

Captain Pott's Minister

Francis L. Cooper

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Title: Captain Pott's Minister

Author: Francis L. Cooper

Illustrator: John Goss

Release Date: December 19, 2009 [EBook #30713]

Language: English

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“THEN, LET ME HEAR YOU SAY YOU LOVE ME!”—*Page 335.*

CAPTAIN POTT'S MINISTER

By
FRANCIS L. COOPER

ILLUSTRATED BY
JOHN GOSS

BOSTON
LOTHROP, LEE & SHEPARD CO.

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Captain Pott's Minister

Printed in U. S. A.
—

Norwood Press
BERWICK & SMITH CO.
NORWOOD, MASS.

To Betty

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CAPTAIN POTT'S MINISTER

CHAPTER I

The sound of voices suddenly arrested Captain Pott's fork in mid-air, and the morsel of untasted salt-mackerel dangled uncertainly from the points of the dingy tines as he swung about to face the open door. Fork and mackerel fell to the floor as the seaman abruptly rose and stalked outside. The stern features of the rugged old face sagged with astonishment as he blinked at the small army of men swarming over his littered yard.

"'Mornin', Cap'n," cheerily called Hank Simpson, the village storekeeper, as he approached the irate man on the stoop.

Captain Pott was so completely jarred out of his usual complacency that for once he had nothing to say. He forgot even to swear. As the significance of the movements of the intruders suddenly dawned upon him he mutely glared at Hank from beneath blackened and swollen eyelids.

"The women-folks said that you'd be wantin' to make your place look peart, bein' as the new minister is goin' to stay here with you," explained Hank, who was apparently the leader of the group. "When we men-folks heard that they was goin' to clean up on the inside we thought it wouldn't be no more than neighborly for us to pitch in and give you a hand with the outside."

It was evident that the Captain did not relish the explanation, for he bristled with dangerous hostility as he took a step forward. But before he could refer Hank Simpson and his entire male army to a certain warm climate where he thought they might go with mutual advantage to himself and them, the morning breeze carried within earshot another note, higher in the scale, but unmistakable in significance. Silently the old man stood and dumbly watched a procession of petticoats march up to his gate and turn into the cinder path.

The female army took possession of the house even as the men had taken possession of the yard, and he who had commanded mutinous crews on the briny deep fled and took refuge in the shade of a spreading elm near the well. Mrs. Eadie Beaver, the Captain's next-door neighbor, approached him, requested that he pitch in and help, and then as quickly beat a retreat before the fierce glare.

Hank Simpson once asked where they might burn the accumulated trash. The answer was unsatisfactory though forceful. Hank declared, "Them instructions is wuth a heap, Cap'n, but unless you've got a trap-door to them parts hereabout, I reckon we'll have to do the crematin' some other way."

All the shutters on the old house were thrown wide open, and sunshine and air were allowed to penetrate corners where dust and cobwebs had held undisputed sway for years. Through the open windows came the sound of tack-hammer and puller, the moving of tables, sideboards, and chairs, and of every other article of furniture that was not actually built into the walls. From his place beneath the elm the Captain heard all these sounds, and watched his old pieces being piled in a confused mass about the front yard. He was smoking incessantly, and swearing no less frequently.

From up the road came the sharp thud of beating hoofs. As horse and rider came into view he deliberately turned in the opposite direction. At the gate the rider drew rein and swung lithely to the ground. Many young admirers gathered quickly about the hitching-post, but the girl was too swift for them. With a friendly nod and smile she tossed her reins to a bashful youngster, and tripped up the path to where the seaman was standing.

The daughter of the senior Elder of the Little River church had always been fond of Captain Pott. When but an infant she had looked up into the clear blue eyes, adoration and love in her own. During childhood she had sat contentedly on his knee, or on a stool at his feet, listening with rapt interest to his stories of adventure by land and sea. The Captain had never been able to spin the wild yarns commonly known to be his habit when Elizabeth Fox was his only audience. This was not due to any fear that she would have detected fraud in his impossible tales, but to the fact that he could not lie when the gaze of her big blue eyes was fastened on him.

To-day she edged near and waited for recognition. Locks of her fair hair, shaken loose by her ride, went straying bewitchingly over her face and forehead. The smile in her eyes crept down to the corners of her mouth as she sought the averted face above her. But all she could glimpse were violent motions of one ragged point of his moustache as it kept imperfect time with the unseen end which was being viciously chewed.

At length, the irresistible little attraction at his side proved too strong for the Captain's stubbornness, and he looked down into her big blue eyes. At sight of his own blackened and swollen lids Elizabeth uttered a sharp cry. She took the

roughened hand in hers and gave it a gentle squeeze. But her deep concern was quickly followed by a ripple of laughter. Hers was a laugh that was as good to see as to hear. The Captain smiled a wholly unintentional smile and returned the pressure of her hand.

“Dear me, Uncle Josiah!” she exclaimed. “You look so like a terrible old storm-cloud! And those awful eyes! Where on earth did you get them?”

“Cal’late I feel a heap sight worse than I look, Beth. That set of females——”

“But your black eyes!” she interrupted. “Who made them like that? Has some one been fighting you?”

“A feller handed ’em out to me last night, and I didn’t happen to be in a position to refuse ’em,” he replied, his grisly weather-browed features lighting up with a wry smile.

“Who dared strike you like that!”

“Now, don’t you worry, Beth. It ain’t as bad as it looks. You see, I was on my way over from the station last night from the late city train. When I got to the top of the hill I sot down for a spell, and while I was thinking, I looked down on my place. I see a light in the pantry window flicker up, die down, and then settle into a steady glow. I cal’lated it must be pirates aboard the old craft, so I tore down the hill like blazes and busted into the house. Something struck me like a ton of brick, and I went down. I never see so many stars in all my life. The next thing I heard was a voice asking if I was hurt, and saying, ‘You’ll pardon me, sir.’” He chuckled with his first sign of mirth. “When I got my senses back there was a big feller sitting on me, nearly choking off my wind. He brung out one of them lightning-bug flashlights and turned it full on me, and then shouted like a maniac, ‘Why, it’s Cap’n Pott!’ ‘That’s me, but who in hell be you?’ I’m telling you just as I said it. He told me his name was Mack McGowan. Well, I was real glad to see him till he told me he was the new preacher and was going to live with me. Eadie Beaver had put him up in my house a week ago. I was mad as hops when he told me that, and I was going to throw him out, but,”—again he chuckled,—“well, I didn’t.”

“You thought caution was the better part of valor, is that it?” questioned Elizabeth.

“Something like that, Beth. I cal’late we’d best say nothing to a soul about this. There’d be some who wouldn’t understand the details of the transaction. It was sort of confidential, as you might say, and there’d be them who’d blame Mr.

McGowan for what he wa'n't exactly responsible for."

"Oh! Can't I tell it? It's really too good to keep. And then," she added seriously, "people might think you have been really fighting. Don't you think it would be best to tell what actually happened?"

"Mighty little any of them would care how I got my shine. But I cal'late it would be best for the parson if we'd keep it quiet."

"Very well, Uncle Josiah. He is really going to live with you, isn't he?"

"Don't that look like it?" he asked, pointing his pipe-stem toward the house.

"But that is for you, too."

"For me? You'd see that set of females getting down on their prayer-bones for an old sinner like me, except to ask God A'mighty to strike me dead. I ain't that popular, not yet."

"Captain Pott, I don't like that one bit! I canceled all my engagements in the city when Father told me the other day what the ladies of the church were planning to do for you. I did it just to help you, and now——"

"There, there, Beth." The old man reached out and touched her arm. "Excuse me, Beth. I feel like a cantankerous old sore-headed bear this morning. Of course, you come home to help me. I didn't mean to hurt your feelings."

"They mean well, too," she loyally defended her neighbors.

"It was awful nice of you," he replied, ignoring her reference to those at work in the house. "It's worth it to put up with that whole pack inside just to have you come."

"There, now, I have my good old Uncle back again." She had always called him Uncle. "But tell me, why do you feel so badly?"

"About them in there?" He jerked his thumb toward the house.

"No-o. I think I can understand your feelings about them. I feel the same way sometimes. If I were the minister it would take all of my religion during the week so I'd have nothing to preach on Sunday. But, there! Father must never hear of my saying that."

"He ain't likely to hear it from me."

"Have you quarreled with Father again?" She stared apprehensively.

Denial sprang to the Captain's lips, but when he looked into her eyes and saw

there the expression of eagerness, he turned away.

“You have!” she averred. “I thought so! And after Father was so kind as to let you have the money to repair and paint your house!”

“Beth, we ain’t exactly quarreled. Leastwise, he ain’t,” he finished lamely.

“Uncle Josiah, why will you and Father never understand each other? Father is so kind and good, and so are you, and yet you are never able to agree. Why is it?” she implored.

“Too much alike, I cal’late. But honest, Beth, I ain’t got nothing particular against your father, and if I had I’d sink my feelings to Davy’s locker for your sake. The trouble is, I’ve been expecting too much, and I ain’t got any right to ask your father to put himself out for an old hulk like me.”

“What sheer nonsense! I’ve half a mind to scold you. Of course, Father is willing to put himself out for you. Only this morning he said he would do all in his power to get a ship for you to command.”

“He’s said something like that to me, too, several times.”

“Then he’ll do it, if you will only be patient. Father always keeps his word.”

“You ain’t seen the new parson yet, have you?” asked the seaman, anxious to change a dangerous subject.

“How could I, when I’ve just reached home? Father tells me he is a real Prince Charming,” she finished, with a wicked little laugh.

“Humph!”

“Is he, really, Uncle Josiah?”

“He ain’t so bad on looks, if that’s what you’re driving at.”

“Father says he must be very strong, too.”

“I cal’late he ain’t lacking on that p’int, neither,” agreed the Captain, blinking his swollen eyelids.

Elizabeth laughed heartily.

“Oh! By the way, what did you and your handsome minister do to Father last night?”

“Is your pa ailing, too?”

“He says he is quite lame, and when I asked him what the matter was, he only

smiled, and told me to find out from you. Did your minister take him for a burglar, too?"

"Is that all your father said about it?"

"Yes, except that it was his own fault."

Captain Pott chuckled. "I feared he wa'n't going to see it that way last night. Eadie Beaver put the parson in here while I was in the city on a special trip. She came over the day I left last week, and said it would be real nice if he could live with me and eat with her. I told her I'd see about shipping a parson in my house, meaning I'd have nothing to do with him. Well, she went ahead and bunked him here, thinking I'd meant it was all right. It 'pears she done it against your father's ideas, too. So he come over last night and tried to get Mr. McGowan to move out. That made me madder than what Eadie had done, so I asked him right then if he was willing to stay. He said he was. Your pa got sore, and started real dignified to go home. The candle that Mr. McGowan had been using was on the floor, and your pa's heel hit it. His cane went up and he went down. His high hat took a swim in a bucket of soapy water that the parson had been using to swab decks with."

"Father is so very dignified! It must have been quite funny," she commented, between paroxysms of laughter. "I wish I could have seen him!"

"'Twas a mite funny. I fished his beaver out the pail, and he made off holding it away from him like it was p'ison."

Sudden seriousness on the part of the girl caused the Captain to look in the direction of her gaze. A tall young man had emerged from the back door of the house, pail in hand. He came hurriedly toward the well.

"That's him," confirmed the seaman in answer to a look from Elizabeth.

"He? A minister?"

"You see now why I wa'n't strong enough to throw him out, don't you? I cal'late Eadie Beaver would say the Lord took my strength away, but the Lord don't need to give that feller a hand. He's a hull host to himself."

"He doesn't look in the least like one," declared Elizabeth.

"He doesn't? Why, his arm is as big——"

"No, no! I mean he doesn't look like a minister."

"He ain't like none I ever see. He used to ship with me during the summer

months when he was in school, and he's man clean to the ground. I can't see why in tarnation a big feller like him wants to take up such a sissy's job of piloting a lot of women to heaven."

"But it isn't that kind of work, unless one makes it such," she defended.

Mr. McGowan came to a halt on the opposite edge of the well-curbing. It was very unladylike, and Elizabeth knew it, but in spite of herself she continued to stare.

"Let me interduce you," suggested the Captain.

"Thank you, I'd better run along and help those in the house."

But she failed to suit the action to the word, and for the simple reason that the gaze of two perfectly normal young people became normally entangled. At length, a flood of color crept slowly into the girl's cheeks, and she smiled.

"I—I beg your pardon for—" began the minister.

"Here, young feller," cut in the Captain as Mr. McGowan turned away, "I want to interduce you to my best friend, Miss Elizabeth Fox. This here is the new minister, Beth, Mack McGowan."

Elizabeth cordially extended her hand. "I've been hearing very interesting stories about your prowess, Mr. McGowan."

"I trust they are true."

"Indeed, they are. Captain Pott told me."

"I did make quite an impression on him," replied Mr. McGowan as he looked at the seaman's swollen eyelids. "I fear you've heard prejudiced accounts of me."

"I don't like them that way one bit," laughed Elizabeth, "even if a clergyman did do it."

"See here! I ain't going to stand this insinuating any longer," interposed the Captain, his good humor fully restored. "I cal'late they might want a hand to help swab decks, so I'll be going."

"But, Uncle Josiah,—"

"I know, Beth. I've been unpleasant, but being as you have come from the city to help me clean up the old craft, I'd otter show my appreciation by bossing the crew."

He seized the pail from the not unwilling minister, filled it from the well-bucket,

and went to the kitchen to report for duty.

“Do you think you’ll like Little River well enough to wish to remain?” asked Elizabeth.

“Yes, I think I shall. Mr. Simpson has been telling me about your brother, and about his far-sightedness in organizing the Athletic Club.”

“Did Mr. Simpson tell you how the club came to be formed in the first place?”

“No, but I think it a splendid idea. I hope the boys will let me be one of them.”

She eyed him curiously. “Father sees no good in the organization. I do. Most of the boys are Harold’s friends,—Harold is my brother,—but there are some who are not friendly to any one except the Innkeeper. I think you ought to know that the decent ones were one time in the Sunday school, but because some of your church members would not try to understand them, they were forced to go to the Inn to set up their gymnasium.”

“Isn’t the Inn as good a place as any?”

“I prefer not to say. You’ll doubtless find that out for yourself.”

“That is one thing I intend to find out. I’ve an invitation to visit the rooms.”

“Indeed, so soon? And do you really mean to go?”

“Certainly. Why not?”

“I suppose there is no reason why you should not. But——” she paused.

“I’ve heard that sort of statement several times to-day, and invariably with the little ‘but’ at the end. I’m curious to know why my presence at the Inn will cause any disturbance. Is that the inference?”

“Other ministers have tried to get hold of the boys, but they went at it wrong, and failed,” she said.

