll have that windlass over to you by to-morrow, or the next day at the latest. The factory held us up."

"That's all right," replied the captain good-naturedly. "I haven't been worryin' about it. I've been dealin' with Tyke Grimshaw goin' on twenty year an' he ain't never put me in a hole yet. I knew it would come along in plenty of time fur sailin'."

"By the way, when do you sail, Captain?" asked Drew.

"In a week, more or less. It all depends on how soon we get our cargo stowed."

"What are you carrying?"

"Mostly machinery an' cotton prints fur China and Japan."

"And what will you bring back?"

"Ain't sure about that yet. Owners' orders will be waitin' fur me when we get to Hong Kong. Probably load up with tea and such truck. Maybe get some copra at some of the islands."

China, Japan, the South Seas! Lands of mystery, adventure and romance! Lands of eternal summer! Azure seas studded with islands like emeralds! Velvet nights spangled with flaming stars!

The wanderlust seized on Allen Drew more fiercely than before, and his heart sickened with longing.

"It must be wonderful to see all those places," he ventured.

"Huh?" said the captain, looking at him blankly.

"I mean," explained the landsman, half ashamed of his enthusiasm, "that everything is so different – so old – so mysterious – so beautiful – . You know what I mean," he ended lamely.

The captain sniffed.

"Pooty enough, I s'pose," he grunted. "But I never pay no 'tention to that. What with layin' my course an' loadin' my cargo an' followin' owners orders, my mind's what ye might call pooty well took up."

The irony of it all! The captain who did not care a copper for romance was going into the very thick of it, while he, Allen Drew, who panted for it, was doomed to forego it forever. Of what use to have the soul of a Viking, if your job is that of a chandler's clerk?

The captain applied himself to the decanter again and Drew roused from his momentary reverie.

"Well," he observed, as he took his hat from the table on which he had thrown it, "I'll keep a sharp eye out for that windlass and see that it is shipped to you the minute it reaches us from the factory."

"All right," responded the captain, rising to his feet. "I'll be lookin' for it. I wouldn't dare risk the old one fur another v'yage."

They shook hands, and Drew climbed the stairs, crossed the deck and went out on to the wharf.

The river was a scene almost as busy as that which lay behind him in the crowded streets of the metropolis. Snorting tugs were darting to and fro, lines of barges were being convoyed toward the Sound, ferryboats were leaving and entering their slips, tramp steamers were poking their way up from Quarantine, and a huge ocean liner was moving majestically toward the Narrows and the open sea beyond.

Drew took off his hat and let the soft breeze cool his brow. Things seemed hopelessly out of gear. He felt like a trapped animal. So he imagined a squirrel might feel, turning the wheel endlessly in the narrow limits of its cage. Or, to make the image human, his thoughts wandered to the shorn and blinded Samson grinding his tale of corn in the Philistine town.

He found himself envying a man who leaned against a neighboring spile. He was a tall, spare fellow, dressed a little better than the common run of sailors, but unmistakably a sea-faring man. What Drew especially noted was that the stranger had only one eye – and that set in a rather forbidding countenance. Ordinarily he might have pitied him, but in his present mood Drew envied him. The stranger's one remaining eye had, after all, seen more of the world than his own two good optics would likely ever see.

From these fruitless and fantastic musings he roused himself with an effort. A glance at his watch startled him. This would never do. As long as he took Tyke Grimshaw's money he must do Tyke Grimshaw's work.

"Back to the treadmill," he said to himself, grimly; and it was then, as he started for the head of the pier, that he first saw the girl.

He slackened his pace instantly, so as to have her the longer in sight, mentally blessing the bales and boxes that made her progress slow. Not for the world would he have offended her by staring; but

he stole covert glances at her from time to time; and with each swift glance the impression she had made upon him grew in strength.

She came on, seemingly unconscious of his presence, until they were almost opposite each other. One hand held her dress from contact with the litter of the dock; in the other she carried what appeared to be a packet of letters. The path she chose led her to the very edge of the dock.

Drew would have passed the next instant had the girl not stopped suddenly, a startled expression becoming visible on her face. The young man turned swiftly. The one-eyed seaman, whose appearance he had previously marked, stood almost at his elbow and confronted the girl.

She stepped back to avoid the seaman, and her foot caught in a coil of rope. For a moment she swayed on the verge of the dock – then Drew's hand shot out, and he caught her arm, steadying her. But the packet she carried flew from her hand and disappeared beyond the stringpiece of the pier.

The girl uttered a little cry of distress. Drew shot a belligerent glance at the one-eyed man.

"What do you want?" he demanded, with truculence. "Isn't the dock broad enough for you to pass without annoying the lady? Get along with you!"

The one-eyed man uttered an oath, but moved away, though slowly. Drew turned to the girl again, hat in hand, a smile chasing the frown from his face.

CHAPTER II

TYKE GRIMSHAW AND HIS AFFAIRS

"I beg your pardon," Drew said, bowing low, "but can I be of any further assistance?"

The girl looked up at him a little doubtfully, but what she saw in his frank brown eyes must have reassured her, for she spoke without hesitation.

"You are very kind," she answered, "but I fear it is too late. I had some letters in my hand, and when I slipped they went into the water. I'm afraid you can't get them."

Mentally resolving to dive for them if such a procedure became necessary, Drew stepped upon the stringpiece of the pier beside her and looked down.

She gave a joyous exclamation as she saw the package lying in the bottom of a small boat that floated at the stern of a steamer moored to the pier.

"Oh, there they are!" she cried delightedly. "How lucky!" Then her face changed. "But after all it is going to be hard to get them," she added. "The pier is high and there don't seem to be any cleats here to climb down by."

"Easiest thing in the world," returned Drew confidently. "I'll go aboard the steamer, haul the boat up to the stern, and drop into it."

"But the stern is so very high," she said, measuring it with her eye.

"That doesn't matter," he replied. "If you'll just wait here, I'll go aboard and be back with the letters before you know it." He glanced around swiftly. "I don't think that fellow will trouble you again."

"I am not at all afraid of that man. He only startled me for the moment. But I hate to put you to so much trouble," she added, looking at him shyly.

"It will be a pleasure," protested Drew, returning her look with another from which he tried to exclude any undue warmth.

It is to be feared that he was not altogether successful, judging from the faint flush that rose in her cheek as she dropped her gaze before his.

His mind awl, the young man hurried up to the gangway of the steamer where he found one of the officers. He briefly explained that he wanted to secure a package that a young lady had dropped into the boat lying astern, and the officer, with an appreciative grin, readily granted permission to him to go aboard.

Drew hurried to the stern, which, as the steamer had discharged her cargo, rose fully twenty feet from the water. He hauled in the boat until it lay directly beneath. Then he gathered up the slack of the painter and wound it about a cleat until it was taut. This done, he dropped over the rail and let himself down by the rope until his feet touched the thwart of the tender.

He worked his way aft carefully, and picking up the package placed it in his breast pocket. Then he caught hold of the rope and climbed up, hand over hand.

It was unaccustomed work for a landsman, but Drew was supple and athletic and he mounted rapidly. Not for a fortune would he have faltered with those hazel eyes fixed upon him. With the girl watching him, he felt as though he could have climbed to the top of the Woolworth Building.

It was his misfortune that he could not see the look of admiration in her eyes as they followed his movements – a look, however, which by the exercise of maidenly repression she had changed to one of mere gratitude when at last, breathing a little quickly, he approached her with the packet he had recovered in his hand.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, taking it eagerly and clasping it tightly, "how very good of you to take all that trouble! I don't know how to thank you enough."

"It was no trouble at all," Drew responded. "I count myself lucky to have happened along just when you needed me."

His speech won him a radiant smile, and he promptly decided that the dimple in her cheek was not merely distracting. It was divine!

There was a moment of embarrassed silence. The young man was wild to pursue the conversation. But he was too much of a gentleman to presume on the service he had rendered, and he knew that he should lift his hat and depart.

One feeble resource was left by which he might reconcile duty with desire.

"It's very hard getting about on this crowded pier," he ventured, "and you see there are some rough characters around. You might perhaps like to have me see you safely to the street when you are ready to go?"

She hesitated for a moment, her own inclination evidently battling with convention. But convention won.

"I think not," she said, flashing him a smile that softened her refusal and at the same time completed his undoing. "You see it is broad daylight and I am perfectly safe. Thank you for the offer though, and thank you again for what you have done for me."

It was dismissal, none the less final because it was gracious, and Drew yielded to the inevitable.

He glanced back once or twice, assuring himself that it was his plain duty to keep her in sight in order to see that nothing happened to her. He found himself wishing that she would drop the letters overboard again – that the one-eyed man would reappear – that something would occur, however slight, to call him to her side once more. It was with a thrill of exultation that he saw her approach the gangplank of the *Normandy*.

Then, for a moment, at least, he was sure he was going to have his wish. He spied the one-eyed man coming into view from behind a heap of freight and approach the boarding-plank. He spoke to the girl and she halted.

Drew was on the point of darting back to the girl's rescue. But the seaman's attitude was respectful, and it seemed that what he said was not offensive. At least, the girl listened attentively, nodded when the man had finished speaking, and as the latter fell back she tripped lightly aboard the *Normandy*, and so disappeared.

Drew's curiosity was so great that he might have lingered until the girl came ashore again, but the one-eyed man was coming up the dock and the young fellow was cooler now and felt that it would not be the part of wisdom to have another altercation with the rough looking stranger. Perhaps, after all, the one-eyed man had merely spoken to the girl to ask pardon for having previously startled her.

"Well," Drew said to himself, "Peters knows her and can tell me all about her. Anyhow I know her name and I'll find out where she lives if I have to search New York from end to end."