“I’ll try to go at the matter from the right end,” he replied, smiling.

“Will you go if you find yourself opposed?”

“I think I can interest the boys sufficiently to overcome any opposition from the Innkeeper, if that is what you mean.”

“What if the opposition comes from other sources?”

“From the members of the church?”

“Yes.”

“Why should they interfere with me?”

“But suppose they do?”

“I’ll go, anyway,” he answered decidedly.

“I’m glad to hear you say that, and I trust you will be able to help the members of the club,” she said quietly. “But, there! I really must be going. The ladies will think I have deserted them.”

Elizabeth smiled, and the minister followed the smile down from her eyes to the corners of her mouth. He made the mental observation that he had never seen a more beautiful face. As she ran lightly up the path, he watched her, unmindful of several pairs of observing eyes focused knowingly in his direction.

When the day was over, and the furniture restored where the greater part belonged, the “Cleaning Bee” gradually broke up. Captain Pott declared to Elizabeth: “It wa’n’t half so bad a day as I cal’lated it would be, and it’s many a year since the old craft has looked so neat and togged up.”

That evening the Captain sat on his back doorstep, smoking his pipe, and thinking. He thought about the transformation wrought by the hand of women inside the house. He heaved a sigh, and thought of Clemmie Pipkin. If she were only able to forget all the past and consent to his oft-repeated proposal, but— He had thought that all out before, and had brought all his persuasive powers against the citadel of her heart, but to no avail. A new light dawned upon him. Perhaps—

Mr. McGowan came round the corner of the house. The Captain rose to meet him.

“Mack, how’d you like to go out to the *Jennie P.* with me? That’s the name of my power-boat out there in the harbor. I thought it might be sort of restful to take a little cruise after this house-cleaning typhoon.”

“That’s a splendid idea, Cap’n. It will seem like old times to get aboard a vessel with you, though it is only a power-boat.”

“And, Mack, if there’s any time I can step in and help you pilot the salvation craft you’ve signed up with, just you let me know. It ain’t likely I’ll be much good to you, but—”

The two men gripped hands. Little did they know that night as they peacefully

sailed round the inlet just what the future was to demand in the way of a fulfilment of that promise.

CHAPTER II

During the following weeks Mr. McGowan continued to grow in favor with the people of the church and village. Every Sunday the little chapel was crowded. His sermons, practical in thought, simple in language, and direct in delivery, were discussed about the tables of the country folk during Sunday dinner. The boys of the Athletic Club had received him cordially, not only because of his athletic ability, but because he had proved himself a good fellow. Elder Fox had strenuously opposed intimate relationships between the club and former ministers, but he made no attempt to interfere with Mr. McGowan, although he remained skeptical as to the wisdom of such secular tendencies. Sim Hicks, the keeper of the Inn, did not like the minister, and declared he would oust him from the community if it were the last act of his life.

The one man who responded most naturally, whole-heartedly, and with simple loyalty to the power of the young man's personality was Captain Josiah Pott. These two became close companions, and one evening Mrs. Eadie Beaver remarked concerning it:

"Ain't you glad I got him in with you, Josiah?"

"Cal'late I am, Eadie. I was mad at first, but it's beginning to mean a heap to me to have him here."

"You always seemed so lonely when you'd come home, and I'd see your light in the setting-room window. It don't seem that way now when I look across."

"It is real nice and homelike having him in the house."

"I'm glad it's different for you," declared his next-door neighbor as she looked about the room. "Things look real trim since the painters got through."

The seaman's face clouded. "It took a sight more than I thought it would, though, and it ain't going to be easy to pay back to Jim what I borrowed to do the repairing with."

"Now, don't you go to crossing any bridges till you get to 'em. The Lord will

provide when the time comes.”

“Cal’late He might, but I’ve always noticed that it’s safer to help Him a mite on the perviding question.”

“Well, ain’t you helping? You’re doing the janitor work at the church, and that helps some. And, then, you’ll get a ship one of these days, mark my word. Mr. Fox said as much to Harry just the other day.”

“I ain’t so sure of that, Eadie,” remarked the Captain doubtfully. It was reasonably clear to his mind that the Elder had a fish to fry in thus starting reports of his willingness to secure a command for the Captain, and it was also reasonably clear that sooner or later he would catch a whiff of the frying fat which would indicate the breed of that fish. Till then, the Captain must be content to wait.

“By the way, Josiah, have you heard that the day has been all set for the installation service?” asked Mrs. Beaver. “Mr. Fox is arranging it, and it’s going to be a great time.”

“What are they aiming to do?”

“Why, don’t you know? An installation service is a meeting where all the ministers of other towns come in and say nice things about our minister. Elder Fox says this one will be a special one, because some one has said that Mr. McGowan ain’t sound in church doctrine, being as he graduated from what is called a ‘New Theology’ school. Mr. Fox says he’s going to prove that ain’t so.”

“What’s all that got to do with him being a man?”

“I guess it ain’t got much to do with that. But you know there is a difference between being just a man and being a real minister.”

The Captain looked at her oddly. “And they’re planning to change him from one to the other, is that the idea?”

“No-o, not that exactly. But Mr. Fox thinks it would be a good time to show all the people that Mr. McGowan is orthodox. There will be ministers here from everywhere. The Reverend Mr. Means is coming out from New York.”

“If they’re all like that feller, they’ll be a hot lot.”

“Josiah Pott! Haven’t you any respect for the cloth?”

“Not for the kind he wears, I ain’t. I’d say his cloth is a sort of sheep’s clothing, same as the Bible speaks of.”

“If you can’t talk decent I sha’n’t stay,” said Mrs. Beaver. She bridled past him, and on into her own yard.

What Mrs. Beaver had said concerning plans for the installation service was true. Elder Fox was carrying the full responsibility, for he wished to make this meeting one long to be remembered. He selected with great care those who were to sit on the council. The Reverend Mr. Means had been chosen for two reasons, first that he was a personal friend of the Elder, and second because his presence would add dignity to the occasion. It was even arranged that the city clergyman should be made moderator.

The eventful day arrived, and with it dignitaries of city and countryside. It was a fearfully hot humid day in July, one of those days when to move about was torment, and to work was torture. Not a breath of air stirred. The clergymen were plainly enervated as they descended from the various vehicles which had conveyed them over from Little River. The Reverend Mr. Means mopped his face as the chauffeur assisted him from the Elder’s limousine. He greeted every one with deep sonorous tones. His manner was graciously condescending, but never once familiar. He made his way up the steps of the chapel with what was evidently meant for a majestic stride, but his heavy frame turned it into a decided waddle. He shook hands with a chosen few, all the while looking far above their heads as though his vision were not of this world.

The Captain watched the clergyman till he had disappeared behind the vestibule doors, and then remarked to Mrs. Beaver, “Them kind ain’t hard to sight. I could sight that feller a mile in the offin’, on a dark night, with my eyes shut! If Mack McGowan was that kind, he’d get to stay here about twenty-four hours, and then he’d smell fire and brimstone.”

Mrs. Beaver surprised the seaman with a wry smile and vigorous nod.

Mr. McGowan arrived in due season under tow of the Elder. Mr. Fox led him before the clergyman from the city, who was lounging near an open window in the front of the auditorium.

“How do you do, Brother Fox!” boomed the deep voice of Mr. Means. “And is this the fortunate young man who has been called to this delightful little town?”

“Yes, this is Mr. McGowan. Mr. McGowan, this is the Reverend Mr. Means from New York City.”

The studied dignity of the visiting clergyman seemed to receive a decided shock as he rolled up out of his chair. He stood before the candidate to whom the Elder

had introduced him and forgot to look at the ceiling. He had been caught off his guard, and through the momentary look of recognition there flitted across his flabby features an expression that was far from ecclesiastical. But it was gone as quickly as it had come, and the Reverend Mr. Means was once more his complacent unperturbed self.

“Ho! So this is our candidate? So!” he exploded. “I am glad, Mr. McGowan, to shake your hand, and perhaps we’d better do it now, for we might not so desire when the grilling is over. So!” He laughed vociferously at his rude joke, and offered his fish-like palm.

“I’m glad to see you again,” lied the candidate, cheerfully.

“Again?” echoed the man, his mirth suddenly controlled by well-feigned astonishment. “Again?”

“Have you so soon forgotten how strongly you opposed me last year when I was up before the New York Presbytery for ordination?”

“So? Really so? Ah! Yes. I do remember, now that you call it to mind. That probably accounts for the familiarity of your face. But I did not oppose you for personal reasons, I assure you. It was because of your radical theological beliefs. I do not allow personal reasons to enter into my religious activities.”

“But why should you have personal reasons for not wishing to see me ordained?”

“Just so! Just so! I did not mean to say I had any. But, as you doubtless remember, my brethren overruled my objections, and although I greatly regret the theological laxity of our Presbytery, I am willing to abide by the decision of the majority. So!”

He dismissed the two men with a wide gesture, and dropped back into his chair. When Mr. Fox and his charge were out of sight, Mr. Means motioned to Mr. Harry Beaver. He whispered in the little man’s ear, and indicated the groups of ministers gathered here and there about the room.

Harry Beaver had the misfortune to stutter, and in his eagerness to make himself understood he would support himself, stork-like, on one leg, and pump the other up and down with frantic jerks. Mr. Beaver’s services were invaluable in such cases as this when gossip was to be repeated, for his stuttering compelled him to leave just enough unsaid to make his news the more startling. He was seen slowly pumping his way from group to group, and there followed in his wake the buzz of low whisperings.

When Elder Fox later saw these signs, he was greatly perturbed. He went directly to the Reverend Mr. Means and demanded particulars. On hearing what the clergymen had to say, the Elder declared that this was neither the time nor the place to air theological differences. The city clergyman leaned forward to whisper a further explanation, but was interrupted by Mr. Beaver, who announced that he had finished his task. Mr. Means looked at his watch, declared it was time to open the session, and rapped sharply for order.

Minor matters of business were quickly dispatched, and Mr. Means—according to the prearranged plan—was duly elected moderator.

“Brethren and sisters,” he roared in his most effective tones, “we now come to the most important, and, I hope, the most delightful part of this program. We are to be favored with a statement from the Reverend Mr. McGowan, who is the candidate for installation as pastor of this very beautiful church. The members of the council will be given an opportunity to question Mr. McGowan after he has read to us his statement. A word of caution needs to be uttered: you are to confine your questions to theological matters as they may affect the fellowship of the ministers and churches represented to-day by pastor and delegate. Mr. McGowan will please come forward.”

Mr. McGowan came forward in more ways than one. He concisely stated his belief in applied Christianity, and followed with a program for future work in the village. His short statement left the council under the spell of an embarrassed silence. But the first question broke the silence, and was followed by others both new and old, which were hurled at the head of the candidate like shots from a rapid-fire gun.

Captain Pott stood the fusillade as long as his patience permitted, and then retreated to the quiet of the out-of-doors, where he dragged a box into the shade of the building, and lit his pipe. Here Elizabeth Fox found him, when she, too, felt the need of a little fresh air.

“Uncle Josiah, did you ever hear anything so ridiculous? Why did you come out here?”

“I felt sort as if I was coming up into a reg’lar twister, and thought it would be safer to reef a mite and make for ca’m waters. My head begun to whirl, and I cal’lated I’d best weigh anchor while my soundings was good.”

“But isn’t it bad form for you to desert like this?” she asked, her big eyes dancing mischievously.

“I ain’t exactly deserting, I cal’late. If I’d been able to pitch into that crew and shake the devil out of ’em, I’d stayed on deck. But——”

“I want you to go back with me. It’s getting too funny to miss!”

“I ain’t got much hankering for them officers’ meeting, Beth. It makes me feel like busting chairs on their heads.”

“But you must go back! You should hear what he is saying to them. Come!”

Before the seaman could obey the summons, Miss Edna Splinter emerged from the rear door. She hurried toward the two. Miss Splinter was one of those fine spinsters which one so often finds stranded in small villages located near large cities. She was one of the few friends of the Captain in Little River.

“It’s the most disgusting thing I ever saw or heard!” declared Miss Splinter, angrily stamping her foot.

“It’s really too funny for words!” exclaimed Elizabeth.

“What in tarnation is he doing to them?”

“Doing to them!” flashed Miss Splinter indignantly. “My word! It’s what they’re trying to do to him. It is positively disgraceful.”

The seaman decided that a scene which could have such opposite effects on two of his best friends must at least be interesting. He knocked the tobacco from his pipe and followed them inside. As he listened, his interest grew, not so much in the ecclesiastical storm of big words, as in the wildly gesticulating clergymen. The moderator had risen and was rapping loudly for order.

“Brethren!” he thundered. “It is time that we recognize some of our laymen. I see Mr. Harry Beaver of this church asking for the floor. Mr. Beaver may speak.”

“M-Mr. Ch-chairman, does M-Mr. Mc-McGowan b-believe in e-ev——”

The unfortunate man blinked, backed, pumped, emitted a series of hissing sounds like escaping steam, but remained hopelessly stuck. Those round him dodged his foot gestures, and smiled appreciatively, while those not engaged in trying to escape mutilation of corns, encouragingly suggested words such as everlasting, everpresent, etc., which might have bearing on the subject previously under discussion. The little man spurned them all with vigorous backings and increased hissings. At last, between a discouraged hiss and a triumphant sputter, the awful word rolled out.

“Evolution!” he shouted, and sat down.

After the laughter had subsided, the moderator demanded that the candidate answer the question.

“Yes, Mr. Moderator.”

Mr. Means was on his feet in an incredibly short time for one so bulky. “Then, you deny here in the face of these wise men, as you did before your superiors in the New York Presbytery, the creation story of the Bible?”

“I did not deny it then, and I do not deny it now.”

“Brethren, we have the right to an explanation from our young brother. I was denied that privilege at the time of his ordination. But I consider his contradictory statements so serious a thing that I shall give you the opportunity that was denied me.”

Elder Fox, plainly nettled by the turn affairs had taken, rose and demanded the floor.

“Brother Fox!” vociferously acknowledged the moderator.

“We have no right to carry this senseless discussion further. There has not yet been sounded—er—the note of fellowship that should prevail among the brethren,” declared the Elder, eyeing the chairman. Very gently stroking his side-whiskers, he continued: “We have sprung at our young friend—er—as if he were before a jury, condemned and found guilty of a felony. Why should we trouble him about things that are not fundamental to our faith?”

Captain Pott muttered something under his breath. Never before had he known of the Elder and the city minister disagreeing.

“That is the very question,” expostulated the moderator. “Mr. McGowan has attacked every sacred doctrine of the church, for he has said what is equivalent to the statement that my ancestors were monkeys. What other interpretation can be given to the doctrine of evolution? If it does not contradict every sacred belief of our past, then I am no theologian.”