For on the envelope that had lain uppermost when he had picked up the package from the grating of the tender, he had seen the name, "Ruth Adams." The address had escaped him in that momentary glance, and although he could have easily repaired the omission while he was passing back along the steamer's deck, his instincts revolted at anything that looked like prying.

But there was nothing in his code that forbade his using every legitimate means of searching her out and securing an introduction in the way dictated by the approved forms, and he promised himself that the episode should not end here.

"Hope springs eternal in the human breast," especially when that breast is a youthful one, and Allen Drew's thoughts spun a dozen rainbow visions as he made his way back to the shop whose insistent call he had for the last hour put aside. He walked automatically and only that sixth sense peculiar to city dwellers prevented his being run down more than once. But the objurgations of startled drivers as they brought up their vehicles with a jerk bothered him not a whit. His physical presence was on South Street but his real self was on the crowded pier where he had left Ruth Adams.

Still moving on mechanically, he entered the door of the chandlery shop, over which a signboard, dingy with age, announced that "T. Grimshaw" was the proprietor. He nodded absently in response to the salutations of Sam, the negro porter, and Winters, the junior clerk, and sat down at his desk.

The building that housed the chandlery shop was a very old one, dating back to a time previous to the Revolution. When it was erected the Boston "Tea Party" was still in the future. If its old walls could have spoken they might have told of the time when almost all New York was housed below Chambers Street; when the "Bouwerie," free from its later malodorous associations, was a winding country lane where lads and lasses carried on their courtships in the long summer evenings; when Cherry Hill, now notorious for its fights and factions, was the abode of the city's wealth and fashion; when Collect Pond, on whose site the Tombs now stands, was the skating center where New York's belles and beaux disported themselves; when merry parties picnicked in the woods and sylvan glades of Fourteenth Street.

Those same walls, looking across the East River, had seen the prison ship *Jersey*, in whose foul and festering holds had died so many patriots. And they had shaken to the salvos of artillery that greeted Washington, when, at the end of the Revolutionary War, he had landed at the Battery and had gone in pomp to Fraunce's Tavern for a farewell dinner to his officers.

In its day it had been a stout and notable building, and even now it might be good for another hundred years. But the inexorable march of progress and the worth of the land on which it stood had sealed its doom. Grimshaw had occupied it for twenty years, but when he sought to renew his lease he had been told that no renewal would be granted. He could still occupy the building and pay the rent from month to month. But he now held possession only on sufferance, and it was distinctly understood that he might be called upon to vacate at any time on a few days' notice.

But "threatened men live long," and it was beginning to look as though the same might be said of the old building. For two years the months had come and gone without any hint of change, and Tyke had settled down in the belief that the building would last as long as he did. After that it did not matter. He had no kith or kin to whom to leave his business.

He was a grim and grizzled old fellow, well on in his sixties. In his earlier days he had been a master mariner, and had sailed all the Seven Seas. He had rounded the Horn a dozen times; had scudded with reefed topsails in the "roaring forties"; had lost two fingers of his left hand in a fight with Malay pirates; had battled with waterspouts, tornadoes and typhoons; had harpooned whales in the Arctic; had lost a ship by fire, and been shipwrecked twice; and from these combats with men and nature he had emerged as tough and hardy as a pine knot.

The profits of a notable whaling expedition from which he had returned with the tanks filled to bursting, barrels crowded on the deck, and the very scuppers running oil, together with a tidy little inheritance that fell to him about the same time, had enabled him to buy the chandlery shop from its former proprietor and settle down to spend the rest of his life ashore and yet in sight and scent of salt water.

How he had gained the name of "Tyke," by which everybody called him, nobody knew. He himself never volunteered to tell, and in all his bills and accounts used only the initial "T." Some of his employees favored Tyrus, others Titus. One in a wild flight of fancy suggested Ticonderoga. But the mystery remained unsolved, and, after all, as the checks that bore the scrawl, "T. Grimshaw," were promptly honored at the bank, it did not matter.

He was not what could be called an enterprising business man and there were many houses in his line that made a more pretentious appearance, carried a larger stock, and had a much more extensive trade. But he lived frugally, discounted his bills, and had such a broad acquaintance among seafaring men that each year's end showed a neat profit on his books.

His store force was modest, being only three in number. Allen Drew was a sort of general manager, and Tyke was growing more and more into the habit of leaving the conduct of the business

to him. Winters was the junior clerk. He had come direct from high school and was now in his second year of service. Then there was Sam, the colored porter and man of all work, whose last name was as much a mystery as Grimshaw's first.

Drew took up some papers that had been laid on his desk during his absence, and tried to fix his mind upon them. He was dimly aware that somebody had entered the store door, had spoken to Winters, and that the junior clerk had shown the visitor into Grimshaw's private office.

But Allen Drew's thoughts were too far afield to be caught by this incident, or to become easily concentrated upon humdrum business affairs. He laid down the papers, and sighed.

He began to day-dream again. In the whole category of feminine names was there ever one so pretty as Ruth? And surely never did a girl, in both form and feature, so fit the name.

Suddenly he realized that the door of the private office was open and that Grimshaw's head was thrust out.

"Hey! Come here a minute, Allen," he called.

There was a note of trouble in the old man's voice, and Tyke's face expressed some strong emotion. Alert on the instant, Drew rose to obey his employer's summons.

CHAPTER III

HARD HIT

Drew was not surprised to find that his employer was not alone. A man whom he now recognized as the agent of the estate controlling the building was seated at one end of the desk and was drumming upon it with his fingers.

Tyke was hunched up in his big revolving chair with a look of agitation on his face. His hands were clenching and unclenching rapidly. It was evident that something much out of the ordinary had occurred to rob him of his usual placidity.

He motioned Drew to a seat.

"Well, Allen," began Grimshaw, in a voice that he tried in vain to render calm, "it's come at last. We've got to get out of the old place."

"What?" cried the young man; yet this only confirmed the suspicion which his recognition of the visitor had suggested.

"We're sorry, of course," purred the agent, who had tried to break the unwelcome news to the old man as easily as possible. "But, of course, you know that you held the place on the distinct understanding that we should take possession at will."

"I ain't denying that, Mr. Blake," admitted Tyke. "There's isn't anything underhand or wrong about what you're doing. I kept on here with my eyes wide open and I'm ready to take my medicine. But all the same, it comes as a shock. I'd hoped to hold on to the old craft as long as I lived."

"I wish you could, both for your sake and ours," returned Blake. "We haven't a tenant anywhere who pays his rent more promptly and bothers us less about repairs. But the trustees of the estate have had an offer from parties who want to put up a more modern building on this site, and it was too good to decline."

"When are they going to start?" asked Drew.

"They're in something of a hurry," replied the agent. "You see this is the right time of the year for construction work, and they want to have the foundations laid by fall."

"It's only a matter of days then before we have to find another place?" went on Drew.

"Oh, I should hardly say that," replied Blake, soothingly. "You know how those things are. They'll have a lot to do in the way of plans and contracts before they get down to the actual work of building. Still," he went on, more cautiously, "they may get busy on wrecking the old building at almost any time, and I'd advise you as a friend not to let the grass grow under your feet. You've got a lot of stuff here, and it will take a good deal of time to move it. If I were you, I'd figure on being out in a week or ten days."

"Ten days!" groaned Tyke. "An' I haven't even got a place to go to."

"It may take some hustling," admitted the agent. "But a good deal can be done in a short time when you have to. I'll look around, and if I learn of any place that would suit you I'll let you know."

There was little else to be said, and after another expression of regret at the unpleasant duty he had had to perform, Blake took his leave.

The two men left in the office, contrasting types of age and youth, looked at each other for a moment without speaking. Allen Drew had a real affection for his employer, who for some time past had treated him more like a son than an employee, and he was genuinely shocked to see how this blow had affected him.

"Don't mind, Mr. Grimshaw," he said cheerily. "It doesn't mean the end of the world. We'll find another place that is just as good. And this time we'll get a lease, so we won't have to worry about being routed out in this way."

Tyke shook his head dismally.

"That's all very well for you youngsters," he replied. "You're at an age when you'd as soon change as not. But I've kind o' stuck my kedge deep into the old place, an' it's like plucking my heart out to have to up anchor and make sail for another port."

The younger man thought it would be best to leave Grimshaw alone for a while, and he rose briskly to his feet.

"If you say so, I'll go out and look around," he suggested. "I've had this thing in the back of my mind for some time past, and I know of two or three likely places that may fill the bill."

"All right," assented Tyke apathetically. "Jest tell Winters to look after things in the shop while you're gone. I reckon I won't be much good for the rest of the afternoon."

Drew went out, and after imparting the news, which shocked Winters and Sam, put on his hat and left the office.

That morning he had been hoping for a change. This afternoon he was getting it with a vengeance.

It was desirable from every standpoint that the new place should be as near to the old one as possible. This consideration limited his choice to two buildings which he knew were vacant, and toward these he bent his steps.

The first place he visited had just been rented, but at the second he had better luck. He returned about four o'clock and burst into the store, flushed and jubilant.

"I've found it," he announced, going into the private office. "Just what the doctor ordered. Plenty of room, a better pair of show windows than we have here, and a long-time lease for a rent that's only a trifle more than we're paying now."

Tyke looked up with the first sign of animation he had shown since Blake's visit.

"Where is it?" he asked.

"Just on the next block," answered Drew. "Turner's old place."

"We'll go right over now an' look at it," said Tyke, rising and putting on his hat.

After inspecting the three floors thoroughly, Grimshaw agreed with his young manager that they were in luck to get the building. A visit to the agent followed, and before they left his office Tyke had handed over a check for the first month's rent and had a five-year lease in his pocket.