The old seaman chuckled, and several shocked faces were turned in his direction.

“Perhaps it would help if Mr. McGowan would tell us just what he does believe in regard to the book of Genesis,” suggested Mr. Fox.

“It is the story of human redemption.”

With a nod of satisfied approval, the Elder sat down, and the moderator

crumpled up.

Captain Pott irreverently observed to Elizabeth: "I cal'late that there Means is left for once with his sails flopping, without no idea as to what his longitude is."

A little wizened-looking man smiled cordially and addressed the chair, but the "chair" seemed oblivious to all about him.

"Should not the ministry of to-day place greater emphasis on the philosophy of life than upon time-worn theology that has come to us from the middle ages?" asked the man.

"We should preach both where they affect life; neither where they do not," was the quick response.

"I am an instructor in philosophy in the high school over at Marble Point, and I was led by your last reply concerning your belief in the book of Genesis to believe you are somewhat of a philosopher. Do you not think that philosophy will touch life more quickly than theology?"

"Religion is something that has outgrown both the classroom and the cloister. It is the anonymous religion that we must take into account in the future if the church is to progress with the needs of men."

It was the voice of the Captain who broke the silence of surprise which followed the unusual statement.

"I want to know!" came the seaman's exclamation in a hoarse stage whisper.

Every face in the room seemed to register the same question. Mr. McGowan smiled and explained.

"By anonymous religion I mean every ideal striving for the right and truth, wherever it is found, and by whatever name it may be known. It may be found outside the church as readily as within it. Wherever good is found, the church should make use of it, whether it is counted orthodox or not."

First one, and then another, was on his feet, till the moderator was powerless to moderate. Some exclaimed for, and others declaimed against, the candidate. Still others fired broadside after broadside into all present.

"It ain't much like a heavenly craft, that there ark, now, is it?" queried the Captain of his two friends. "Smells more like brimstone round these parts than it does like heavenly ozone."

Mr. Fox assumed command, and under his steady hand and head the spiritual

elements began slowly to calm.

“In all my life,” he lamented, “I have never seen such proceedings in the house of God. The parish committee arranged this meeting—er—for the purpose of fellowship, and you have seen fit to make of it child’s play. It is time for us to recognize that Mr. McGowan is big enough, and broad enough, to supply the needs of a community like this. The very fact that he has not satisfied each of your unreasonable demands is evidence that he is competent to meet all of them, if we give him time. I make the motion—er,—Mr. Moderator, that we proceed with the installation of the candidate without further delay or discussion.”

The motion was seconded, and put to a vote. There were only a few who had the temerity to register themselves as negative in the face of what the leading layman had said. Elder Fox suggested that the vote be made unanimous.

“Brethren,” protested the Reverend Mr. Means, slowly rising from the depths of the easy chair, “before that vote is taken to make the will of this council unanimous, I wish to have it fully understood that I am opposed, bitterly opposed, to the calling of unorthodox men to our pulpits. It is atrocious, and I shall wash my hands of the whole affair. I regret very much that our beloved Brother Fox has forced me to disagree with him, and if he is of the same opinion still, I shall have to ask him to take the chair while the vote he has called for is being registered.”

Mr. Fox took the chair, and the motion passed without one dissenting voice. Adjournment to the kitchen parlors followed, and when that vote was taken the voice of him who had washed his hands of the action of the council was heard booming an affirmative near the Captain’s ear.

The bounteous provisions warmed heart and stomach, and that fact, together with some persuasion from Elder Fox, led the city minister to the decision that he would lose nothing if he remained to deliver his prepared address. And he did himself proudly. Even Captain Pott could find no fault with the impassioned words of the speaker. He was heard to remark, however, “Them there things he said wa’n’t what was inside by a damn sight, but just smeared on like honey.”

It was late that night when the Captain reached home after closing the church building. The minister was in his study, and the old man tapped lightly on the door.

“Won’t be disturbing your peaceful meditations about that meeting if I come in for a spell, will I?”

Assured he would not, he entered. He took a chair on the opposite side of the table and drew out his pipe.

“There ain’t no wind so fierce that it don’t blow you some good,” he philosophized, as with deliberation he scratched a match on his trouser-leg. “I’d never hoped to see Jim Fox stand up to that city feller the way he did.”

“What did you think of the whole thing, anyway, Cap’n?”

“Well, so far as I could get the drift, I’d think that there theology stuff would be purty dry picking. But it was mighty interesting the way you met up with ’em at every p’int. I was real ’feared that Jim Fox would get aboard their band-wagon when he see the way things was going against you.”

The minister nodded.

“And the way the Means feller washed his hands! Wa’n’t that good as a show, and then getting up and preaching like Gabriel afterward? Mack, you ain’t got no idea what he made me think of, have you?”

“Not in the least. What?”

“I heard a preacher tell a yarn once about a pilot washing his hands in hell. It struck me queer about there being a river in hell. If it’s as hot down there as I’ve heard it described, you’d think the surroundings would sizzle her up. But that’s what the preacher said about this pilot, whose last name I rec’lect was Pontyhouse. His stay was to be purty tolerable long with his Satanic majesty. I’ve always felt sorry for that chap, seemed kind of lonely, but as I figger it out he’s going to have company one of these hot days.”

Mr. McGowan looked up.

“You just bet he is. I knew that Means chap afore he took to religion, and if he’s slated for heavenly bliss I’m going to put in my papers for the other place, alongside the scrubbing pilot.”

“You mean——”

“I mean that one of us is going to keep that feller company in hell. Beyond that you’ll have to guess,” said the Captain, rising. “Only don’t you tie too tight to Means, that’s all. Good night, I’m going to turn in.”

“All right, Cap’n, I’ll promise,” replied Mr. McGowan, smiling appreciatively.

“You’d best go to bed, too, Mack. You’re mighty tired.”

But the minister did not follow his friend’s advice about retiring. He sat at his

desk. The angry men of the afternoon slowly faded from his thoughts, and into the center of his consciousness came the vision of the loveliest face he had ever seen. He recalled the words of frank approval with which Miss Fox had met him after the evening service, and the cordial manner she had shown. Not that he was in love with one of the members of his church. That would never do. But there was something different about the Elder's daughter, something which appealed to his sense of the beautiful. This, he told himself, he could enjoy without overstepping the conventions.

The next day he was to dine at the Fox home.

CHAPTER III

On the following evening, just as early as the rules of propriety would permit, Mr. McGowan turned into the private road that led up to the Fox estate. He walked slowly along the wide avenue beneath the spreading elms and stately chestnuts. He had dined with the Elder many times during the few months he had been in the village, but on those other occasions Elizabeth had been absent. The house had always seemed cold and forbidding both outside and inside. As he came out of the shaded roadway into the sweeping semicircle described before the main entrance to the house, he caught himself wondering if the stiff interior would seem softened by the presence of the girl. He began at once to chide himself for entertaining such a sentimental notion, but before he could finish the rebuke the door swung back, and Elizabeth Fox stood in the opening. She was dressed in a simple blue frock of clinging stuff, which set off the perfect lines of her athletic body. The blue of her eyes took on a deeper hue as though to harmonize with the shade of her gown.

“Good evening, Mr. McGowan. We are so glad you could come. Father will be right down.”

The minister's emotions played leap-frog with his heart, and he stumbled awkwardly on the upper step. He made some stupidly obvious observation concerning the condition of the weather as he followed his hostess into the library. He realized that he was acting strangely for one who had reached the supposedly practical view of life where all sentiment is barred from social intercourse with the fair sex, but he also realized that he was powerless to check the surge of what he now felt within. With kaleidoscopic rapidity there flashed through his mind every occasion when he had been with Miss Fox, from the first meeting beneath the elm-tree in the Captain's yard to the present time, and he recognized what it was that had sent scurrying his practical views of life. He was in love, not with the beauty of this girl, but with her. That love had come like the opening strains of a grand symphony, subtly and gently disturbing his emotional equilibrium, but with accumulative effect the transitions had come with the passing weeks, till now every interest in his life seemed to be pouring out into

the one emotion he felt.

Elizabeth had preceded him into the library, and was standing motionless before the mantel. She became suddenly aware of what was going on within the mind of Mr. McGowan, and a shy embarrassment crept into her eyes.

Simultaneously, an unreasoning determination took possession of the minister. Unconsciously, he began to move in her direction, unmindful of the sound of footfalls on the stair. Only one step remained between Mr. McGowan and Elizabeth when Elder Fox entered the room.

“I trust I’m not intruding——”

The Elder began nervously to stroke his chops. His breath came heavily, shutting off his words. A hunted look leaped into his eyes as he studied the tense face of the eager young man. Could it be possible that the fears of the Reverend Mr. Means—privately made known to the Elder after the installation service—had foundation in fact? Or had the suggestion of Mr. Means lodged in the Elder’s mind, playing havoc with his imagination?

Mr. McGowan drew off to the far end of the mantel, and began, figuratively, to kick himself. He had often declared that a man in love was the biggest mule on earth, and now here he was, the king of them all, a genuine descendant of Balaam’s mount with all his asinine qualities, but lacking his common mule sense.

“I—I beg your pardon,” he stammered.

“There is no occasion for excuses,” graciously replied the girl. “Father, Mr. McGowan and I were——” She paused, blushing in confusion. “Really, Mr. McGowan, what were we saying?”

She laughed, and it was so infectious that the men forgot to look serious, and joined with her.

“I should say—er—that you have put the matter in a very diplomatic way,” observed the Elder, apparently once more himself. “No explanations are necessary—er—I assure you. I was once a young man, and have not forgotten that fact. I apologize, Mr. McGowan, if by my attitude I appeared—er—to misjudge you. The trouble was with me, not with you. An odd fancy momentarily got the upper hand of me, and upset me for an instant. Make yourself quite at home, sir.”

It was not long till they were called to table, and in the discussion of parish

matters the strangeness of the Elder's action was for the time being relegated to the background.

"You have doubtless heard a hundred times to-day how proud we all were of the way you answered the questions yesterday," commented the Elder enthusiastically. "You showed a fine spirit, too, sir, one—er—which some of the older men might well emulate."

"I feel greatly indebted to you, Mr. Fox, for the final outcome."

The Elder waved his hand as though lightly to brush aside such words of praise, and yet in the same movement he modestly acknowledged that without his aid the young minister could have done nothing.

"I might also add, that we are delighted with the work you are doing at the church," continued the Elder magnanimously. "It is—er—very good. Though I am still a little dubious about your associations down at the club, still—"

"Father's ambition is to have all the pews filled," broke in Elizabeth, attempting to divert her father from a delicate topic.

"No, my dear. That is hardly my position. There must never be a sacrificing of principle, even for the sake of full pews. A full church—er—is not the most important part of parish work. Am I not right, Mr. McGowan?"

"Quite right, if that is the end sought in itself."

"I am convinced from what you said yesterday that you will furnish us—er—with both. I am confidently looking forward to one of our most prosperous years."

"Both?" queried the minister.

"Yes. I am old-fashioned enough to believe in the need of—er—the saving power of the gospel. Full pews without that would make our church the sounding of brass and the tinkling of cymbal. We must have the old-time power in our churches to-day, Mr. McGowan."

"You think Little River needs reforming, Father?"

"That is exactly the point I make: it is more than reformation we need, it is conversion. Take the Athletic Club, for example. Will reform stop them? No, sir, no more than a straw-stack would stop a tornado. They need—er—a mighty thunderbolt from heaven, and I hope that you will let God use you, sir, as the transmitting agency."

A picture of himself occupying the place of Zeus, holding in his hand the lightnings of heaven, flitted through the minister's mind. He smiled faintly. Elizabeth evidently caught what was in the young man's mind, for she met his glance with a merry twinkle.

"Really, Father, don't you think Mr. McGowan would look out of place as a lightning-rod, even on Little River Church?"

"I was speaking figuratively, my dear," he replied, somewhat crestfallen that his reference should be thus irreverently treated. "The boys in that club are a reckless lot, and they are doing the work—er—of the devil. They must be brought to repentance."

"I don't think that is fair, Father. The church is not wholly without blame for what those boys have done," declared Elizabeth emphatically. "What did we do to keep them from going out and organizing as they have?"

"No doubt we did make mistakes in the beginning, but our errors do not atone for their sins."

"But, Father——"

"There, Beth, never mind. We can never agree on that point, and we should not entangle Mr. McGowan in our differences. I only hope he will do all in his power to make them see the sinfulness of their ways."

Conversation turned into other channels under the direction of Elizabeth. They were discussing modern fiction when the door at the end of the hall swung back with a bang and a loud halloo echoed through the house. Elizabeth sprang up from her place and ran to the dining-room door just as a tall young man bounded through. He came up erect at sight of the stranger.

"Harold!" cried Elizabeth. "When did you come?"

"Just now. Didn't my war-whoop announce me?"

"But how did you get over from Little River station?"

"Walked."

"Why didn't you telephone? I'd have come over to meet you."

"Needed the exercise. Hello, Dad."

The Elder greeted the young man with a cold nod. His hand trembled slightly as he stiffly extended it.

“We are just a short time at table. Will you join us?”

“Be glad to, Dad. I’m starved,” he declared, eyeing the minister as he drew up a chair.

“Oh, Mr. McGowan, please excuse us!” cried Elizabeth. “This is my brother. Harold, this is our new minister, Reverend Mr. McGowan. Harold comes home so seldom that I fear his unexpected arrival demoralized our manners.”

“Delighted to meet you, Mr. McGowan,” cordially greeted Harold. “Heard of you before I got in sight of the house.”

The young men gripped each other’s hands. Consternation took possession of the Elder. Had his son fully understood?

“Mr. McGowan is the minister at our little church,” he said significantly.

“That’s what Beth just said. Didn’t I say the right thing to him, Dad? Want me to start all over again like I had to when I was a kid?”

He eyed the minister with a curious expression as they took their seats about the table.

“Maybe Dad wants me to repeat some verses to you. Used to do it and get patted on the head.”

Mr. McGowan laughed heartily, but the Elder showed his displeasure.

“That will do, Harold,” he commanded sternly. “I shall not allow profane jesting about sacred things in my house.”

“Closet next, is it? Never mind, Dad, I’ll try not to shock you again. Haven’t had much hankering for closets since I got shut up in that hole over in Sydney. They called it a prison, but it was more like a potato-pit than anything else.”

“Sydney?” questioned the minister.

“Yes, Australia. You see, Mr. McGowan, I was a real prodigal for more than two years. Chased out to California after I graduated from Yale, and got mixed up out there in another fellow’s scrape. To save my skin I shipped on a freighter to Australia. Over there I tried to save another poor devil from the lock-up, and got in bad with the authorities. Yes, I was a real prodigal, always trying to help the other fellow out of trouble and getting the worst end of it every time. The only difference between me and the Bible chap was that Father did not heap treasure on me when I left, and didn’t kill the fatted calf when I returned.”