"A good piece of work, Allen, my boy," he said, as they parted outside the shop that night. "I don't know what I'd do without you. But I'm mighty sorry to have to leave the old place. No other will ever seem exactly like it."

"Poor old Tyke," mused Drew, as he looked after the retreating figure that suddenly seemed older than he had ever seen it. "He's hard hit."

In all the stir and bustle of that crowded afternoon, Drew had been conscious of a glow at his heart that was not due to mere business excitement. One name had been upon his lips, one thought had sought to monopolize him. And now that business was over for the day, he yielded utterly to the obsession of that meeting on the wharf.

Instead of striding uptown as usual, he turned in the other direction and went down to the Jones Lane pier, now for the most part deserted and quiet in the waning light. Here and there a watchman sat on a bale smoking his pipe, while occasionally a sailor lay a more or less unsteady course for his ship.

Drew made his way to where the *Normandy* was moored, and asked for Captain Peters.

"Gone ashore, sir," said the man he addressed. "Some friends of his came aboard this afternoon and he's gone off with them to celebrate."

There was a grin on the man's face as he spoke, and this, together with his recollection of the decanter, left no illusions in Drew's mind as to the character of the celebration.

"Any message to leave for the captain, sir?" the man inquired.

"Nothing important," returned Drew carelessly. "I may drop around and see him to-morrow." And he blessed the belated windlass which would give him a reasonable excuse for returning.

But even though the captain was absent, there were other things at hand that spoke of the girl with the hazel eyes. There was the place where she had dropped the letters. There was the post against which she had leaned as she watched him recover them. And there, as he bent over the edge of the pier, he saw the little boat that had played its part in the day's happenings.

How musical her voice was! And she had smiled at him once – no, twice! Smiled not only with her lips but with her eyes.

He thought of her as he went slowly uptown. He thought of her until he went to sleep and then his thinking changed to dreaming.

Decidedly, Tyke was not the only one who was hard hit on that eventful day.

CHAPTER IV

THE SHADOWS OF ROMANCE

When Allen Drew opened his eyes the next morning, he was conscious of an unusual feeling of elation. He lay for a moment in the twilight zone between sleeping and waking, seeking the reason. Then in a flash it came to him.

He was out of bed in a twinkling. Life was too full and rich now to waste it in sleep. Yesterday morning it had seemed drab and commonplace. To-day it sparkled with prismatic hues. He was a new man in a new world.

He found himself whistling from sheer excess of good spirits as he moved about the room. He hurried through his shower and dressing in record time. Then he despatched his breakfast with a speed and absent-mindedness that were most unusual for him and evoked the mild astonishment of his landlady. A few minutes later he had joined the hurrying throng that was moving toward the nearest subway station. He left the train at Fulton Street and surprised Winters by appearing at the shop a half hour earlier than his usual time.

There were two reasons for pressing haste on this morning. The moving from the old quarters to the new involved an amount of work that was appalling. There were a thousand things to be done, and for the next week or ten days the force of three employees must work at top speed. Current business would have to be attended to as usual, and in addition there was the colossal task of removing the contents of the three crowded floors from the old building to the new.

There was a second task which, in Drew's secret heart, seemed the more important. That was to discover the address of the girl he had met on the pier and learn what he could about her.

In the first flush of determination this had seemed to be a comparatively easy matter. The very fact that he wanted it so badly seemed to guarantee his success. Such difficulties as suggested themselves he waved airily aside. No young Lochinvar coming out of the West had felt more certain of carrying off his Ellen than Allen Drew had felt the night before of finding Miss Ruth Adams. But when he applied his mind to the task in the cold light of day, it did not seem so easy and he was hazy as to the best way to go about it.

He opened his desk, and before looking at the mail that mutely besought his attention, he reached for the huge city directory and opened to the letter "A." He was appalled to find how many Adamses there were. There were dozens, scores, hundreds! Even with the firm and corporation names eliminated, the individual Adamses were legion. And not one of them had Ruth before it.

This, however, he had hardly expected. She was too young to be listed separately, and would probably be included under the name of her father or her mother.

He had had a vague idea that, if there were not too many Adamses, he might take them one by one and by discreet inquiries in the neighborhood of each find out if the family included a young lady named Ruth. If he succeeded, that would be a great point gained. What he should do after that he would have been puzzled to tell. But he had a desperate hope that, hovering in the vicinity, some way, somehow, he could manage to secure an introduction.

But now, with this formidable array of names before him, his plan vanished into thin air. Life was too short, and he could not wait for eternity!

And how did he know that she lived in the city at all? It was probable, but not at all certain. She might simply be here on a visit; and for all he knew her permanent home might be Chicago or San Francisco.

Clearly, he must see Captain Peters without loss of time. The girl had gone aboard his bark, and the probability was that her errand had been with him.

He looked hastily through the mail, and was glad to see that it included a notification from the freight department of the railroad that a windlass consigned to "T. Grimshaw" had arrived and was awaiting his orders.

"I'll just drop around to see Peters and set his mind at rest about that windlass," he said to Winters, reaching for his hat.

"I thought you did that yesterday," replied Winters.

"I told him we expected it," said Drew, flushing a little; "but he may be worrying about it, being delayed on the way. He's an old customer of ours and we want to keep on the right side of him."

Winters looked his surprise at this sudden spasm of business anxiety, but said nothing further, and Drew hastened down to the Jones Lane pier and boarded the *Normandy*. But again he was doomed to meet with disappointment.

"Sorry, sir," said the second officer, biting off a chew from a plug of tobacco, "but the skipper can't be seen just now. Just came aboard a little while ago and there was a friend on either side of him. You know how it is," and he winked. "He's below now, sound asleep, and 'twould be as much as my billet's worth to disturb him."

"Well," Drew said thoughtfully, "that windlass he ordered has arrived and I'll see that it's carted down here to-day. But there was another matter I wanted to speak to him about."

"Better wait a day or two if it's any favor you want to ask the old man," advised the seaman. "Let his coppers get cooled first. A better navigator than Cap'n Peters never stepped, and he don't lush none 'twixt port and port; but he's no mamma's angel child when his coppers is hot, believe me!"

"Thanks. I'll remember," Drew said. "Of course you did not notice the young lady who came aboard here yesterday afternoon just after I left?"

"Didn't I, though?" responded the second officer of the *Normandy*. "My eye!"

"Do you know who she is?" blurted out Drew.

"No, sir. But the skipper does, I reckon."

"All right," Drew said, and turned to descend the plank to the dock. As he did so he found himself confronting the one-eyed man who had figured in the incident on the dock the previous afternoon.

The fellow's countenance was raised to his own as Drew came down the plank, and the latter obtained a good view of the scarred face.

It was almost beardless, and even the brows were so light and scanty that they lent no character to the remaining shallow, furtive blue eye. The empty socket gave a horribly grim appearance to the whole face.

Momentary as Drew's scrutiny was, he saw that the one-eyed man was intoxicated. Not desiring to engage in a controversy with a stranger in that condition, he would have passed on quickly, but the fellow would not step aside.

"Just let me pass, will you?" Drew said, eyeing the other warily.

"You lubberly swab!" the one-eyed man said thickly, and with it spat out a vile epithet that instantly raised a flame of hot anger in Allen Drew.

He plunged down the plank, his fists clenched and his eyes ablaze. The one-eyed man was by no means unsteady on his legs; he met the charge of the young fellow boldly enough.

But Drew dodged his swing, and having all the push of his descent of the plank behind the straight-arm jolt he landed on the other's jaw, the impact was terrific.

"Whee!" yelled the second officer of the *Normandy*, leaning on the rail, an interested spectator. "That's a soaker!"

Others came running to the scene. A fight will bring a crowd quicker than any other happening.

The one-eyed man had been driven back against the nearest pile of freight. Drew was after him before he could recover from that first blow, and he got in a couple of other punches that ended the encounter – for the time being, at least. His antagonist went to the floor of the dock and stayed there.

"Beat it, 'bo!" advised a seaman at the *Normandy's* rail. "Here comes the cop."

Drew accepted the advice as good, dodged around a tier of freight, and so escaped. He was not of a quarrelsome disposition; yet somehow the memory of those three blows he had struck gave him a deal of satisfaction.

"I never supposed those sparring lessons at the gym would come in so handy," he thought, hurrying officeward. Then he chuckled. "Yesterday I was grouching because nothing ever happened to me. And look at it now! That fellow had it coming to him, that's all. I wonder who he is. Like enough I'll never see him again."

But he was never more mistaken in his life than in this surmise.

Grimshaw had come in by the time Drew got back to the shop, and was busy in his office. Winters and Sam were condoling with each other over the amount of work that lay before them.

"It's a whale of a job," complained Winters, looking about the crowded shop.

"Ah kin feel de mis'ry comin' into ma back ag'in," groaned Sam, who had formerly been a piano mover, but had been obliged to seek a less strenuous occupation because of having wrenched his back. "Ah suttinly will be ready fo' de hospital when Ah gits t'rough wid dis movin'."

"Oh, you're just plain lazy, Sam," chaffed Drew. "It won't be half so bad as you think. We'll have a gang of truckmen and their helpers to do most of the heavy work. But I suppose we've got our hands full, packing these instruments so they won't be broken and scratched. And 'hustle' is the word from now on."

"But think of the junk upstairs!" groaned Winters. "Why doesn't the old man call in the Salvation Army and give them the whole bunch on condition that they take it away? He's got the accumulation of twenty years on that top floor, and it's not worth the powder to blow it up. It beats me why Tyke keeps all that old clutter."

"It doesn't seem worth house room," admitted Drew; "and now that we're moving, perhaps we can get rid of a lot of the stuff. I'll speak to Tyke about it. But let's forget the upper floors and get busy on this one. There's a man's job right here."