During this recital the Elder had fidgeted to the end of his chair. “I cannot see,

son, why you persist in telling of your wickedness to everybody. It's a thing rather to be ashamed of."

"I acknowledge that, Dad, but the closet idea suggested it to my mind. Then, perhaps, it's not a bad idea for Mr. McGowan to know the worst side of me first. I spent about a week in that hole they called a prison," he said turning to the minister, "and seven days there couldn't be very easily effaced from my memory unless I went bugs and had an awful lapse. But the result was not so bad, for that place proved to be my swine-pen where I came to myself. It was just about as much like a pig-sty as any place I ever didn't sleep in.... Do you happen to know anything about Sydney, Mr. McGowan?"

"Not much. I know it's quite a trading center, but most of my information is second-hand."

"It is the best trading center on the Australian coast. An odd case came to the office from there last week. You know, perhaps, that I'm a member of the Starr and Jordan law firm in New York. Well, our branch office in Sydney referred this case to our office in London, and they, in turn, sent it over here. The reason it was transferred here is that the documents say the client now lives in America. I happened to be put on the case because I knew a little about Sydney. The same case has been up several times, it seems, for some woman over there keeps pounding away at it. The queer part of it is that the trail has been followed up to a certain point and then lost at that point every time. It is the same old story of what is happening every day. Relatives of a wealthy trader left Sydney several years ago, the trader died, and the heirs to his fortune can't be found. The strange part of it is that these people can be traced as far as America without the slightest trouble, and then, without any apparent reason, they suddenly drop out of existence as completely as though they had been kidnapped and carried to a desolate island. So little data has been collected from the other side that the firm has decided to send me over to Sydney. It promises to be quite an adventure. That's why I came home to-night, Dad. I'm leaving in the morning."

Elder Fox had been listening intently, and at mention of the proposed trip he grew pale.

"I—er—should not go if I were you, Harold. They may arrest you again. The police of Australia have a way of remembering things against former prisoners."

"How do you know so much about the police of Australia?"

"I've read it, sir," hastily explained the Elder.

“But I’ve got to go, Dad. They’ll not pinch me. They found the right chap before they let me go, and couldn’t do enough for me when they discovered their mistake.... You say you’ve never visited Sydney, Mr. McGowan?”

“I was born there. But I don’t remember anything about the place, as we moved away when I was a mere lad. I’ve often heard my father speak about it. He was a trader there in the early days.”

“May I see your father to-night?” asked Harold eagerly. “He may be able to save me a trip over. Where does he live?”

“He is not living. He and Mother both died a few years after coming to America. The climate was too severe for them.”

“I beg your pardon,” apologized Harold. “I didn’t know. I’m so anxious to get news of this man that I rush in where angels would fear to tread.”

“That is perfectly all right. It’s no more than natural that you should think he would be able to help you in your search.”

“Yes. He could have doubtless given me valuable information concerning the traders of his day, and thus have put me on the trail of my client. This man was arrested on some charge trumped up by two scamps, but was later released and exonerated. They’d arrest a man over there for looking at his own watch if he happened to cross his eyes while doing it. At the time when my client was in trouble the convict-ships were in business.”

The Elder dropped back from the edge of his chair which he had held since the beginning of the conversation. He gave his son a look of dumb appeal. With an effort he straightened and glared vacantly across the table.

“I was aboard the convict-ship *Success* while she was in the New York harbor this spring,” commented the minister. “I don’t see how civilized men could think out so many different modes of torture and remain civilized, let alone human.”

“Nor I. I was aboard the old tub, too. That was the ship my client was on. It was when she first came out.”

The Elder was acting queerly.

“Dad, what’s wrong?” asked Harold, with concern.

“Nothing,—er—nothing. Only I do wish you would not take this trip. Can’t you send some one else?”

“I’m afraid not. You see, I’m not my own boss. No, Dad, I can’t get out of it.”

Harold had never seen his father so concerned for his welfare, and it greatly affected him.

“They won’t trouble me, not in the least. To ease your mind I’ll go under an assumed name, if you say so. But I must get my data at the source concerning this man Adoniah Phillips, if——”

The Elder was sipping his coffee, and his cup fell into the saucer with a crash, breaking both fragile pieces into fragments. The contents were sprayed over the linen, and drops stained the Elder’s white waistcoat.

“Father!” cried Elizabeth. “What is the matter? You are ill!”

He did not answer. He turned an ashen face toward Mr. McGowan, and with a wild stare studied that young man’s face. The two men sprang to the old man’s assistance, but as the minister reached out his hand Mr. Fox gave a startled cry and threw up his arm as though to ward off a blow.

“Go back to your seats!” ordered the Elder thickly. “Do not mind me. I’m all right, or shall be in a few seconds.”

He fought helplessly for self-control.

“Come, Dad, you must go to your room,” declared Harold, taking his father tightly by the arm.

“I’m not ill, sir,” answered the father, stubbornly. “But it might be as well for me to retire from the table. You need not trouble, Mr. McGowan. I shall get on quite well with my son’s assistance,” he affirmed, waving the minister back.

Mr. Fox drew his handkerchief across his perspiring forehead, and dazedly eyed the stained cloth. “I’m sorry, Beth, very sorry I was so awkward.”

“Don’t mind the cloth, Father,” begged the girl tearfully.

“You remain with Mr. McGowan, Beth. I shall soon be quite myself. Fainting spell, I guess.”

Harold led his father from the room. Elizabeth turned to the minister.

“Oh, Mr. McGowan! Is it—do you think—Oh! I can’t say it! It’s too awful!”

“We must telephone for the doctor at once. It may be serious.”

“Then, you do think it’s a stroke! What shall we do!”

Mr. McGowan telephoned for the doctor, and when he arrived he sent him at once to the Elder’s room. The physician entered unannounced, stopped short on

the threshold, and stared at the two men who were in the midst of a heated discussion.

Elizabeth met the doctor as he came down the stair.

“Miss Fox, will you be kind enough to tell me if your father has had bad news, or sudden grief?”

“Not that I know of, Doctor. Harold had just told him that he must start for Australia to-morrow when Father nearly fainted. That is all that happened.”

“Then, I see no occasion for this. There is nothing organically wrong so far as I can discover. But I shall take his blood pressure to-morrow just to be on the safe side. Call me any time during the night if anything out of the ordinary happens. Keep him perfectly quiet. Good night.”

Harold called Elizabeth from the head of the stair.

“Excuse me, Mr. McGowan. I shall send my brother right down.”

“Please, don’t do that. Your father will need you both. I shall be going.”

“I’m so sorry!” she exclaimed, offering her hand. “You will come again, very soon, won’t you?”

“I shall call in the morning to inquire about your father.”

“Thank you. Good night.”

“Good night.”

Mr. McGowan took his hat from the hall-tree and left the house. As he walked very slowly through the avenue of trees a strange passage from the Bible kept tantalizing his attention. “Behold, a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone.... Then there was no breath in them.... Then from the four winds the breath came into them, and they lived.”

Half provoked for allowing these words to arouse suspicion, he tried to cast them out. But the effect of them remained. He had witnessed the coming together of the dry bones of a past. Were the four winds from the four corners of the earth to give them life? Had he unwittingly helped to furnish the dry bones with breath?

He had gone but a short distance when he heard footsteps behind him.

CHAPTER IV

“One minute, Mr. McGowan,” called Harold Fox. “Come with me, please.”

He drew the minister aside into the path that led into the lower gardens. Once in the deeper shadows, Harold stopped.

“What have you to do with this man Phillips?” he demanded.

“What’s that? Why, Mr. Fox——”

“I’d no sooner got Dad to his room than he began to mumble that you were to blame for his condition,” cut in the lawyer. “He connected you in no favorable way with some woman in Australia. This man Phillips was involved, too, from what I could gather. I was questioning him when the doctor arrived, and after he was gone I could get nothing more out of him. I hate to go to Australia with him like this, and I have every reason to surmise that I won’t need to go if you tell me all you know.”

“I’m very sorry for your father’s condition, but I see no way to help you. I don’t see why he should connect me with his condition. How long ago did all this happen to your client?”

“About twenty-five years ago.”

“Then it’s ridiculous to associate me with any such trouble. I was not more than born, if, indeed, that. In what way does it all affect your father, anyway?”

“That I don’t know. It’s a mystery to me.”

“I should gladly give you aid if it were possible.”

“I’m only asking that you tell me all you know.”

“All an infant in arms would know would be of little value, I fear.”

“But you must know something by hearsay. Father would not take this turn out of a clear sky. There must be a little moisture where there are so many clouds.”

“But, Mr. Fox, I’ve told you——”

“See here, Mr. McGowan,” broke in Harold impatiently, “don’t think me thickheaded. I’ve been practising law long enough to smell a rat when it’s round. Father knows something, and he knows you know something. In some way it involves him. His trouble to-night was purely mental.”

“Suppose I am connected with all this mystery in some way, how on earth can a man call on a child’s empty memory——”

“You’re stalling, Mr. McGowan. Don’t try that alibi stuff with me. It simply won’t go.”

“You refuse to accept my statement of ignorance concerning this man?”

“I most certainly do. You and Dad are passing the buck. I thought from all reports that you would stand up to any proposition like a man, no matter how unpleasant.”

“There is nothing for me to stand up to, Mr. Fox.”

“You absolutely refuse to tell me what you know?”

“I absolutely refuse, for I know absolutely nothing.”

Harold Fox studied the set features of the minister in the dim light of the moon. He then cordially extended his hand.

“Pardon me, sir. I believe you. But there’s something damned crooked somewhere, and I intend to ferret it out. If Dad’s in it——Well, I hope to the Lord he isn’t. You’d better watch your p’s and q’s pretty close, for Dad mentioned the fact that Mr. Means has it in for you, and the two of them can make it hell for you. I’m sorry to say that, but it’s God’s truth. I wouldn’t trust Means with a pet skunk. I never have liked the fellow. I’ve said too much. Good night, and good luck.”

Harold abruptly left, and Mr. McGowan walked slowly and heavily from the garden into the road that led toward the sea.

Following that night, things began to happen with lightning-like rapidity. A spirit of distrust and suspicion sprang up among the members of the little church over night. The congregations dwindled down, till within a month they were not one-half their original size. But in spite of the friction that was grinding at the religious machinery, Mr. McGowan went on steadily about his work. He visited

the Inn more frequently, and won no little renown among the members of the club. But here he also had his enemies, and they were becoming bolder in proportion as the church grew more hostile toward its minister. Sim Hicks, the keeper of the Inn, began an open fight against Mr. McGowan's intrusions, declaring he would make good a former threat to oust the "Psalm-singer" from the village.

One evening Mr. McGowan returned to his study deeply perplexed. What was the meaning in the unjust persecution? Not that he complained; his difficulty was rather his inability to get at the bottom of it all. He stood before his window gazing absently out into the gathering dusk, when Captain Pott quietly opened the door and entered.

"Can I come in, Mack?"

"I'd love to have you. I need company."

"Anything special wrong? I've been noticing you're getting awful thin of late. Ain't Eadie's cooking agreeing with you?"

"I'm afraid that food cooked to the queen's taste wouldn't agree with me these days."

"Ain't in love, be you? I've heard tell how it affects people like that."

The young man turned toward his friend. The wry smile with which he tried to divert the seaman did not hide the hurt expression in his eyes. The Captain caught the expression.

"Thought likely," he observed, pulling at his moustache. "But that ain't no reason for you losing sleep and flesh over, unless she ain't in love with you."

"There's no reason why she should be."

"Tush, tush, son. Don't ever try to hurry 'em. Let her take all the time she wants. Women are funny that way."

"Cap'n," said the minister in tense earnestness, "there is something vitally wrong in this town, and I can't seem to find out what it is."

"I know," nodded the Captain.

"Then I wish you would enlighten me."

"I cal'late I can't do that, Mack. All I can see is that there's something like mutiny brewing aboard your salvation sloop, and mutiny is a mighty funny thing. You can't put your finger on it and say, 'Lo, here, or lo, there,' according

to scripture. Ain't that right?"

"You have certainly stated the situation much better than I could hope to."

"I was only hoping you wouldn't see it."

"I don't see it, and that's my whole trouble. I can only see the results. I can't say that this one or that one is to blame, for the thing seems to be in the very air."

"I know just how you feel, Mack. That's where a skipper is hog-tied against taking any action. You just sort of feel that there's something devilish afoot, but you don't know enough what it is to be ready to meet it. Puts me in mind of a song I heard once aboard one of my ships. One of the new mates sang it, and called it the microbe song. I ain't got any idea where he picked it up, but it went like this:

"Johnnie, don't you see 'em on my head and chin,
All them powerful microbes, both outside and in?
Johnnie, up and smite 'em, counting every one,
With the strength that cometh with the pork and bun.

"Johnnie, don't you feel 'em, how they work within,
Striving, crowding, pulling, kicking just like sin?
Johnnie, don't you tremble, never be downcast,
Gird ye for the battle, we'll kill 'em while it lasts.

"Johnnie, don't you hear 'em, how they speak ye fair:
"All of us are shipmates, not a bunk is bare!"
Johnnie, answer boldly: "While we breathe we smite!"
And peace shall follow battle, day shall end in night."

Mr. McGowan laughed heartily as the Captain brought his song to an unmusical close.

"That song ain't got much music in it, leastwise not as I sung it, but it's got a heap of truth. Fact is, Mack, I'm as chuck full of them damn microbes as you be, and I ain't able to smite 'em. They are right in here,"—he tapped his head,—“and though I ain't able to say for sure, yet I've got a purty good idea that they're outside, too, and making a heap of trouble in this here burg.

"Now, take those pirates down to the Inn," continued the seaman. "There's something brewing down there, and it smells like hell-fire to me that's doing the boiling. Sim Hicks and his gang are whooping it up a mite too lively for comfort.

That's microbe army number one. Then, there's Harry Beaver. He says they won't board you after your month is up."

"May army number two quickly advance! I shall gladly and willingly surrender."

"Hey? What's that? Where in the name of the ship's cook would you go, I'd like to know?"

"Right here."

"Right where? You board with me?"

"Why not?"

The old seaman's face slowly lighted up with appreciation as he fully grasped the meaning of Mr. McGowan's words, and then suddenly clouded.

"No, Mack. There ain't no sense in that," he declared, shaking his head emphatically. "I can keep soul and body together, but what I get on with would kill you. There's worse things in the world than Eadie's biscuits. No, I ain't going to listen to any such out-and-out murder as my cooking would commit."