"A giant's job, to my way of thinking," grumbled Winters, as he looked around him.

It was indeed a varied and extensive stock that was carried on the main floor. To name it all would have been to enumerate almost everything that is used on shipboard, whether driven by wind or by steam. Thermometers, barometers, binoculars, flanges, couplings, carburetors, lamps, lanterns, fog horns, pumps, check valves, steering wheels, galley stoves, fire buckets, hand grenades, handspikes, shaftings, lubricants, wire coils, rope, sea chests, life preservers, spar varnish, copper paint, pulleys, ensigns, twine, clasp knives, boat hooks, chronometers, ship clocks, rubber boots, fur caps, splicing compounds, friction tape, cement, wrenches, hinges, screws, oakum, oars, anchors – it was no wonder that the force quailed at sight of the work that lay before them.

They set to work smartly and had already made notable progress when Tyke stepped out of the private office. He looked around with a melancholy smile.

"Dismantling the old ship, I see," he observed to Drew.

"Right on the job," replied the young man, glad to note that Tyke seemed to have somewhat recovered his equanimity after the trying events of the day before.

Grimshaw watched them for a while, making a suggestion now and then but leaving most of the direction of the work to his chief clerk while he ruminated over the coming change.

At last he roused himself.

"Better leave things to Winters now and come upstairs with me," he said to Drew. "There's a heap of stuff up there, and we want to figure on where we're going to stow it all in the new place."

Drew followed him and they mounted to the second floor. Here the surplus stock was held in reserve, and there was nothing that could be dispensed with. But the third floor held a bewildering collection that made it a veritable curiosity shop. When they reached this, Drew looked about and was inclined to agree with Winters in classifying it as "junk."

All the discarded and defective stock of the last twenty years had found a refuge here. And in addition to this debris there was a pile of sailors' boxes and belongings that reached to the roof. Tyke had a warm spot in his heart for sailormen, especially if they chanced to have sailed with him on any of his numerous voyages; and when they were stranded and turned to him for help they never met with refusal.

In some cases this help had taken the form of money loans or gifts. At other times he had taken care of the chests containing their meagre belongings, while they were waiting for a chance to ship, or perhaps were compelled to go to a hospital.

In the course of a score of years, these boxes had increased in number until now they usurped a great part of the space on that upper floor. Drew had often been on the point of suggesting that they be got rid of, but as long as they did not encroach on the space actually needed by the business this thought had remained unspoken. Now, when they were about to move and needed to have their work lightened as much as possible, the time seemed opportune to dispose of the problem.

Tyke listened with a twinkle in his eye as Allen repeated the suggestion of Winters that the contents of the floor be held for what it would bring or given to the Salvation Army.

"Might be a good idea, I s'pose," he remarked. "Them old things ain't certainly doing any one any good. An' yet, somehow, I've never been able to bring myself to the point of getting rid of 'em. Seems as though they were a sort of trust. Though I s'pose most of the boys they belonged to are dead and gone long ago."

"I don't imagine there's anything really valuable in any of the chests," remarked Drew.

"No, I don't think the hull kit an' boodle of 'em is worth twenty dollars," acquiesced the old man. "Although you can't always tell. Sometimes the richest things are found in unlikely places. But I kind of hate to part with these old boxes. Almost every one of 'em has something about it that reminds me of old times.

"You know I ain't much of a reading man," Grimshaw went on, "an' these boxes make the only library I have. I come up here an' moon around sometimes when I git sick of living ashore, an' these old chests seem to talk to me. They smell of the sea an' tell of the sea, an' each one of 'em has some history connected with it."

Drew scented a story, and as Tyke's tales, while sometimes garrulous, were always interesting, he forebore to interrupt and disposed himself to listen.

"Now take that box over there, for instance," continued Tyke, pointing to a stained and mildewed chest which bore all the marks of great age and rough handling. "That belonged to Manuel Gomez, dead ten year since. He went down in the *Nancy Boardman* when she was rounding the Cape. Big, dark, upstanding man he was, an' one of the best bo'suns that ever piped a watch to quarters in a living gale.

"An' he was as good a fighting man as he was sailor. Nobody I'd rather have at my side in a scrap. He was right up in front with me when those Malay pirates boarded us off the Borneo coast. Those brown devils came over the side like a tidal wave, an' no matter how many we downed, they still kep' coming on.

"It was nip an' tuck for a while, but we were fighting for our lives, an' we beat 'em off at last an' sent what was left of 'em tumbling into their praus. As it was, they sliced off two of my fingers, an' one fellow would have buried that crooked kriss of his in my neck if Manuel hadn't cut him down jest in time.

"Of course, I was grateful to him for saving my life, an' he sailed with me for several voyages after that. That scrap with the pirates never seemed to do him an awful lot of good. He had pirates on the brain anyway. You see, he come from Trinidad on the Spanish Main, where the old pirates used to do their plundering an' butchering, an' I s'pose he'd heard talk about their doings ever since he was a boy.

"He used to talk about 'em whenever he got a chance. Of course, discipline being what it is on board ship, he couldn't talk as free with me as I s'pose he did with his mates. But once in a while he'd reel off a yarn, an' then he'd hint kind of mysterious like that he knew where some of the old Pirates' doubloons were buried an' that some day, if luck was with him, he'd be a rich man.

"I'd heard so much of that kind o' stuff in my time that I used to laugh at him, an' then he'd get peeved – that is, as peeved as he dared to be, me being skipper. But that wouldn't last long, and after a while he'd be at it again. Jest seemed as though he couldn't get away from the thought of it."

"Perhaps there was something in it after all," said Drew, to whom just now anything that savored of adventure appealed more strongly than usual.

"More likely his brain was a bit touched," replied Grimshaw carelessly. "I lost sight of him for several years when I quit the sea. But just before he went on his last voyage, he wanted me to take charge of this chest of his until he returned. Said he didn't dare trust it with any one else.

"All right, Manuel. No diamonds or anything of that kind in it, I s'pose?" I says with a laugh and a wink.

"But he didn't crack a smile.

"Somethin' wort' more zan diamon's," he said solemnly, an' went away. I never saw him again, an' a few months later I heard of the *Nancy Boardman's* going down with all hands."

"Why not examine the chest?" cried Drew eagerly.

The recital of the grizzled veteran had fired his blood. All that he had ever read or heard of the old buccaneers came back to him. In fancy he saw them all, Avery, Kidd, Bartholomew Roberts, Stede Bonnet, Blackbeard Morgan, the whole black-hearted and blood-stained crew of daring leaders ranging up and down the waters of the Spanish Main, plundering, sacking, killing, boarding the stately galleons of Spain, sending peaceful merchant ships to the bottom, wasting their gains in wild orgies ashore capturing Panama and Maracaibo amid torrents of blood and flame. Silks and jewels and brocades and pearls and gold! From the whole world they had taken tribute, until that world – tried at last beyond bearing – had risen in its might and ground the whole nest of vipers beneath its wrathful heel.

Tyke looked at the young man quizzically.

"Thinking of the pirate doubloons, Allen?"

"Why not?" Drew defended himself, albeit a little sheepishly. "Perhaps the key to treasure is right over there in that old chest of Manuel's."

Then Tyke laughed outright.

CHAPTER V

A SETBACK

"I wouldn't bank on finding treasure," Grimshaw advised. "What those old pirates got they spent as they went along. They warn't of the saving kind. 'Easy come, easy go' was their motto."

"That's true enough of the majority of them, no doubt," conceded Drew. "The common sailors got only a small portion of the loot anyway. But some of the leaders were shrewd and far-sighted men. They didn't look forward to dying as pirates. They wanted to save enough to buy their pardons later on and live the rest of their lives ashore in peace and luxury. What was more natural than that they should hide their shares of the plunder on some of the little islands they were familiar with? They wouldn't dare to keep it on their ships, where their throats might be cut at any moment if their crews knew there was treasure aboard."

"That's true enough," admitted his employer.

"And if they did bury it," pursued the young man, encouraged by this concession, "why shouldn't a good deal of it be there yet? Gold and silver and jewels don't perish from being kept underground. And as most of the pirates died in battle, they had no chance to go back and dig the plunder up from where they had buried it."

"But some of the crews must have been in the secret," objected Tyke, "an' after the death of their captains what was to hinder them from going after the doubloons an' getting 'em."

"There might have been a good many reasons," answered Drew. "In the first place, the captains seem to have had a cheerful little habit of killing the men who did the digging and leaving their skeletons to guard the treasure-chests. And even when that didn't happen, what chance would the common sailor have had of going after the loot? He couldn't have got a ship without giving away his secret, and the minute he'd given it away his own life wouldn't have been worth a copper cent."

"And then, too," went on Drew, warming to his subject, "look at all the traditions there are on the subject. Where there is so much smoke there must be some fire. A single rumor wouldn't amount to much, but when that rumor persists and is multiplied by a thousand others until it becomes a settled belief, there must be something in it. The rumors are like so many spokes of a wheel all pointing to a single hub, and that hub is – treasure!"

"I declare! you're getting all het up about it," grinned Tyke, as Drew paused for breath. "But all the same, my boy, you want to get back to earth. You've got as good a chance of finding hidden treasure as I have of taking first prize in a beauty show."

"What's the matter with taking a look in Manuel's box and finding out what it was he was so anxious about?" questioned Drew, a little dashed by Tyke's skepticism.

"Well, perhaps we shall some time later on," conceded Tyke, somewhat doubtfully. "We can't think of doing it until we git moved an' settled. We've got enough on hand now to keep us as busy as ants for a good many days to come."

Drew was disappointed, but as his employer had spoken there was nothing more to be said, and he regretfully followed Grimshaw to the ground floor.