"Don't you think we could hire some one to come in and get our meals?" asked the minister.

"I'm 'feared that ain't possible. And even if it was it would cause more talk about town. There's enough gossip aboard the old salvation craft to sink her now, beam-fust."

"Why should it cause talk for some one to take care of the house for us, and get our meals?"

"Why should any of this gab be floating round at all? There ain't no sense in it, but that don't stop it. Mack,"—the Captain leaned eagerly toward his young friend,—“don't tell me nothing you don't want to, but what happened up to Jim Fox's house that night you ate there the last time? Things ain't been going smooth since then. I hear he acted mighty queer. Was you to blame for it in any way?"

"Did Harold Fox talk to you before he left?"

"No. Harold ain't the gossiping kind."

"Some one has evidently been talking to you."

"Ain't denying that, Mack. There's plenty of 'em in this burg that's ready to talk, and I'd have to be deaf, dumb, and blind, not to get some of the gab. The doctor

told more than he ought, I guess.”

“It might pay him to take a few lessons in keeping his mouth closed,” impatiently commented Mr. McGowan.

“I know, Mack. I reckon he was pumped pretty hard.”

“That doesn’t excuse him for——”

“There, Mack, don’t get mad. I was asking you for your own good. There’s something mighty mysterious about that affair, and I thought if you’d tell me just what took place that we’d be able to do something before that gang of rough-necks down to the Inn get the bits in their teeth.”

“I don’t see what the men at the Inn have to do with all this.”

“They ain’t got much to do with it, except to use it for a lever to pry you loose from the fellers who do like you. There’s real trouble of some sort being hatched down there, but I ain’t sure just what it’s like. Maybe there ain’t no use my worrying you with these suspicions, but watch them skunks at the Inn, and don’t give ’em the inside of the track. Cal’late you’d best go over to supper, and see if Harry’s going to shut off the rations.”

Three days after this conversation Mr. McGowan’s month was up, and the hammer of Mr. Beaver’s authority came down. Captain Pott stood in his door, watching the pantomime as Mr. Beaver pumped, backed, stuttered, and blinked out the minister’s dismissal from his wife’s table. The Captain had an extra griddle on the stove when Mr. McGowan returned. Without question or comment he indicated a chair, and the minister smiled like a schoolboy as he drew it up before the place at the Captain’s table which he was to occupy from now on.

“Best eat ’em while they’re sizzling hot,” invited the Captain, dumping a turnerful of cakes on the empty plate.

When the men had divided the last flapjack, the minister announced that he was going for a stroll along the beach.

He was no sooner out of sight than over came Mrs. Beaver, carrying a large tin filled with biscuits. Captain Pott took them to the pantry, and returned with the empty pan.

“Thanks, Eadie. Mr. McGowan will sure appreciate them.”

“Oh, Josiah! I hope he won’t blame me for what’s happened.”

“Cal’late he won’t blame you,” said the seaman sympathetically.

“Why are things so upset in town against him?”

“I ain’t able to answer that, Eadie. It does seem that the old ark is going through quite a squall, don’t it?”

“Has Harry said anything to you?”

“Not yet, he ain’t, and if I sight him fust he ain’t going to say anything. I ain’t got time for him to get his pumps working on me.”

“You mark my word, he will say something, and don’t you believe one word when he does. I don’t see what’s got into him. Somebody has bewitched him.”

The Captain stared at her. Here were signs of a new kind of microbe, and he could make neither head nor tail of it. It was next to the miraculous for Mrs. Beaver to espouse an unpopular cause when there was interesting gossip to repeat.

“You don’t say!” exclaimed the seaman.

“I do say. Hank Simpson is the only man in this town beside you who’s got back-bone enough to stand by himself! He’d struck Harry last night if that Hicks hadn’t held him off. I wish he had hit him hard, maybe it would have brought him to his senses.”

“Are you trying to tell me that Harry’s got the gossiping fever?”

“Not only that, but what he’s saying is pure lies. I can’t see why he wants to do other people’s dirty work,” complained the unhappy woman.

“I cal’late you’d best give me some idea about this here yarn he’s spinning, so’s I can lay for him with a spike.”

“It’s about Mr. McGowan, and what he’s telling ain’t true, and I know it!” Her voice broke into short dry sobs. “He says our minister is doing things down to the Inn that ain’t right. And, then, that Reverend Mr. Means was up again the other day, and told Mr. Fox something. Harry won’t tell me what it was, but he keeps saying it’s awful scandalous.”

“Well, Eadie, if I was you I’d quit spilling all that brine, for it ain’t wuth it.”

“But, Josiah, it is worth it. They’re trying to ruin Mr. McGowan, and he’s such a fine man. Won’t you stop Harry’s talking in some way? Won’t you go to Mr. Fox?”

“Me go to Jim? What in tarnation would you have me say to him?”

“I don’t care what you say, but make him understand that he’s to leave Harry alone, and stop him telling what ain’t so.”

“Maybe he’s the one who has made Harry believe it is so. In that case, I’m ’feared my views on the subject might set off some real fireworks.”

“But you must make him believe you! Can’t you say something?”

“I ain’t sartin but I might say a thing or two, and they won’t be words fit for a prayer-meeting, either.”

“Then, you will speak to him?” she asked eagerly.

“We’ll see, Eadie. Maybe I’ll do something, too. But I cal’late we’d best begin as Scripture says, right here at home.”

“You mean you’ll speak to Harry? What will you say?”

“I ain’t got it all figured out yet being as we’re camped on this here sand-heap. If I was aboard ship I’d kick him down the deck and up again, then into the hatches for a little tonic for disobeying orders. Beyond that, I ain’t able to say right offhand.”

Mrs. Beaver clutched the back of a chair. “Oh, don’t hurt my Harry! He’s all I’ve got!”

“He ain’t wuth boasting about, Eadie. But being as he is all you’ve got in the way of earthly possession, and being as we’re on land, I cal’late I won’t do harm. But if I was you I’d steer him clear of these channels for a spell till I calm down a mite.”

“O dear! I’ve made a mistake coming to you, and I hoped you’d help me. I shouldn’t have told you!”

“We won’t argue that p’int.”

“Whatever shall I do!”

“The fust thing I’d do,”—suggested the Captain, slowly nodding his head for emphasis,—“would be to use a little discipline on your fust mate.”

“But I can’t make Harry mind any more!”

The pitiful figure gave the Captain an uneasy feeling as he tried to return her pathetic gaze. He replied kindly:

“Eadie, you’ve always held a purty tight rein over that husband of yours, about the best I ever see drawn over a prancing colt. You’d best tighten up a mite on

them reins, right sudden-like.”

“But I haven’t any power over him now. He’s that worked up that I can’t even talk to him. He shuts me right up.”

“What’s that? You can’t handle that little shrimp?”

She uttered a cry, and looked past the Captain, through the dining-room door, into the hall. The seaman turned in the direction of her wild and distracted gaze. Mr. Beaver, more wild and distracted than his spouse, stood in the door, the incarnation of burning passion and pent up fury.

“W-What are you d-doing in this m-man’s house?” he shouted, his shrill voice breaking into a ferocious shriek, as he blinked and pointed at his frightened wife.

Captain Pott was so surprised that he merely gaped at the infuriated little man.

“Harry, please don’t!” pleaded Mrs. Beaver, drawing back against the wainscoting.

“C-Come out of h-here!” hissed her husband. He brought his heel down with such vehemence that he chipped off a splinter from the threshold.

“Best stand back, Eadie, and be careful not to touch him,” advised the Captain, eyeing the human cyclone with amusement and amazement. “Looks mighty dangerous, and sort as if he might go off.”

Harry met these words with a blazing glare.

“Cal’late you’d best come in and cool off a mite, Harry. You seem sort of het up.”

“W-Woman, c-come w-with m-me!” spluttered Mr. Beaver.

He strutted round the room, well out of the Captain’s reach, and back again toward the door, looking for the world like a young barnyard fowl. But his wife did not follow.

“She ain’t going just yet. We was having a quiet-like chat when you busted in here, and I cal’late we’d best make it three-sided, that is, if you ain’t got no reasonable objection to raise. Come, you ain’t in that rush.”

Harry bounded toward the door. So, also, did the Captain. A heavy hand fell on the shoulder of the little man and spun him about.

“It’s real nice of you to come in like this for a friendly conflag,” said the seaman, dangerously pleasant.

“M-Man, t-take your h-hand off m-me! H-How dare y-you a-assault m-me! I’ll h-have the law on y-you!”

“That’s all right, Harry.” The expression on the Captain’s face contrasted sharply with his quiet words. “There’ll be plenty of time for that. I’ve been feeling real slighted because you ain’t been to see me for some time. Cal’late a little conversation will do us both a heap of good, and clear up the air a mite.”

Mr. Beaver again started for the door, but the Captain reached it first. He closed it, turned the key in the lock, and put the key in his pocket.

“Now, suppose you spin the yarn to me that you’ve been spreading round town,” he said, slowly filling his pipe and offering the pouch to Harry Beaver.

Mr. Beaver spurned the weed of peace with a ferocious glare. With a little coaching the Captain brought out the story. The gist of the matter was that Mr. Beaver considered McGowan morally lax in the free way he was mixing with the boys at the Inn.

“Let’s get this straight. Who is the feller you’re talking about? Just repeat his name to me.”

“M-McGowan!” defiantly repeated Mr. Beaver.

“When mentioning him to me,”—requested the Captain in a tone that made the other man start with apprehension,—“you’ll call him *Mr.* McGowan. Understand that?”

Mr. Beaver seemed fully to understand, for he obeyed. When he had finished his yarn of sheer nonsense, Captain Pott slowly laid his pipe on the table and ⁹his hand on the little man’s collar. He led him to the door, and opened it. Harry tugged like a bull-pup on the end of a leash, so that when the Captain released his hold—with ever so slight a shove—Mr. Beaver described a spread-eagle on the cinder path.

“If you repeat that rotten truck to another soul, I ain’t going to be responsible for what happens to you!” He shot each word at the kicking figure from between set teeth, and brushed one hand over the other as though to clean them of filth.

Mrs. Beaver ran to her husband, lifted him out of the cinders, and patted the ashes from his clothing. Harry Beaver stood irresolutely for a moment, and violently shook his fist at the man standing in the door.

“Y-You’ll p-p-pay for this!” He spit out words and cinders with gasping breath.

Captain Pott went inside. He washed his breakfast dishes. He was by no means as calm as he appeared. The whole day through he fed the fires of his anger. That night he urged the minister to stay at home. He even begged him not to go to the Inn. Mr. McGowan asked the reason for his deep concern. The Captain could give none, except to say that the microbes were working overtime. But duty called more loudly than his friend’s fears, and Mr. McGowan went that evening to the Inn. An hour later the Captain’s intuition got the upper hand of his

judgment, and he followed.

CHAPTER V

An ominous murmur of voices, with a deep growling undertone, floated up from the improvised gymnasium in the basement as Captain Pott entered the swinging doors of Willow-Tree Inn. This was followed by a more ominous silence. The seaman bounded down the steps. The sight that met his gaze caused him to stop short. On each side of the low room men and boys were drawn up in lines, and the division was as clean cut as though chosen for a tug of war. The doors at the far end of the gymnasium swung back, and a stranger, stripped to the waist, stepped gingerly into the room. Sim Hicks met the man, and began to tie a pair of boxing gloves to his hands. While the Captain looked on in utter amazement, the doors again swung back, and Mack McGowan entered. He did not appear surprised at sight of the crowd, as large audiences had become quite the common thing during his boxing lessons. Hank Simpson came from out the shadows and reluctantly tied another pair of gloves to the hands of Mr. McGowan.

“What in tarnation is the meaning of this damn exhibition?” demanded the Captain, turning to Jud Johnson, the plumber.

“It means there’s dirty work on.”

“You mean there’s been a crooked deal put over on Mack?”

The plumber nodded.

“Who in hell——”

“Swearing ain’t going to do no good, Cap’n. The parson don’t stand for it down here,” cut in Jud.

“Whose doing is this?”

“We’ve got a pretty good idea who the cur is, but we ain’t exactly sure.”

“Where’d he come from?”

“The city.”

“Who brung him in here?”

“We ain’t just sure of that, yet.”

“What in h—— What’s he cal’lating to do?”

“He figures to lick the tar out of the parson. And by the blazes of the inferno, if he does——”

It was plain that civil war was to ensue if the contest went against Mr. McGowan.

“How’d he git into such a scrape?”

“It looks like the work of that d—I wish the parson would let me swear for once—Sim Hicks.”

“You mean Hicks brought him in?”

“He come in here more’n a week ago and asked Mr. McGowan to give him some lessons. Now the devil’s to pay, and if we ain’t ’way off Hicks happens to be that devil.”

“How——”

“For God’s sake stop asking me questions or I’ll cut loose and turn the air blue round here.”

“There ain’t a feller living that can fight Mack on a week of training,” declared the seaman.

“No one said he’d had no more’n a week of training.”

“I don’t give a tinker’s dam if he’s had all the training in creation, he can’t lick Mack McGowan and do it fair.”

Jud shot the Captain a look of approval. “Them kind don’t fight fair.”

“But, Jud, I don’t see the meaning of it, anyway.”

“Then you’re a heap sight blinder’n I thought. This thing’s all fixed up to help Hicks get the parson out of town. When the news of this fight gets out into the church, they’ll oust him like a shot from a cannon.”

“Then why don’t you fellers stop it afore it starts?” blazed the Captain.

“Stop nothing. Hank’s tried it, already.”

Hank Simpson came across the room to where the Captain stood, looking woe-begone.

“The minister says our fears ain’t got no foundation about that feller being crooked, and he won’t listen to reason,” declared the dejected Hank.

“By the Almighty, he’ll listen to me!” exclaimed the Captain.

“He wouldn’t listen to his own mother if she was here. He says if what we suspect is true, he couldn’t show the white feather now. He’s the best sport I’ve ever seen, and I hate to see him beat up by that white-livered slugger.”

“I sha’n’t see it!”

Captain Pott started toward the ring that was rapidly forming about the boxers. He caught the minister’s glance. He halted. In that glance there was an expression which the Captain had come to recognize and respect. Mack McGowan was going to take his medicine, or give it, and no one was to interfere during the dose. The seaman dropped back into the shadow of the stair.

The boxers faced each other. There was no doubt left in the minds of the onlookers as to the profession of the stranger as he squared off for action. The minister recognized, too, the trap that had been set for him, but he gave no evidence of worry. He met the malicious grin of the other with a friendly, but grim smile.