The chronicle of his life for the rest of that day and the two following could be summed up in the one word, work – hard, breathless, unceasing work. A reminder had come from Blake that the moving must be expedited, and from Tyke himself down to Sam no one was exempt.

Not that the thought of Ruth Adams was ever for long out of Drew's mind. But the colors had grown more sombre in his rainbow of hope. He had snatched a few moments from his noon hour on the second day to run over to the *Normandy*, and although this time he saw Captain Peters, it was only to learn that he could expect no help from that quarter.

The captain was curt and irritable after his prolonged drinking bout, and answered chiefly in monosyllables. No, he had not seen any young girl come aboard two days before. Did not know of any one who had.

"Now you git out," snarled Peters in conclusion. "You'll git no information here. Make no mistake about that!"

Drew was startled by the change in Captain Peters' manner and look. The skipper glared at him as though Drew were a strange dog trying to get the other's bone. The young man's temper was instantly rased; but Peters was a considerably older man than he, and he seemed to be laboring under some misapprehension.

"I assure you, Captain Peters," Drew said, "my reasons for asking were perfectly honorable."

"You needn't assure me of anything. Just git out!" roared the skipper of the *Normandy*; and, seeing that there was nothing but a fight in prospect if he remained, the young man withdrew. On deck he saw the second officer, and that person winked at him knowingly and followed him to the plank.

"Old man on the rampage?" he asked.

"Seems to be," said the confused Drew.

"Chance was, that that Bug-eye you knocked out the other day is a pertic'lar friend of the skipper's. But gosh! you're some boy with your mits."

Drew might again have tried to find out from this fellow about the girl, but he shrank from making her the subject of any general inquiry or discussion. To him she was something to be kept sacred. His heart was a shrine with her as its image, and before that image he burned imaginary tapers with the fervor of a devotee.

One thought came to him with a suddenness that made him quake. Could it be that she was already married?

He tried to remember whether "Mrs." or "Miss" had preceded the name on the letter. For the life of him he could not recall. He had so utterly assumed that she was unmarried, on the occasion of their meeting, that any thought to the contrary had not even occurred to him then. He was somewhat comforted by the probability that, had she been married, her husband's name or initials would have followed the "Mrs." instead of her given name. Yet, this was a custom that was becoming as much honored in the breach as in the observance, and the use of her own given name would not be at all conclusive.

Then, with a great wave of relief, the memory came to him that he had placed the letters in her left hand and had noted that she had no rings on that hand at all. The thought had come to him at the time that no ornament could make those tapered fingers prettier than they were.

His heart leaped with elation. She was unmarried then! She wore no wedding ring!

There was still greater cause for jubilation. She wore no ring of any kind! She was not even engaged!

She probably was somewhere in this teeming city. Many times their paths might almost cross, perhaps had already almost crossed since that first meeting on the pier.

Fantastic musings took possession of him. Who was it that, in a burst of hyperbole, said that if one took up his station at Broadway and Thirty-fourth Street, he would, if he stayed there long enough, see everybody in the world go past? Or was it Kipling who said that of Port Said?

Where should he take his stand? What places should he frequent with the greatest likelihood of meeting her? Theatres, the opera, art galleries, railway stations, Central Park?

He recalled himself from these fantasies with a wrench. How foolish and fruitless they were! He was no man of leisure, to do as he pleased. He was bound as securely to his desk as the genie was to the lamp of Aladdin, and he must answer its call just as unfailingly.

So, alternately wretched and elated, tasting the torments as well as the joys of this experience that had revolutionized his life, he tore desperately into his work, but with the girl's face ever before him.

On the third day after Tyke had received notice to move, the preparations were far advanced. Delicate instruments had been carefully wrapped; heavier objects had been clothed with burlap; truckmen were notified to be ready on the following day. Tyke and Drew had made frequent pilgrimages to the new place and had arranged where the stock could be placed to the best advantage. New bills and letterheads had been ordered from the printers, and even the old sign over the door, which Tyke obstinately refused to leave behind, had been taken down to have the old number painted out and the new one substituted.

There was no elevator in the old building. Drew had often urged Grimshaw to have one installed, but the old man was dead set against any such "new-fangled contraptions." So, everything from the upper lofts, when it was called for, had to be carried or rolled down the rickety stairs, a proceeding which often roused rumbles of rebellion in the breast of Sam, upon whom fell the brunt of the heavy work.

He had spent most of that afternoon in getting down the boxes from the third floor so that they might be within easier reach of the truckmen when the moving should begin. He was on his way down with one of them, perspiring profusely and tired from the work that had gone before, when, as he neared the lowest step, he slipped and dropped his burden.

He was fortunate enough to scramble out of the way of the box and thus escape injury. But the box itself came to the floor with a crash, and split open.

Drew and Winters sprang to the help of the porter, and were relieved to find that he was not hurt. He rose to his feet, his black face a picture of consternation.

"Dat ole mis'ry in ma back done cotched me jes' when Ah got to de las' step," he explained. "Ah hope dey ain't much damage done to dat 'er box."

"Pretty badly done up, it seems to me," remarked Winters, as he surveyed the broken chest critically.

"Never mind, Sam," consoled Drew. "It wasn't your fault and the old box wasn't of much account anyway."

Just then Tyke thrust his head out of his office to learn the meaning of the crash. At the sight of the broken box he came into the shop.

"How did this happen?" he asked.

"Ah couldn't help it, Mistah Grimshaw," said Sam ruefully. "Ma back jes' nacherly give way, an' Ah had to let go. Ah'm pow'ful sorry, sah."

Sam was a favorite with the old man, who refrained from scolding him but stood a moment looking curiously at the box.

"Carry it into the office," he said at last to Sam. "And you, Allen, come along."

CHAPTER VI

THE BROKEN CHEST

Sam lifted the big chest, and, very carefully this time to make amends for his previous dereliction, carried it into the private office. He placed it on two chairs that his employer indicated and then withdrew, closing the door softly behind him and rejoicing at having got off so easily.

"Well, Allen," remarked Tyke, wiping his glasses and replacing them on the bridge of his nose, "you're going to get your wish sooner than either one of us expected."

"What do you mean?" asked Drew wonderingly.

"Don't you see anything familiar about this box?" replied Tyke, answering a question in Yankee fashion by asking one.

"I don't know that I do," responded the other. Then, as he bent over to examine the broken chest more closely, he corrected himself.

"Why, yes I do!" he cried eagerly. "Isn't this the one you pointed out to me the other day as belonging to the man who fought with you against the Malays?"

"That's it," confirmed Tyke. "It's Manuel Gomez's box. Queer," he went on reflectively, "that of all the chests there were in that loft the only one we thought of looking in should burst open at our very feet. If I was superstitious" (here Drew smothered a smile, for he knew that Tyke was nothing if not superstitious), "I might think there was some meaning in it. But of course," he added hastily, "we know there isn't."

"Of course," acquiesced the younger man.

Tyke seemed rather disappointed at this ready assent.

"Well, anyway, now that it has opened right under our noses, so to speak, we'll look into it. I guess we've got far enough ahead with our moving to take the time."

Drew, who was burning with curiosity and impatience, agreed with him heartily.

The chest had split close to the lock, so that it was an easy matter after a minute or two of manipulation to throw the cover back.

A musty, discolored coat lay on top, and Tyke was just about to lift this out when Winters stuck his head into the office.

"Some one to see you, sir," he announced.

Tyke gave a little grunt of impatience.

"Tell him I'm busy," he snapped. Then he caught himself up. "Wait a minute," he said. "Did he tell you his name?"

"No, sir," returned Winters. "But I'll find out." In a moment he was back. "Captain Rufus Hamilton, he says."

The petulant expression on Grimshaw's face changed instantly to one of pleasure.

"Bring him right in," he ordered.

Drew, thinking that Grimshaw would wish to see his friend alone, rose to follow Winters.

"I suppose we'll put this off until after he's gone," he remarked.

But his employer motioned to him to remain.

"Stay right where you are," he directed. "Cap'n Rufe is one of the best friends I have, and I'm glad he came jest now."

The door opened again, and Winters ushered in a powerfully built man who seemed to be about fifty years of age. He had piercing blue eyes, a straight nose with wide nostrils, and a square jaw, about which were lines that spoke of decision and the habit of command. His face was bronzed by exposure to the weather, and his brown hair was graying at the temples. There was something open and sincere about the man that caused Drew to like him at once.

The newcomer stepped briskly forward, and Tyke met him half way, gripping his hand in the warmest kind of welcome.

"Well met, Cap'n!" cried Tyke. "I haven't seen you in a dog's age. I was jest wondering the other day what had become of you. There's nobody in the world I'd rather see. What good wind blew you to this port?"

"I'm just as glad to see you, Tyke," replied the visitor, with equal heartiness. "I've been in the China trade for the last few years, with Frisco as my home port. You can be sure that if I'd been hailing from New York I'd have been in to see you every time I came into the harbor."

Tyke introduced Drew to the newcomer, and then the two friends settled down to an exchange of reminiscences that seemed sure to be prolonged for the rest of the afternoon.

After a while Captain Hamilton leaned back to light a cigar, and in the momentary nagging of conversation that ensued while he was getting it to going well, his gaze fell on the open chest.

"What have you got here?" he asked with a smile. "Looks like a sailor's dunnage."

"And that's jest what it is," answered Tyke, recalled to the work on which he had been engaged when the captain's coming had interrupted. "I declare! your visit put it clean out of my head. It's the box that used to belong to Manuel, that old bo'sun of mine that I guess I've told you about in some of my yarns. The one that was with me off Borneo when I lost these two fingers."

"That run-in you had with the Malays?" returned the captain. "Yes, I remember your telling me about him. Saved your life, I think you said, when one of the beggars was going to knife you."

"That's the one," confirmed Grimshaw. "He was shipwrecked later off the Horn. He left his box here with me to take care of for him."

"Seems to be pretty well broken up."

"The porter dropped it coming downstairs," explained Drew.

"You had it brought in here to save room, I suppose," said the captain. "I noticed that you were all cluttered up outside."

"Why, it wasn't that exactly," replied Tyke, slightly embarrassed. "You see, Allen an' I were rummaging around in the top loft the other day, an' among other things our eyes fell on this box. That started me off yarning about the tight places Manuel an' I had been in together, an' how he'd hinted that some day he'd be rich. Then I told Allen of how Manuel said, when he left his box with me, that there was something in it worth more'n diamonds an' then —

"Yes, I can guess the rest," said Captain Hamilton, with a quiet smile. "And then you both got a hankering to see what was in the box."

"Allen did," admitted Tyke, "an' I ain't denying that my fingers itched a little too. But I put it off until we had got moved into our new place. Now, didn't I, Allen?" he demanded virtuously.

Drew assented smilingly.

"Why didn't you wait then?" giped the captain.

"We would have," affirmed Grimshaw eagerly, conscious that here at last he was on firm ground, "but that black rascal, Sam, the porter, dropped the box on his way downstairs an' it split wide open, as you see. If I was superstitious —" here he glared challengingly at both of his listeners, who by an effort kept their faces grave, "I'd sure think it was meant that we should look into it right away. What do you say, Cap'n Rufe?"

"I agree with you," replied the captain. "The man is dead, and the box is yours by right of storage if nothing else. This Manuel didn't have wife or children that you know of, did he?"

"Nary one," responded Grimshaw. "When he'd been drinking too much he used to cry sometimes an' say that he hadn't a relative in the world to care whether he lived or died."

"That being the case, heave ahead," advised the captain. "You don't owe anything to the living or the dead to keep you from finding out all you want to know."

Reinforced by this opinion, the old man again lifted the coat from the top of the box.

What lay beneath was a curious medley of articles such as might have been gathered at various times by a sailor who was familiar with all the ports of the world. Mingled in with old trousers and boots and caps, were curiously tinted shells, clasp knives with broken blades, grotesque images of heathen gods, a tarantula and a centipede preserved in a small jar of alcohol, miraculously saved from breakage.

But what especially attracted their attention in the midst of this miscellaneous ruffraff was a small cedar box, about eight inches long by six inches wide and deep. It was heavily carved, and was secured by a lock of unusual size and strength.

"Wonder if this is the thing that was worth more'n diamonds," grunted Tyke, with a carelessness that was too elaborate not to be assumed.

"It must be that, if anything," replied Captain Hamilton, who had let his cigar go out and was now vigorously chewing the stub.

Drew said nothing, but his cheeks were flushed and his eyes brighter than usual.

Grimshaw fumbled with the lock for a moment, but found it immovable.

"Jest step out, Allen, and get all the keys we have an' we'll see if any of 'em fit," he directed.

Drew did so, and returned in a moment with the entire collection that the shop boasted. Tyke tried them all in turn, but none fitted.

"I guess there's no help for it," he said at last. "I hate to spoil the box, but we'll have to force the lock. Get a chisel, and we'll pry the thing open."

The chisel was brought and did its work promptly. There was a rasping, groaning sound, as if the box were complaining at this rude assault upon its privacy, then, with a hand that trembled a little, Tyke lifted the cover.

All three heads were close together as the men bent over and peered in. Their first glimpse brought a sense of disappointment. They had half expected to catch the sheen of gold or the glitter of jewels. Instead they saw only a piece of oilskin that was carefully wrapped about what proved to be some sheets of paper almost as stiff as parchment.

"Huh," grunted Tyke. "Pesky lot of trouble with mighty little result. I told you I thought Manuel was a bit touched in the brain, an' I guess I was right."

"Wait a minute," said Captain Hamilton. "Don't go off at half-cock. Let's see what's in that oil-skin."

Tyke opened the packet. The others drew up their chairs, one on either side, as he unfolded the oilskin carefully on his desk.

There were two sheets of paper inside, so old and mildewed that they had to be handled carefully to prevent their falling to pieces.

One of the papers seemed to be an official statement written in Spanish. The other consisted of rude tracings, moving apparently at random, with here and there a word that was almost illegible.

The three men looked at this blankly. Drew was the first to speak.

"It's a map!" he exclaimed eagerly.

CHAPTER VII

A MYSTERIOUS DOCUMENT

The two captains scanned the document closely.

"It certainly is a map," pronounced Captain Hamilton decisively.

"That's what it 'pears to be," admitted Tyke.

"And it's the map of an island," went on Hamilton. "See," he pointed out, "these wavy lines are meant to represent water and these firmer lines stand for the land."

The others followed the movement of his finger and agreed with him.

"Well, after all, what of it?" asked Tyke, leaning back in his chair with affected indifference.

"There's this of it," said his visitor throwing his extinguished cigar into the waste-basket and drawing his chair still closer. "I feel that we have a mystery on our hands, and we should examine it fore and aft to find what there is in it."

"I s'pose the next thing you'll be saying is that's it's a guide to hidden treasure or something like that," jeered Tyke feebly, to conceal his own growing excitement.

"Stranger things than that have happened," replied the captain sententiously.

"Have it your own way," assented Tyke, rising and going to the door.

"Winters," he called, "jest remember that I'm not in to anybody for the rest of the afternoon."

"Yes, sir," replied Winters dutifully.

Having locked the door as an additional guard against intrusion, Tyke rejoined the two at the desk.

"Fire away," he directed. "What's the first move?"

"The first thing is to make out what's written on this other paper," said the captain, handling it gingerly.

The three bent over and studied the document closely.

"Why, it's some foreign lingo; Spanish probably!" exclaimed Grimshaw. "Not a word of English anywhere, as far as I can make out."

"That's so," agreed the captain, a little dismayed at the discovery. "We've struck a snag right at the start. If we have to call in any one to translate it, we'll be taking the whole world into the secret, if there is any secret worth taking about."

"Don't let that worry you," Drew intervened. "I think I know enough Spanish to be able to make out the paper."

There was an exclamation of delight from Captain Hamilton and a snort of surprise from Tyke.

"Why, I never knew that you knew anything about that lingo!" the latter ejaculated.

"I don't know any too much about it," returned Drew, modestly. "But the South American trade is getting so big now that I thought it would be a good thing to know something of Spanish; so I've been studying it at night and at odd times for the last two years."

"Well, don't that beat the Dutch!" cried Tyke delightedly. "Now if I was superstitious" – he stared truculently at the suspicious working of Drew's mouth – "I'd be sure there was something in this that wasn't natural. We want to look into the box, an' it busts open in front of us. We want to read that Spanish lingo, an' you know how to do it. I'll be keelhauled if it don't make me feel a little creepy. That is," he corrected himself quickly, "it would if I believed in them things."

"Well, now that we know you don't believe in them," said Captain Hamilton, with the faintest possible touch of sarcasm, "and since our young friend here is able to read this paper, suppose we go to it."

"You bet we'll go to it!" cried Tyke eagerly. "You jest take a pencil an' write it down in English as Allen reels it off."

"There won't be any 'reeling off'," warned Drew, as with knitted brow he pored over the document. "In the first place, the Spanish used here is very old, and some of the words that were common then aren't in use any more. I can see that. Then, too, the ink has faded so much that some of the words can't be made out at all. And where the paper has been folded the lines have entirely crumbled away."

"Sort o' Chinese puzzle, is it?" queried Tyke dismally.

"A Spanish puzzle, anyway," smiled Drew. "I need something to help out my eyes. I wish we had some microscopes in our stock, as well as telescopes."

"We'll get the best there is in the market if necessary," declared Tyke. "But jest for the present, here is something that may fill the bill."

He reached into a drawer and brought out a reading glass that could be placed over the paper as it lay on the desk.

"The very thing!" exclaimed Drew as he applied it. "That helps a lot."

There was a tense air of expectancy over all three as he began to read. Tyke kept nervously polishing his glasses, and Captain Hamilton's hand was the least bit unsteady as it guided the pencil. Drew's voice trembled, though he tried studiously to keep it as calm as though he were reading off the items on a bill of lading in the ordinary course of business.

But if the work was exciting, it was none the less very slow. Once in a while there would be a word that was wholly outside Drew's vocabulary. In such cases the captain put it down in the original Spanish for Drew to study out later by the aid of his dictionary. Then at the points where the story seemed most important, there would be a crease in the paper that would eliminate an entire line. Other words had faded so completely that the magnifying glass failed to help.

But at last, despite all the tantalizing breaks, the final word was reached, and the captain sat back and drew a long breath while the younger man refolded the paper.

"Well now," said Tyke, "lets have it all from the first word to the last. An' Cap'n, read mighty slow."

Amid a breathless silence, Captain Hamilton commenced reading what he had taken down.

"Trinidad, March 18, 17 – .

"In the name of God, amen.

"I Ramon ... rez unworthy sin fit ... name ... lips ... knowing
... mercy ... shown none, expecting ... deepest hell
yet ... Mary ... saints ... shriving ... Holy Church ...
confess ... life.

"... wild ... Tortugas ... French ... *Reine Marguerite*
... death.

From there we ran to Port au Spain ... plundering ... city, ...
many men and boys and ... women and ... Off one of Baha ... Cays ...
galleon ... fought stoutly ... walk ... plank. Other ships ...
... forgotten. We took great spoils ... accursed ... spent ... living,

"I ... captain. Down in the Caribbean Sea we ... caravel ...
... one hundred and twenty. Lost ship in tornado ... got another.