The stranger lost no time in preliminaries. He thought himself in full possession of the minister’s boxing ability, and he showed a great amount of over-confidence. He had studied the other’s speed, he had spied into his style, he had tested his reach. Certainly, with all this knowledge, he should have a picnic. He had been very careful on all occasions to appear as nothing more than a novice. He was not unmindful of the other’s endurance, but hoping to make a quick end of the matter, he tried to force the minister under full headway at once. He went at him in a whirlwind rush. It seemed to the observers that Mr. McGowan must certainly be swept from the floor.

But the minister was not caught off his guard. He quickly guessed the other’s intention. With a swiftness that took the breath of the onlookers, he stepped aside, drew in his left toe under his right heel, and faced to the right. It was done in a flash! With one long step he swung out to the left of his adversary. Out of the range of terrific blows, he smiled and made a closer study of his opponent, eye and brain alert for information. It took but a moment, and he was facing the stranger before the man was ready to meet him.

The Captain had never seen his young friend box with greater ease, although the odds were against him in weight. He warded off blow after blow with a precision

that was maddening to the other. His foot-work was as quick as that of a cat, and as sure. Again and again the stranger would rush in with deadly intent, only to find himself blocked, or to back away severely punished.

A breathless suspense hushed all rooting. The minister had dropped his guard! Even the other boxer hesitated, as though he could not believe his own eyes. Mr. McGowan had thrown back his head and shoulders as though he had partially lost his foothold. The city boxer rushed in and swung for the other's heart with all his weight behind the blow. When it was too late he saw his mistake. He had been led into a trap, and the very movement which had drawn the blow made it ineffective. With lightning-like swiftness the minister stepped forward, delivered three blows on his opponent's head with bewildering rapidity, and recovered himself with ease and without exertion. The stranger recoiled, and for an instant appeared to be under the impulse to run. But blind rage seized him as his unexpected punishment began to sting, and he came back like a madman. Mr. McGowan shoved aside or blocked the terrific shower of fists with a coolness and precision that drove the stranger momentarily insane. He bellowed like a mad bull. He began to slug with the force of a pile-driver without any pretense to fairness. He leaped from left to right, and back again, like an orangutan stirred to frenzied anger. Mr. McGowan tried to stop him by calling time, but with a foul oath he shot a stiff arm into the minister's abdomen. Decidedly jarred, Mr. McGowan swayed back under the impact of the foul, but recovered his footing in time to meet the other with a blow full in the face. The stranger rushed in again, but Mr. McGowan ducked, landed his glove with a heavy jar on his adversary's body, and cut the man's lip with a right swing as he sprang to safety.

The sight and smell of his own blood sent the city pugilist into a crazed frenzy. He threw his elbow into the minister's throat and hurled him against the wall. Holding him there as though in a vise he landed a wicked hook under the left ear. Sim Hicks gave an immoderate laugh. A shout went up from the few who favored the stranger. A deep growl was the answer from Hank Simpson and his following as they sprang forward. They seized Mr. McGowan, tore him away from the maddened pugilist, and led him to a box. Hank steadied him while Jud Johnson massaged the bruised neck and bathed the bleeding ear. Sim Hicks crossed to where they were at work.

"Have you got enough?" he asked with a sneer.

"No! And by thunder, you ain't got all that's coming to you, neither," growled Jud.

Mr. McGowan leaned heavily against Hank Simpson. As it was apparent that his mind was beginning to clear, Sim Hicks came closer.

“Are you ready to call quits and stop your damned meddling in my affairs?” persisted the Innkeeper.

Mr. McGowan shook his head, slowly. Then, with a start, he straightened. Between the uprights of the stair-banister he had seen two faces peering down into the room. As his vision cleared a little more he saw that one face was set between silky chops.

Captain Pott had not taken his eyes from the minister’s face, but now he followed the direction of his startled gaze.

“If it ain’t that damned menagerie, Fox and Beaver!”

One of the two figures slipped up and out. The other, deeply engrossed, did not budge. The Captain gave a mirthless chuckle and quietly crept up the stair. He seized the heels of Mr. Beaver, dragged him bumping down the stair, and dropped him beneath one of the lights. He gripped the little man’s collar, glanced menacingly into the distorted face, and remarked:

“Paying off some of them infernal debts you spoke of?”

“L-Let m-m-me g-go! L-Looking’s f-f-free, ain’t it?” His thin voice rose with each word till it reached a hissing shriek.

“Yes, the show seems to be free. And if I’m any judge, it’s just begun, so you may as well come down for it all.”

Sim Hicks was swearing so loudly that the seaman turned in that direction. The Innkeeper was shaking his fist in the minister’s face. Captain Pott dragged the squirming Beaver across the room.

“See here, Sim, you’d best shet that trap-door of yours, it’s letting out too much blue smoke, and the dominee don’t permit swearing among the boys. Cal’late I can give you some assistance if you’re needing it,” said the seaman, coming uncomfortably near. “As for that there slugger of yours, he’s nothing but a white-livered cur of a coward.”

“You take back those words, or I’ll make you swallow them one at a time!”

The threat came from the city pugilist, and the Captain swung about to face him.

“This here is my friend you hurt,”—the seaman’s eyes flashed with fury as he jerked his thumb toward the minister,—“and I cal’late you’d best apologize for

what you've done to him."

"Why, you doddering old idiot! If you didn't want your little pet hurt, you'd best have kept him home. I understand he's your special hobby."

"You'd best apologize," repeated the Captain in dangerous calm.

The pugilist laughed hoarsely. "When I do it will be in a hotter place than where we are to-night. I did nothing——"

"Don't lie to me! I see what you done. Either you fight like a man,—even if you ain't one,—or by the lord Harry——"

For emphasis he clutched the collar he still held, and Mr. Beaver squirmed as though in fear of being hurled bodily into the face of the city boxer. Sim Hicks sprang at the Captain's throat with a fierce leap and an angry growl. But Sim picked himself up from a corner and rubbed the blood from his streaming nose. The sight of the cringing Innkeeper seemed to have a temporary effect upon the pugilist, but he quickly recovered and bristled defiantly.

"You damned city cur! If you don't fight fair I'll measure you out on the same spot!"

"You go to the devil!" said the man with a sneer.

"When I do I'll take a white-livered, yellow-haired cur along. You take that grin off your face and stand up to Mack like a man. I'll act as pilot from now on, and if I sight any more of your dirty tricks, may the Lord have mercy on you, for I won't. Pitch in!"

The two men obeyed and faced each other. Except for a slight tightening of the lips, Mr. McGowan gave no sign of having suffered from the severe punishment because of the other man's foul. Those who had been standing about the box, now jostled the other faction out of the ring, and pressed closely about the Captain.

During the next fifteen minutes the boxers worked swiftly. Although the stranger had publicly defied the seaman's orders to fight fair, yet it was apparent to all that he was obeying them. Only once did he attempt a foul. The Captain's quick eyes saw, and with a thundering command that shook the room he checked the pugilist's stiff arm movement to the throat. Then the end came. Mr. McGowan brought forward his head and shoulders with his usual lightning-like swiftness in order to draw a lead before the other was prepared for it, and at the same time he accompanied the movement with a quick jerking back of his left hand as though

suddenly changing his mind. The city man did the rest. He halted. Mr. McGowan stepped to the left just as the other delivered his spent blow, and with the added weight of his moving body landed his right glove against the stranger's ear. This was quickly followed with a crashing upper-cut to the heavy jaw. There was a loud rending and ripping of splintered wood as the big man fell through one of the thin panels of the partition. He slid to the floor and lay motionless amidst the wreckage.

Sim Hicks bawled at him to get up and go on with the fight. Mr. Beaver squirmed and whined under the tightening grip like a beaten pup. The crowd stood dumb with amazement. Few of those present had ever witnessed the effect of a knock-out blow.

Mr. McGowan was the first to the side of the prostrate man. He lifted him to his feet, and began walking him about. As the stranger regained his senses, he smiled faintly at Hicks' repeated requests that the fight be finished.

"How long was I out?" asked the pugilist.

Sim caught the savage glare in the Captain's eyes, and reluctantly admitted that it had been over a minute.

"But this ain't no regular match!" he shouted.

The pugilist looked in the direction of the Captain as he drew away from the minister and steadied himself against an upright.

"I guess we'll have to call it regular enough to go by rules," declared the city boxer. "I'm beaten, Hicks."

"I was sorry to do it, but there seemed no other way. There was too much at stake to run the risk of losing," said the minister. "May I say, sir, that you are a good boxer?"

"Mr. McGowan,"—the stranger extended his hand with unaffected cordiality,—“it's great of you to say that after what I tried to do to you. I refused to apologize when that old fellow tried to make me, but I do it now. I'm ashamed of the way I lost my head. If you'll accept my apology, I'll accept your compliment."

"Gladly!" exclaimed the minister.

Beneath the rough exterior of this savage fighter there was the spirit of the true sportsman. The two men removed their gloves and gripped bare hands in a warm grasp.

“The fact of the matter is, you had me outclassed at every turn. Any man who could do what you have done to-night, after I’d thought I’d spied on you long enough to secure the key to all your strong points, could make his fortune in the ring. I’m heartily ashamed that I made myself a party to this plot to put you out. What your old friend has said is true: I’m a cur and a white-livered coward to sneak in on you the way I did.”

“See here!” shouted Sim Hicks, abandoning all caution, “ain’t you going to finish this little job you’ve been paid for?”

“It is finished, but it wasn’t stipulated in the contract as to who was going to do the finishing.”

“You——”

“Shet that trap of yours, Sim. If you don’t it’s li’ble to get another catch,” threatened the Captain.

Hicks eyed the seaman, rubbed his swollen nose, and backed away.

Mr. Beaver did a corkscrew dance, and tried in vain to release the hold on his collar.

“Cap’n Pott!” exclaimed the surprised minister who noticed for the first time that the seaman was holding Mr. Beaver. “What on earth are you doing?”

“Well, this little shrimp was mighty interested in the boxing, and I thought he might as well come down for a few lessons that he wouldn’t forget right off. I cal’lated to give him a few myself.”

Mr. Beaver’s face was purple. His words would probably have been of the same hue had there been any possibility of releasing them.

“Let him go, Cap’n, you’re strangling him.”

“He’d otter be choked, if he’s as deep in this thing as I think he is. But he ain’t in no condition for a lesson to-night, he’s a mite too worked up. Harry, I’ll let you off, but if this here yarn gets out into the church through you or through the rest of the menagerie, we’ll give you the little lesson I spoke about, and it will stick like glue to your anatomy. Now, you run along to Eadie, she’ll be missing you, and I’d hate to send you home mussed up.”

Mr. Beaver ran. With a dart he shot for the stair.

The members of the club escorted Mr. McGowan to the Captain’s home. As he said good night, Hank Simpson came forward.

“Mr. McGowan, the fellers want to know if you’ll be one of our members in regular standing.”

Mr. McGowan expressed his delight, and declared he would like nothing better.

“He’s ’lected, fellers!” shouted Hank.

A ringing cheer went up from the crowd. The Captain said to Elizabeth the next morning, when recounting what had taken place, “I was ’feared that Mack would be mad as hops the way them fellers carried on, but he wa’n’t, not a mite. He seemed tolerable pleased about it. When the fellers asked a lot of foolish questions as to what was the matter with Mr. McGowan, and then answered them by saying that he was all right, Mack looked as happy as a school kid.”

Hank once more whispered to the minister. The answer was apparently satisfactory, for the boys gave a parting cheer, declaring that they would all be present in church the following Sunday.

CHAPTER VI

The troublesome microbes, of which Captain Pott had so unmelodiously sung, had been driven out into the open, and were now doing a war-dance to a jazz tune. Into the domestic life of the Captain there wormed the most subtle microbe of all. Just what to do with it, or how to meet it, he did not know. But it continued to bob up at every meal time with a clamorous demand for attention.

One Monday evening the two men sat in the minister's study, the clergyman wrapped in silence, and the Captain in a cloud of tobacco smoke. The seaman was the first to break through his cloud.

"Mack, I'm awful sorry to disturb your meditations, but if they ain't a heap sight more entertaining than mine, I cal'late you won't mind to give 'em up for a spell."

"It wouldn't be much of a sacrifice, Cap'n," acknowledged Mr. McGowan, laughing. "What is troubling you?"

"Well, it's this,"—the Captain blew a cloud of smoke,—"this here's slow navigating on land without a woman's hand on the wheel. We need some one to set things to rights round here once in a while."

Mr. McGowan had been lounging lazily before the open fire, but now rose and stretched himself.

"The idea is all right, but how can we put it into effect?"

"I ain't just exactly sure."

"You must have something to propose, else you wouldn't have mentioned it."

"There ain't going to be no proposing, leastwise not by me."

The minister smiled. "Afraid of the fair sex, Cap'n?"

"No. Just wise to 'em."

"Why don't you take the suggestion I made some time ago?"

“Meaning, which?”

“Have some one come in once a week to clean up.”

“It needs something more than a cleaner round here. What we want is a cook. I cal’late we’d best ship a general housekeeper.”

“A housekeeper!” exclaimed Mr. McGowan, suddenly breaking off a wide yawn. The skipper blew a cloud of smoke and watched it thin out into the air above his head.

“And you have just declared that you didn’t intend to propose. I’m afraid——”

“I ain’t interested in your fears, young man. I’m too old a sea-dog for any of them new-fangled tricks. But being as you’re set on staying here I’ve decided that we’ll take a woman aboard to look after the mess and swab decks.”

The minister became serious. “Is that practical in our present position?”

“Practical in our present position? If it ain’t, then I’d like to know when in the name of all my ancestors such a thing is practical. Mack——”

“I mean from the financial point of view. The boxing match seems to have hit the pocketbooks of the church members harder than the man from the city hit me. At least, something has given them almost total paralysis.”

“Who’s asking you to consarn yourself with a woman’s keep? I ain’t, be I?”

“I hope you don’t think that I’d permit you to bring a housekeeper in here for me unless you give me the privilege of sharing in the expense.”

“Mack, this here place ain’t your house. Cal’late I’ll do about as I please on that p’int.”

“If I can’t stand the expense with part salary, you certainly can’t stand it with none,” persisted the minister.

“I ain’t sartin it would cost anything. Leastwise, it won’t cost much. I ain’t sartin,”—repeated the Captain as though in meditation,—“but I think she’ll come.”

“Who?”

“Don’t let your cur’osity get away with you, young feller. I ain’t promising nothing, but I’m just thinking, that’s all. How’d you like to cruise round the P’int to-morrow, Mack?”

“You have a delightful way of changing the subject when it gets too hot. But I’d certainly like the cruise and the air.”

“I cal’late I ain’t changed no subject. We’ll go over Riverhead way. It’ll be sort of a vacation from all this mess, and give me a chance to see about this puzzling woman question.”