"Many more ... weary ... telling we ... God ... man.

"At last ... ten ... butchery ... frigates ... ch ... Fled to one of the
... islands ... careened. Tired knowing ... sooner or later I made up my mind
... one more rich prize ... wickedness.

"We captured the ... Guadalquiver ... Desperate ... blood ... thousand
dobloons ... pearls ... price.

"I knew of an island off the beaten track where there was good hiding
found, night. Cutter ashore, mutiny killed them both. And there the
booty is still forbid.

"Now standing hell, I have made ... drawing island where
... buried. I give it freely ... Mother cand altar and masses
... .. unworthy soul.

his

(X) *Al*

mark

"Attest *Pablo Ximenes*, notary."

The captain laid the paper on the desk and glanced at the intent faces of his companions.
"Now, what do you make of that?" he asked.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SCOURGES OF THE SEA

Tyke's eyes were staring and his face was so apoplectic that Drew was alarmed.

"Make out of it?" Tyke spluttered, getting up and nearly overturning his chair. "I make out of it that Manuel was right when he said that the old chest held something worth more'n diamonds."

Grimshaw was so shaken out of his usual calm that Captain Hamilton, too, shared Drew's alarm.

"I tell you what we'd better do," he suggested. "We're all too much excited to discuss this thing intelligently now. We've got a whole lot to digest, and it will take time. This thing will keep. Suppose we have our young friend here take this rough draft home with him and piece out the missing parts as well as he can. In the meantime we'll all mull it over in our minds, look at it from every angle, and meet here fresh and rested to-morrow morning to decide on what we'd better do."

"I guess you're right," assented Tyke, mopping his forehead. "This old head of mine is whirling around like a top."

Tyke locked the map carefully in his safe and committed the other paper and the captain's partial transcription to his chief clerk with solemn injunctions to take the utmost care of them.

But the latter stood in no need of the admonition. He would have defended those papers with his life. They meant for him – what did they not mean?

Romance, adventure, wealth! Now at last he would have something to justify his search for Ruth Adams and his suit for her hand. Now he could frame his jewel, when he found it, in a proper setting.

The three men prepared to leave the private office. Captain Hamilton was first at the door, and he unlocked it. The instant he pulled the door open, Drew heard him ejaculate:

"Thunderation! Mr. Ditty! What are you doing here?"

"You told me to follow you here, Captain Hamilton," said a respectful voice. "They told me you were inside, and so I waited for you."

"Humph! quite right, Mr. Ditty," Captain Hamilton said hastily. Then he thrust his head back into the office. "My mate's come for me, Tyke. We've got an errand on Whitehall Street. See you to-morrow. Good night, Mr. Drew."

Both the captain and the other man had gone when Drew went out into the larger room. The remainder of that afternoon he spent in a dream.

When the day's work was over, Drew dined hastily and then shut himself in his room where he worked busily until midnight, filling in the vacant spaces in the rough draft of the confession. He was critical of his efforts, recasting and revising again and again until he was satisfied that he had caught the full meaning of the old document as far as it was humanly possible. Only then did he lay it aside – to dream of Ruth.

Drew was at the shop before his usual time the next morning, and Tyke and Captain Hamilton came in soon afterward. The three went at once into secret session, leaving the entire conduct of the chandlery business to Winters, much to the mystification of that youth.

All three were fresh and cool this morning as they buckled down to the problem they had to solve, and the wisdom of the previous night's adjournment was clearly evident.

"I got to talking this thing over with my daughter last night," said Captain Hamilton. "You'd forgotten I had a daughter, Tyke? Wait till you see her! Well, she was aboard the schooner for dinner with me, and she said: 'Daddy, if there is a real pirate's treasure, please go after it. Then you can stay ashore and not go sailing away from me any more.' So, I've a double incentive for pursuing this thing," and the captain laughed.

"Yes, that's like the women-folk," observed Grimshaw. "They're always for a man's leaving the sea."

"That isn't what made you leave it, Tyke," Captain Hamilton said slyly.

"An' it won't be women-folk that sends me back to it, neither," growled the older man. "An' now, Allen," he added, as they settled comfortably into their chairs, "how did you git along with the paper? Have you got it so that it makes sense?"

"I'll let you judge of that for yourselves," replied Drew, taking the revised draft from his pocket. "Of course, I can't say that it's exactly right. Some of the missing words and sentences I had to guess at. But it's as nearly right as I know how to make it."

He waited while Grimshaw and Captain Hamilton lighted their cigars, and then proceeded to read:

"Trinidad, March 18, 17 ...

"In the name of God, amen.

"I, Ramon Alvarez, unworthy sinner that I am and not fit to take the name of God upon my lips, and well knowing that I deserve no mercy who have ever shown none, expecting to be plunged into the deepest hell, yet basing my only hope on the Virgin Mary and the blessed saints and the shriving of Holy Church, do hereby confess the misdeeds of my life.

"From my youth up I was wild. I was with the buccaneers who, off the Tortugas, captured the French ship, *Reine Marguerite*, all of whose crew and passengers we put to death. From there we ran to Port au Spain, ravaging and plundering. We captured the city, killing most of the men and boys and carrying off the women and girls. Off one of the Bahama Cays we took a Spanish galleon, and although her people fought stoutly, we made them finally walk the plank. Other ships we captured whose names I have forgotten. We took great spoils, but the money was accursed and was soon spent in wild living.

"I myself soon became a captain. Down in the Caribbean Sea we won a caravel and killed all on board, one hundred and twenty. I lost my ship in a tornado, but soon got another.

"Many more evil deeds we did that would make me weary with the telling. We feared neither God nor man.

"At last, after ten years or more of butchery, the nations sent many frigates in chase of us. I fled to one of the islands and careened my ship. Tired, knowing I would be taken sooner or later, I made up my mind that I would capture one more rich prize and then be done with my wickedness.

"We captured the ship *Guadalquiver*. The fight was desperate and the decks ran with blood. We took ... thousand doubloons, many pearls and jewels of price.

"I knew of an island off the beaten track where there was good hiding to be found. I took the cutter one night and went ashore to bury treasure. Two men with me mutinied and I killed them both. And there the booty is still, unless it has been taken away, which God forbid.

"Now, standing mayhap on the very brink of hell, I have made this drawing of the island where the treasure is buried. I give it freely to Holy Mother Church, and beg that part be spent for candles to be burned before the altar and for masses to be said for my unworthy soul.

his

"*Ramon (X) Alvarez.*

mark

"Attest, *Pablo Ximenes*, notary."

"Good work, Allen," commended Tyke, as the reader stopped.

"Very cleverly done," added Captain Hamilton.

Drew flushed with pleasure.

"Those old fellows were well called 'the scourges of the sea,' weren't they?" he said. "Now here! There are just two things missing that it would be the merest guess-work to supply," he added. "One is the date. We know the century, but the year is absolutely rubbed out. The other is the number of doubloons captured with his last prize. That was in a crease of the paper and had crumbled away."

"Yes," replied Captain Hamilton; "but neither is so very important. Of course, the later the date, the less time there has been for any one to find the doubloons and take them away. We have the names of some of the ships that were captured though, and we might look the matter up in some French or Spanish history and so get a clue to the date.

"As to the extent of the treasure, we'll find that out for ourselves when we get it, if we ever do. And if we don't get it, the amount doesn't matter."

"It seems to be a pretty good-sized one, from the way the rascal speaks about it," remarked Tyke.

"Plenty big enough to pay for the trouble of getting it," agreed Captain Hamilton.

"Well, now that we know what the paper says, let's git right down to brass tacks," suggested Grimshaw. "In the first place, this particular pirate, Alvarez, was evidently a Spaniard. The language the paper is written in proves that."

"Not necessarily," objected the captain. "Spanish is the language spoken in Trinidad, and even if the dying man were a Frenchman or an Englishman, the notary would probably translate what he said into Spanish. Still, the first name, and probably the last, indicate Spanish birth. I guess we're pretty safe in considering that point settled."

"But I thought most of the pirates, the leaders anyway, were French or English," persisted Tyke.

"So they were," answered the captain; "but the Portuguese and Spaniards ran them a close second. As a matter of fact, those fellows acknowledged no nationality and cut the throats of their own countrymen as readily as any others. The only flag they owed any allegiance to was the skull and crossbones."

"But how comes it that this confession was made before a notary?" asked Drew. "I should think it would have been made verbally to a priest."

"Well," said the captain thoughtfully, "there are various ways of accounting for that. Alvarez may have been taken sick suddenly, and the notary may have been nearest at hand. Even if the priest had been summoned, the sick man might have feared that he would die before the priest got there and wanted to get it off his mind. He didn't seem to have much hope of heaven, from the way the paper reads."

"I don't wonder," put in Tyke, dryly.

"But whatever chance there was, he wanted to take it," finished the captain.

"I wonder how the paper ever got into Manuel's hands," pondered Tyke.

"The churches and convents seemed to suffer most in those wild days," said the captain. "They were sacked and plundered again and again. It might very well be that this paper was stolen by ignorant adventurers, and in some way got into the hands of one of Manuel's ancestors and so came down to him. Probably most of them couldn't read and had no idea of what the paper contained. Could Manuel read?" he asked, turning to Grimshaw.

"Why, yes; but rather poorly," answered Tyke.

"I've seen him sometimes in port looking over a Spanish newspaper, moving his finger slowly along each line."

"That explains it then," said the captain. "He was able to make out just enough to guess that the paper and map referred to hidden treasure, but he wasn't able to make good sense of it."

"I s'pose that was the reason he was always trying to git me interested in his pirate stories," put in Tyke. "He was kind o' feeling me out, an' if I'd showed any interest or belief in it, he'd have probably tried to git me to take a ship and go after it with him."