With this declaration, the Captain retreated into a silence which all of Mr. McGowan’s questions failed to penetrate. The old man was thinking of Clemmie Pipkin!

Clemmie had been the object of his boyhood ardor till the day when his dashing half-brother had kidnapped her affections. But no sooner had he won her from the Captain than he disappeared, leaving the faithful Miss Pipkin, never to return. She had remained unmarried all these years, in spite of the oft-repeated attempt on the part of Captain Pott to rekindle her love. He wondered now, as he sat before the dying fire, if her presence in his home would change her attitude toward him. This question awakened anew the desire of his youth, and after he had retired it kept sleep from his eyes through the long hours of the night. He must have Clemmie Pipkin to take care of his house.

Daylight had barely kindled her fires over the eastern waters when the two men boarded the *Jennie P.* Mr. McGowan noticed that the Captain took particular pains in cleaning and polishing the few brass trimmings. They both worked hard till the sun appeared, and then hastily ate a lunch which they had brought aboard with them. After finishing the sandwiches, the Captain went forward and dropped a measuring-stick into the gasoline tank.

“I’ll swan!” he ejaculated. “There ain’t a drop of ’ile in that there tank. And I left the cans ashore.”

“I’ll go for them.”

“No, you don’t, young feller! You stay right aboard here,” ordered the skipper. “You can be working on the engine, or something. I’ll get that ’ile myself.”

Surprised at the seaman’s earnestness, the minister obeyed. He was working over the engine, his hands covered with grease, when the dory scraped the side of the boat. He came out of the cockpit, and, to his amazement, saw the Captain assisting two young ladies into the *Jennie P.* Each carried a large basket. They were no less surprised than he.

“Why, Mr. McGowan!” exclaimed Elizabeth, the color flooding her already rosy cheeks.

“Captain Pott!” cried Miss Splinter.

Mr. McGowan said nothing. He folded his hands behind him and looked foolish.

“I thought maybe a little company might liven up the trip,” observed the seaman, looking like a schoolboy who had sprung a surprise on his teacher. “Ain’t you going to welcome ’em? You’ll find their name on the roster, and they brought their grub with ’em.”

“This is a very delightful surprise,” faintly declared the minister.

Elizabeth looked troubled, and her discomfort did not add to the minister’s ease. She had been anything but cordial since the incident at her home when Mr. Fox had taken ill. He had not seen her since the fight. He feared that the interpretation placed on that by her father had not bettered his standing.

“I didn’t go to bed last night right off, Mack, when I said I was going,” explained the Captain. “I went out and fixed up this little party for a sort of surprise to all hands. I stowed that ’ile in the boat-house on purpose so as I could get ashore without too many questions.”

“I trust that our going will make no difference.”

The minister’s embarrassment had grown painful. With a hopeless gesture he brought out a pair of black grimy hands. “Indeed, it will make a difference, Miss Fox, all the difference in the world. If the Captain had kept his engine cleaner I’d have been able to give you a more hearty welcome.”

The sight of the greasy hands broke the tension, and although Mr. McGowan cordially extended them neither young lady offered hers in return.

The cruise was a great success, if we take the Captain’s word for it, which word was given to Mrs. Beaver on their return to Little River. “Them young folks had the time of their lives, and I never see a more likely pair than that little Beth and the minister as they stood by the wheel together steering the *Jennie P.* through them rollers. Beth takes to water just the same way she takes to everything, with her whole soul.”

It was noon when they cast anchor in the Riverhead Inlet. The men prepared to go ashore while the girls took out the lunches. As the baskets were opened, and bundles untied, Mr. McGowan suggested that they make for shore before their appetites demanded otherwise.

At the landing the men parted, for the Captain had expressed the desire to make his visit alone. He did not tell the minister that his destination was the County

Farm for fear that he, Mr. McGowan, would not understand that Clemmie Pipkin was the matron, and not an inmate.

Captain Pott found Miss Pipkin without difficulty. During the past ten years, he had been a frequent visitor at the Farm, and many knew him. He went at once to the bare little reception-room and made known his presence. As Miss Pipkin entered a slight tinge crept into the hollow of her sallow cheeks. She extended a bony hand.

"I'm real glad to see you, Josiah. It's been a long time since you called."

"Howdy, Clemmie. It has been a mite long, but I've been purty busy of late trying to keep people out of trouble."

"Then you must have changed a lot."

"You ain't looking well," he observed solicitously. "Ain't sick, be you?"

"No," she answered with a deep sigh. "That is, I ain't real sick. I ain't been feeling quite myself for a spell, but I reckon it will wear off."

"You'll wear off if you don't get out of this place," replied the Captain.

Miss Pipkin was far from being a beautiful woman. From all appearances she had never been pretty, or even good-looking. Her form had a few too many sharp angles where it should have been curved. Her face was long and thin, and now age and worry had dug deeply into the homely features, obliterating the last trace of middle life. She always dressed in black, and to-day the Captain saw that her clothes were worn and faded. He moved uneasily as his quick eye took in the meaning of these signs.

"I cal'late they're working you too hard here, Clemmie," he said tenderly. "You'd best get away for a spell."

"I'd like to have a rest, but I can't leave. There's no one to take my place."

"Pshaw! There's plenty who'd be glad for the place."

"Anyhow, I ain't got no place to go."

"That's what I've come to see you about, Clemmie."

Miss Pipkin straightened with cold dignity, and her eyes flashed fires of warning.

"Josiah Pott! Be you proposing to me *again*?"

"Now, don't get mad, Clemmie. I ain't proposing to you," he explained as calmly as possible. "But as I've said afore——"

“I know what you’ve said, learnt it like a book. And you know what I’ve said, too. My no means NO.”

“I cal’late you ain’t left no room for me to doubt that. You’ve made that purty tolerable plain. I reckon we’re getting too old for that now, anyway. Leastwise, I be,” he finished hurriedly, noting a rising color in her thin cheeks.

“Huh!” she grunted indignantly. “A body’d think you was the grandfather of Methuselah to hear you talk.”

“I am getting on purty well, Clemmie.”

“Josiah Pott! If you come over here to talk that nonsense you can go right back.”

“I really come on another matter. I want you to come over and keep house for me and another man. We’re living on the old place, and it ain’t what you’d call hum sweet hum for two males to live alone in a big house like mine. Thought maybe you wouldn’t mind keeping the decks swabbed and the galley full of pervisions if I’d only pay you the same as you’re getting here. I’d——”

“That will be enough!”

“Thought maybe ’twould.”

“I’ll not listen to another word from you!” exclaimed the shocked Miss Pipkin. The expression on her face gave the Captain the feeling that he had dived into icy water, and had come up suddenly against a hidden beam.

“Two of you! And you want me to do your work! Well, of all the nerve!”

“I ain’t told you yet who the other feller is,” suggested the Captain.

“I don’t care if he’s an angel from heaven. I’d think you’d be ashamed of yourself to come here and speak of such a thing.”

“But I ain’t ashamed, Clemmie. A drowning man is willing to grab the first straw he sees. Listen to me, Clemmie,” he pleaded, as she turned to leave the room.

“Me listen to you proposing for me to come over to Little River and start talk that would ruin the town? Not if I know what Clemmie Pipkin’s doing.”

“I tell you I ain’t proposing to you, I’m just asking you. As far as that town goes, a few things more for it to talk about can’t do her no harm.”

Miss Pipkin paused on the threshold to give a parting shot, but the Captain spoke first and spiked her guns.

“The other feller happens to be the new parson.”

Her expression changed. Preachers had long been her specialty at the Poor Farm, and she knew exactly the care and food they needed.

“What was that you said, Josiah?”

“The other feller living with me is the minister at the brick church.”

“The minister living with you!”

“Yes.”

“With you? But you ain’t got religion.”

“I cal’late that’s the safest guess you ever made, Clemmie, but just now it’s cooking, and not religion, that’s bothering me.”

“Lan’ sakes! You ain’t trying to cook for the minister, be you?” she asked incredulously.

“You put it just right, I’m trying to. I don’t know how long he’ll be able to stand it, but he won’t go nowhere else.”

“Poor thing!” she exclaimed. “Poor thing!”

“Them’s my sentiments, too, Clemmie.”

“And no doubt he’s a frail creature, too, and ought to have the best of care. So many of them are that way.”

A violent fit of coughing seized the Captain.

“Lan’ sakes! Now, what’s the matter with you? Been going out without your rubbers, I’ll warrant. Men are worse than babies when left to themselves. I do believe they’d die if the women-folks didn’t look after them once in a while.”

“We sartin would,” choked out the Captain. “Do you suppose you can arrange it to come over?”

“When do you want me?”

“Right now. To-day. I come special for you.”

“I’ll go,” decided Miss Pipkin impulsively. “It’s plain as day that it’s my duty. I am getting wore out in this place. They’ve been putting the work of three on me, and I ain’t got the strength.”

“It ain’t right, Clemmie, for you to be wearing yourself out in this kind of work. God intended you for something better. I ain’t proposing,” he hastily added, lest his bird take the sudden notion to wing her way back into the bush.

Miss Pipkin gave him a quick look, and left the room. She very soon returned carrying a bundle beneath one arm, and clutching a bulging telescope suit-case in the other hand. From one end of the bundle protruded the head of a cat.

“What in tarnation you got in there, Clemmie?” asked the seaman, pointing toward the bundle.

“You didn’t think I was going to leave my Tommy behind to be starved and abused, did you?”

“Hadn’t thought about that,” meekly admitted the Captain, as he took the telescope.

“Have you got a trunk to send over?”

“No.”

Miss Pipkin breathed a deep sigh of relief as they passed out of the gates. She looked back at the weather-beaten old buildings of the County Farm into which ten years of her life had gone. But she felt no pang on leaving.

The Captain kept up a constant stream of conversation on the way down to the wharf. Suddenly, Miss Pipkin stopped, and suspiciously eyed the seaman.

“Josiah, how are we going back?”

“In my *Jennie P.*”

“In your what?”

“In my power-boat, the *Jennie P.*”

“Josiah Pott! You know I ain’t been aboard a boat for more than twenty year, and I ain’t going to start out on the thing, whatever-you-call-it!”

It appeared as if the Captain would have to come another day, in another sort of vehicle, to carry home his newly-found housekeeper. He again led trumps.

“The minister come all the way over with me to get you.”

“He did?”

“Sartin did.”

“Poor thing! He’s been treated so scandalously that he’s willing to do ’most anything. Well, it may be the death of me, but I’ve got this far, and I may as well go on.”

Mr. McGowan was waiting for them at the end of the wharf. The skipper

introduced them with a malicious wink at Miss Pipkin as he indicated the physical strength of the minister. Her face flushed as nearly crimson as it had in years. When they finally got into the dory she leaned close to the Captain and set his staid old heart palpitating. Mr. McGowan was engaged, waving to the girls in the *Jennie P.*

“You ain’t going to tell him what I said about his being delicate, and the like, are you, Josiah?”

He answered with a vigorous shake of the head as he leaned back to draw the oars through the water. Each time he swung forward he looked into the eyes of Miss Pipkin. Did he imagine it, or did he see there something more than interest in her own question?

Aboard the *Jennie P.* the young ladies took charge of Miss Pipkin, and soon they were chatting companionably. The girls had removed the door to the cabin, and laying it from seat to seat, had improvised a table. Over it they had spread cloths, and on the cloths were plates piled high with good things. The odor of coffee greeted the Captain’s nostrils, as he came forward after securing the dory.

“Well, I’d like to know! Where in tarnation did you get the stove to b’ile the coffee on?” he asked, sniffing the air.

“We brought it with us,” replied Elizabeth.

“You fetched a stove in them baskets?”

“Certainly. Come and see it.”

She drew her old friend toward the cockpit. There stood the steaming coffee-pot over an alcohol flame.

“Well, I swan!”

Paper plates were scattered about over the improvised table, chicken piled high on some, sandwiches on others, doughnuts, cream-puffs, and apple tarts on still others. Indeed, not a thing had been left out, so far as the Captain could see.

“If this ain’t the likeliest meal I ever see, then, I’d like to know. I feel right now as if I could eat the whole enduring lot, I’m that hungry,” declared the skipper.

Elizabeth served, moving about as gracefully as a fawn. Mr. McGowan watched her with no attempt to hide his admiration. The one question in his mind all day had been: what did she think of him for his part in the affair at the Inn? He decided that he would take advantage of the first opportunity to prove to her that

no other course had been left open for him.

Dinner over, the Captain filled his pipe, and stood in the door of the cabin. He smoked quietly, and watched the ladies put the things away. Miss Pipkin was folding the cloths, and on her the seaman's gaze came to a rest. Would the old home seem different with her in it?

"Hadn't we better start?"

The Captain jumped. "I cal'late I'm getting nervous, jumping like that."

"Or in love?"

"Maybe you're right, Mack."

"Honest confession?"

"I ain't confessing nothing. I was referring to your idea that we'd best be under way," explained the Captain, with a wry smile.

As he spoke he leaned over the engine, and gave it a turn. Tommy, Miss Pipkin's black cat, was mincing contentedly at some scraps when the chug-chug of the exhaust shot from the side of the boat. Tommy shot from the cockpit. He paused on the upper step, a startled glare in his eyes. He forgot the tempting morsels; he forgot his rheumatism; he was bent on flight. And fly he did. With a wild yodeling yell he sprang forward. Like a black cyclone he circled the deck. On his fourth time round he caught sight of the minister's legs. He and Elizabeth were standing at the wheel, ready to steer the boat out of the harbor. To the cat's excited glance the man's legs suggested the beginnings of tree trunks, at the top of which there was safety and repose from the spitting demon at the side of the boat. Like a flying bat he made the leap. But he had misjudged both the distance and his own rheumatic muscles. He landed on the girl, and came to a rest half-way to her shoulder. His claws sank into the thick folds of her sweater. Elizabeth released her hold on the wheel, and with a cry fell back against the minister. A pair of strong arms lost neither time nor opportunity. With a little persuasion Tommy saw his mistake, and dropped to the deck. He took up his interrupted flight, finally coming to an uncertain rest somewhere aloft.

Elizabeth looked up, smiled, blushed like a peony, took hold the wheel, and gently released herself.

"Oh, thank you! Wasn't it stupid of me to let that old cat frighten me so?"

Mr. McGowan declared that he was delighted to have been of service, and his emotions began to be very evident to him.

It took considerable coaxing on the part of the Captain, and more clawing on the part of Tommy, before he could be convinced that the cabin was as safe as the mast. At last he gave in and came down, and as the boat left the harbor he was purring contentedly, folded safely in the arms of Miss Pipkin.