"Not a doubt in the world," agreed Captain Hamilton.

"Well, now we've looked at the matter of the paper from most every side," remarked Tyke; "an' I guess we're all agreed that it looks like a *bona fide* confession. We've seen, too, how it was possible for it to git into the hands of Manuel. Now let's see if we can make head or tail of the map."

He brought out the paper from his safe and the three men crowded around it. Here, after all, was the crux of the whole matter. By this they were to stand or fall. It bootied little to know merely that the doubloons were buried somewhere in the West Indies. They might as well be at the North Pole, unless they could locate their hiding place with some degree of precision.

The dark, heavily shaded part in the center of the map was evidently meant to mark the position of the island itself. Quite as surely, the light, undulating lines surrounding it were intended to show the water.

"There seems to be just one inlet," said Captain Hamilton, pointing to an indentation that bit deeply into the dark mass of the island.

"Lucky there's even one," grunted Tyke. "I've known many of those picayune islands where there was no safe anchorage at all."

The island was irregular in shape and seemed to have an elevation in the center. But what most attracted their attention were three small circles some distance in from the shore that seemed to indicate some special spot.

"There's some writing alongside of these," announced Drew, after a sharp scrutiny. "If you'll hand me the reading glass I think I can make it out."

The glass was quickly brought into use, and Drew stared at the writing hard and long.

"'The Witch's Head.' 'The Three Sisters'," he translated.

"Sounds like a suffragette colony," muttered Tyke.

But Drew was too deeply engrossed with his task to notice the play of fancy.

"Thirty-seven long paces due north from the Witch's Head.' 'Eighty-nine long paces due east from The Three Sisters,'" he went on.

"Now we're getting down to something definite!" exclaimed Captain Hamilton.

"That's all," announced Drew. "What do you suppose it means?"

"It can mean only one thing, it seems to me," said Tyke excitedly. "It's pointing to the spot where the doubloons are buried."

"Yes," agreed the captain, "I should take it to mean that if you mark off thirty-seven long paces north from the Witch's Head and eighty-nine long paces east from The Three Sisters, the spot where those paths cross would be the place to dig."

"Do you see anything on the map that would give a hint as to the latitude and longitude?" asked Grimshaw anxiously.

"No," answered Drew. "Wait a minute though," he added hastily. "Here's something that looks like figures down in the lower left hand corner. Fifty-seven ... No! Sixty-seven-three is one, and thirteen-ten is the other."

"That can only stand for longitude and latitude!" cried Tyke. "Quick, Allen, git down that Hydrographic Office chart. That'll cover it."

CHAPTER IX

GETTING DOWN TO "BRASS TACKS"

In a moment the chart was taken down from its hook and spread out on Tyke's big desk. With shaking fingers the old man found the line of longitude indicated on the pirate's map, and followed it down till he came to the thirteenth degree of latitude.

"Thirteen-ten; sixty-seven-three," he muttered. "Thirteen degrees, ten minutes latitude; sixty-seven degrees, three minutes longitude. There it is!" and he made a mark with his pencil on the chart. "Right down there in the Caribbean, west of Martinique. Glory Hallelujah!"

The old man was as frisky as a colt, and under the stimulus of excitement the years seemed to drop away from him.

Captain Hamilton was quite as delighted, though he did not give so free a rein to his emotions.

"Splendid!" he beamed. "When we can actually get down to figures, it begins to look like business. Of course, there are innumerable small islands down that way. But it won't take much cruising around to try them all."

Once more he studied the shape and the size of the island, and his brows knitted almost to a scowl, so close was his concentration.

"That elevation in the middle looks something like a whale's hump," remarked Drew.

Captain Hamilton jumped as though he had been shot.

"That's it!" he cried. "By Jove! I know that island! I remember thinking that very thing about it one day some years ago when I was coming up from Maracaibo. My mate was standing by me at the time. It was just as sunset, and the island stood out plain against the sky. I remember saying to him that it looked to me just like the hump of a whale. Now we've located it sure. I'll recognize it the minute my eyes fall on it whether it's charted or not. My boy, you're a wonder. You've helped us out at every turn in this business."

"That he has," declared Tyke enthusiastically. "Neither the paper nor the map would have been any good without Allen to translate 'em. I'm proud of you, Allen."

The young man flushed with pleasure and murmured deprecatingly that it was just a bit of luck that he happened to know Spanish.

"Luck! 'Tisn't luck that makes a man dig out a foreign lingo," said Tyke. "An', anyway, you've been smart at every point with your suggestions, an' helped us out as we went along. You started things with your eagerness to look into Manuel's box an' you put the cap sheaf on when you jest now gave Cap'n Rufe that last pointer.

"An' now," Tyke went on, when they had sobered down a little, "let's get down to brass tacks. There's jest one thing that remains to be done, but it's a mighty big thing. We feel pretty sure that there is a treasure, an' we think we know where that treasure is. Now the question is, how are we going to git it?"

Drew experienced a feeling of dismay. He had been so engrossed with the preliminary work that he had hardly given a thought to the practical problem involved. He had taken it for granted that it would be easy enough to get a ship to go after the pirate's hoard.

Now with Tyke's bald statement confronting him, a host of perplexities sprang up to torment him. Where were they to get the right kind of ship? How could they escape telling the captain of that ship just where they were going and what they were going for?

But if the matter puzzled Tyke and his chief clerk, it bothered Captain Hamilton not at all. He lighted a fresh cigar, crossed his legs and smiled broadly.

"That's an easy one," he remarked. "Give me something hard."

Tyke looked at him in some surprise and Drew's face reflected his bewilderment.

"Seems to me it's hard enough," grumbled Tyke.

"What do you mean?" asked Drew quickly.

"I mean," said the captain complacently, "that we'll make this voyage in my schooner."

The two others jumped to their feet.

"Splendid!" cried Drew.

"Glory be!" ejaculated Tyke.

"The plan seems to suit you," smiled the captain.

"Suit us!" shouted Tyke. "Why, it's jest made to order. But how're you going to git the owner's permission? How do you know he'll be willing to have the ship chartered for such a cruise? An' how are we going to keep the secret from him?"

"As I happen to be the chief owner, as well as the captain, I guess we won't have any trouble on that score."

"Owner!" exclaimed Tyke, in astonishment. "I hadn't any idee that you had any int'rest in her outside of your berth as captain. You've been pretty forehanded to have got so far ahead as to own a craft like that."

"I haven't done so badly in the last few years," said the captain modestly; "and as fast as I saved money I kept buying more stock in the old girl. Mr. Parmalee encouraged that idea in his captains. He knew human nature, and knew that when a man's own money was invested in the deck under him he was going to be mighty careful of the ship's safety and would have a personal interest in seeing that she was a money maker. The old man's dead now, but his son has inherited a third interest in the *Bertha Hamilton*, while I hold the other two-thirds. I renamed her when I got control of the bonny craft. I hope some day to buy out Parmalee's share and become the sole owner."

"You're a lucky man," congratulated Tyke warmly. "It must be great when you tread the plank to feel that you're not only boss for the time being, but that you actually own her. What is she like? How big is she? And how much of a crew do you ship?"

"She's three stick, schooner rigged," replied the captain. "A hundred and fifty feet over all and carries a crew of about thirty. Oh! she's a sailing craft, Tyke. She's not afoul with steam winches and the like. And she's a beauty," he added, his eyes kindling with pride. "There are mighty few ships on this coast that she can't show a pair of heels to, and she's a sweet sailer in any weather. She stands right up into the wind's eye as steady as a church and when it comes to reaching or running free, I'd back her against anything that carries sails."

"But how about your other engagements?" suggested Grimshaw. "Is she chartered for a voyage anywhere soon?"

"That's another rare bit of luck," returned the captain. "I had an engagement to-day with Hollings & Company, who were thinking of having me take a cargo for Galveston. If I hadn't run plump into this treasure business as I did, there isn't any doubt but I would have closed with them to-day. But now it's all off. I'll see them this afternoon and tell them they'll have to get somebody else."

Tyke sat down heavily in his chair and wagged his grizzled head solemnly.

"It's beyond me," he said. "It must be meant. Here we might be weeks or months before we could git a ship that suited us, if we got it at all; but along comes Cap'n Rufe here with the very thing we want. If I was superstitious," – before his stony stare they sat unwinking – "I'd think for sure there was something in this more'n natural. It can't be, after all this, that we're going on a wild goose chase."

"Well," replied Captain Hamilton cautiously, "it may be that after all. Things certainly have worked to a charm so far, but that doesn't prove anything. 'There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip,' and this may be one of them. When all is said and done, it's a gamble. For all we know, the doubloons may have been taken away a hundred years ago, and all we'll find after we get there may be an empty hole in the ground. But 'nothing venture, nothing have'; and with all the evidence we have, I'm willing to take a chance."

"So am I!" cried Tyke heartily. "Of course, we stand to lose a tidy little sum if it should turn out to be a fluke. There's the outfitting to be done, the crew's wages to be paid, an' a lot of other expenses that'll mount up into money. But it's worth a chance, and if we lose I'm willing to stand the gaff without whining."

It goes without saying that Drew heartily echoed these sentiments in his mind, but he felt some delicacy about expressing them. After all, it was Captain Hamilton and his employer who would have to provide the funds for the expedition and stand the loss if there were any. He himself would be called on to risk nothing.

And with this thought came another with the suddenness of a stab. On what was he building his hopes for a share in the profits of the adventure? After all, he was only Tyke's employee. The very time he was spending in unraveling this mystery belonged to Tyke and was paid for by him. He felt again the weight of his chains, and the air castle he had built for Ruth's occupancy suddenly took on the iridescent colors of a bubble.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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