Before they reached Little River harbor, Miss Pipkin had many times declared she was going to die. The Captain as many times remonstrated with her, but she only showed a greater determination to die. When the boat was anchored, she refused to move or be moved. The minister lifted her bodily, and carried her to the dory. As he was handing her over the side into the Captain's arms, she objected to the transference by a sudden lurch, which sent the minister to his knees. His foot caught on the gunwale, and his ankle was severely wrenched. On releasing his shoe string that night he discovered a serious sprain.

CHAPTER VII

“Lan’ sakes!” exclaimed Miss Pipkin, who, fully recovered, was busily engaged in the kitchen on the following morning when the minister entered. “Now, what is the matter with you, Mr. McGowan?”

He was leaning on the back of a chair which he was sliding along the floor in front of him.

“I twisted my ankle last evening as I was leaving the boat.”

“You did! And you never said one word! How did you do it?”

“I slipped just as I handed you over the side.”

“It was my foolishness that made you do it. Josiah!” she called, as the Captain came down by the rear stair. “Get me a basin of water and the cayenne pepper, quick!”

The Captain obeyed with alacrity. Miss Pipkin soon had the ankle in the water, and the water was a fiery red in color.

“It’ll take the swelling out,” she affirmed.

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“Ain’t you got it a mite too hot with pepper, Clemmie?”

“No, I ain’t. That’s all you men know about such things.”

“Well, I didn’t know.”

The swelling began to disappear according to the prophecy of the housekeeper, but the skin took on the color of the reddened water in the basin. An hour later Mr. McGowan was undecided which was the more undesirable, the pain from the sprain, or the blisters from the treatment.

“Cal’late I’ll run down to the *Jennie P.*,” announced the Captain after breakfast. “You can’t navigate that far, can you, Mack?”

“Josiah Pott! What on earth do you mean? Of course he can’t, and you know it. I don’t see what you want to go traipsing down to that thing for, anyhow; it ain’t

going to get loose, though it'd be a good loss if it did."

"It ain't likely she'll get away, that's sartin sure, but I thought I'd do a little work on her. I ain't had much time afore now, with all my cooking and keeping house. The minister said my engine wa'n't clean."

"Well, if you ain't been cooking better than you've been keeping house, the wonder is you ain't both dead," she said, peering about the room.

Fearing further comment, the Captain hastily left the house. On reaching the wharf, he was surprised to see Elizabeth walking from the far end to meet him.

"Morning, Beth. Out purty early for your constitutional, ain't you?"

"Good morning, Uncle Josiah. I've been waiting for you an awful long time. Are you going out to the *Jennie P.*?"

"That's my calculation. Want to go along?"

"If I may."

"Of course you can. Did you leave something aboard last night?"

"No. I just came down here on purpose to see you. I felt certain you would be going out."

"You come down just to see me? What do you want to see an old feller like me for? Now, if it was——"

"You, old! Who's been telling you that?"

"Nobody, 'cepting this infernal rheumatism. But I ain't quite as badly crippled up this morning as the preacher is, at that."

"Do you mean to say that the minister has the rheumatism?"

"No, he ain't got nothing as tame or ordinary as that. He started with a sprained j'int from the cruise, but he's going to have something far worse, if I don't miss my guess. Clemmie's been soaking his ankle in red pepper." He chuckled quietly as he helped Elizabeth into the dory.

"Soaking his foot in red pepper?"

"Yes. Hot as fire, too, it was. I asked if she didn't have the water a mite too red, but she said it wa'n't, and I cal'late she'd otter know."

"Isn't she the quaintest little woman? I remember her when I was a child, but she didn't like me one bit because I spilled some hot water on her once. Is she going

to stay with you?”

“She’s going to keep house,” replied the Captain, drawing the dory alongside his power-boat. “Well, here we be, Beth.”

Elizabeth sprang lightly over the side. She led the way to the roof of the cabin, where she sat down. When the Captain had taken his place at her side, she looked up eagerly into his eyes.

“I do so hope you will understand me, Uncle Josiah!”

“I’ve always tried to, Beth.”

“I know you have! Tell me, did my—did any one you know have anything to do with making up that boxing match the other night?”

“There was a good many that had to do with it, unless I’m ’way off in my reckoning.”

“Has Mr. McGowan said anything about Father in connection with the affair?”

“He ain’t said nothing to me,” responded the Captain.

“Uncle Josiah!” exclaimed the girl, her eyes growing wide in her earnestness. “I know Father has not treated Mr. McGowan one bit nicely since what happened at our house, and I don’t know why. There must be some reason, though, for Father would not harm any one without just reasons. He is the best man in the whole world! But he has had his way so long with all the other ministers that he cannot become accustomed to the way Mr. McGowan ignores him. Father does a lot of good, and Mr. McGowan dare not think ill of him!”

“There, there, Beth,” soothed the Captain. “You’re trying to tell me something, but you’re getting off the course. Just you tell me calm-like what it’s all about. The fust thing to do is to get our bearings. Has some one been telling you that Mr. McGowan thinks and talks about your dad in the way you say?”

“No-o. But I’ve heard others say that Father knew all about the plans for that fight before it happened, and that he could have stopped it had he wished to. It isn’t true! And if Mr. McGowan even thinks it’s true he isn’t fair. He will misjudge Father if he has the least idea that he would stoop to such a frame-up.”

“I cal’late he ain’t misjudging your father none, Beth. So far as disobeying orders goes, it’s because he knows what’s best. He ain’t likely to go contrary, unless——”

“But I know he does misjudge Father,” broke in the girl in an attempt to return to

her former subject. "And Father feels it keenly. If he doesn't misjudge him, why doesn't he come to our house any more to ask advice about parish matters? He just goes ahead to suit himself. Do you think that fair?"

Captain Pott wanted to say no, in order to agree with his young friend, but her big blue eyes were too intent with eagerness to permit of anything but the truth, or to hedge. He chose the easiest way and hedged.

"I ain't in no position to answer that, Beth."

"Oh, I can't understand it at all! Why can't they be friends as they were at first? What has happened?"

"I can't answer that, neither."

"It's just because Father has refused to bow to him in some little matter, I suppose. Isn't there some way to get them together or at least to get them to compromise?"

"I'm 'feared it ain't in neither of 'em to do either one."

"I suppose not," she replied, a little catch in her voice. "But it is too bad to have the work go to pieces like it is just because they are both so stubborn."

"It sartin is, Beth." The seaman fidgeted. What could the girl be driving at?

"But I'm in sympathy with my father!" she cried.

"That's right for you, Beth. I'd think less of you if you felt any other way."

"If only Mr. McGowan would go to him!"

"Let's see if I get the hull drift of your argument. You say that you think your father is right, and the minister is wrong. That being your conviction you think the minister otter go to him and do a little apologizing. Well, he won't. What he's done is just as right to him as what your father thinks he'd otter done is right to your dad. To try to get 'em together would be like trying to mix 'ile and water, both of 'em good enough in their place, but when you try to mix 'em what you get ain't one nor t'other, and sp'iles both. Cal'late we'd best leave 'em as they are."

"I didn't mean that Mr. McGowan should go to Father and apologize. That would be too much like all of the others before him. But I did think you might suggest some other way to bring them together before things get worse."

"Beth, I'd like to accommodate you, if that's what you're asking of me, but if Mack McGowan had chosen any other way than the one he took, I'd cut him

adrift, sartin as death.”

The seaman felt the girl at his side stiffen and tremble against his arm as she turned from him. Despair seized him.

“Forgive me, Beth, for making you cry like that. I ain’t nothing but a rough old sailor, and can’t say things as they’d otter be said. Come, it ain’t wuth crying over. What I meant was that I’d have disowned him, because I’d have known he was going contrary-wise to what he thought was right.”

She trembled more violently than before. Too miserable for words, he seized her and turned her about. He was amazed to find no tears in her eyes.

“I wasn’t crying,” she choked, drawing the corner of her handkerchief from her mouth. “It struck me so funny, Uncle Josiah!”

“Your notion of fun is the funniest I ever see,” he commented. “Mind telling me what it was that tickled you so?”

“You! Captain Josiah Pott! Threatening to disown the minister should he fail to toe your chalk-line! Where, may I ask, can one find a more high-handed tyranny of spurned authority than that? It’s too funny for words!”

“I cal’late you’d do some disowning, too, if he’d go traipsing round asking everybody’s pardon just because he steps on a few toes now and again.”

“I disown him?” she asked, not able to check the rush of color to her cheeks. “Pray tell! Why——”

“Now, see here, BETH, THERE AIN’T NO USE OF YOUR PRETENDING TO ME.”—*Page 146.*

“Now, see here, Beth, there ain’t no use of your pretending to me. I’ve got a pair of eyes, and I make use of ’em. You wouldn’t want him a mite different, and if he was, you’d be as disapp’inted as me. I know what I’m talking about,” he declared, holding up his pipe with a convincing gesture. “All that he’s done is as religious to him as preaching a sermon, even that fight down to the Inn. It was a heap sight more religious than a lot of sermons I’ve listened to in my day.”

“But, Uncle Josiah, don’t you think his methods are a little too strenuous and out of the ordinary in dealing with spiritual derelicts?” she asked, trying hard to hide the pride which the Captain’s observation had awakened.

“I ain’t got much of an idea what you mean by spiritual derricks, Beth, but I’m going to say this: he’s the fust real live preacher I ever see, and if he’s got ways of bringing ’em in that’s a mite off the set course, he’s going to do it, and there ain’t enough men living to stop him. He has found some of that queer sort of religion what he called anonymous down there to that Inn, and if he’d have taken water the other night he’d have lost every one of them boys. He fought that puncher because he was after the gang behind him. If things had gone against him, I’d have pitched in and helped him trounce the hull enduring lot, and I’d have felt mighty religious while I was doing it, too.”

“But I think he might prove just as much a success and still not be so original. It doesn’t pay when one’s position and salary depend on how one acts.”

“Mack’s position and salary can hang from the same gallows, so far as he’s concerned, if they go to putting muzzles on him.”

“I’m so glad you said that!” exclaimed the girl, giving his arm a gentle squeeze.

The seaman stared at her. What on earth could she mean? “Beth, you’ve sartin got me gasping to understand you this morning.”

“I’m trying so hard to explain without actually telling you. He must leave the church!”

“Must leave—Say, what in tarnation do you mean?”

“Please, don’t hint that I told you, but it has been decided by the vestry.”

“I want to know!”

“It isn’t to be on account of the fight, though. Oh, I was real bad and listened,” she explained to the surprised seaman. “I didn’t mean to at first, but I couldn’t help hearing. Then, I had to listen to the rest. I shall tell Father what I have done just as soon as I can, for I know it was wicked of me. I felt I must come to you. They are going to find something in his sermons that isn’t orthodox, and then, there is to be a church trial! That was what I didn’t want to tell you for fear you wouldn’t understand, but you didn’t suggest anything for me to do, and I had to tell you. Can’t you get Mr. McGowan to be careful what he puts in his sermons?”

“Am I to tell him whose orders they be?”

“Indeed, not!”

“A heap of good it will do, then, for me to say anything. He’d take it as a banter

for a fight. Cal'late we'll have to trust to luck that he'll stick to the old chart."

Elizabeth slid from the roof of the cabin to the deck. She walked to the railing and looked over into the water. The Captain, thinking she was ready to go ashore, followed. She swung about, and stamped her foot, angrily.

"Why don't you men know how to act! Why doesn't he know how to behave himself!"

She turned back and looked out across the Sound. The mainland showed dim through the haze of the Indian Summer morning.

"Beth, I hate to see you worrying like this," said the Captain, a tremor in his voice. "I wish I could help you, I sartin wish I could."

She came to him, and laying her hand lightly on his sleeve, looked eagerly into his eyes.

"You dear old Uncle! Please, forgive me for telling you all I have. I am worried, dreadfully worried, about Father. He is so different of late. He takes everything so seriously where Mr. McGowan is concerned. He is not at all like himself. I'm afraid something dreadful will happen to him if things do not right themselves very soon."

"Now, don't you worry, Beth. Just you be patient. I cal'late there is something wrong, but there ain't no channel so long that it ain't got an outlet of some sort, and the rougher 'tis, the shorter it's li'ble to be. We're going to get out, you bank on that, and when we do, your daddy is going to be aboard."

"Thank you, Uncle Josiah. I'm ready now to go ashore."

The look of relief on her beautiful face, as the tears of gratitude filled her eyes, caused the Captain to swallow very hard, and to draw the back of his hand across his eyes, remarking that the smoke was getting into them. He was unmindful that his pipe had gone out long ago.

On his way home the skipper became uncomfortably aware of the seriousness of his promise to the Elder's daughter. He had pledged himself and his support indirectly to Jim Fox! What that might mean he could not foresee. He remembered what Elizabeth had told him concerning her father's condition, and this set a new train of thought going through his brain. He recalled that there had always been times since Jim Fox had first come to Little River when he had seemed dejected and melancholy. Could it be possible that there had been some physical disease working all these years in the Elder's body, and might that not

be an explanation for the mental state into which he seemed to be heading? Might that not be the reason for his strange actions against the minister and himself?

Captain Pott entered the dining-room just as Miss Pipkin emerged from the minister's study. She was carrying a large crock. The seaman looked intently at the bowl.

"There was a mite too much pepper in that basin, Josiah. I was that excited about his ankle that I didn't notice how much I was putting in. It'll soon be better, now, for I was bathing it in this cream that Mrs. Beaver give me."

"Bathing his foot in—what?"

"Cream. It takes the soreness out."

"Clemmie, you're a wonder! But if that cream come from Eadie's I cal'late it won't be none too healing."

"I've been talking to the minister about the services," she said, placing the crock on the table. "The Ladies' Aid meets this afternoon. I'm going."

"You'd best get a life-preserver on."

"Josiah, you shouldn't talk like that. They do a lot of good. I ain't been to one for years. It's so Christian and nice to do things for others. That's what Aid means, aiding some one else."

"If I ain't 'way off, most of the aiding business runs to the tongues of them present. Most women lean to tongue, excepting you, Clemmie."

"Josiah, you ain't fit for the minister to live with! You shouldn't talk like that about the business of the Lord."

"Cal'late I am sort of a heathen. But I'll wager that you'll find them there aiders interested in some things aside the business of the Lord."

Miss Pipkin left him and hurried into the kitchen for broom and duster.

It was late in the afternoon when she had finished her house-cleaning, and sailed forth in the direction of the church. The Captain was sitting on the front steps of the chapel, and rose to meet her as she turned in at the gate.

"I hope the meeting ain't over," she said, breathless.

"Just got her off the ways, I'd say," he commented, jerking his head toward an open window through which came the sound of many voices. "You'd best tell

'em where you're staying, Clemmie, or you're li'ble to hear some things not intended for your ears."

She bridled past him and swept into the church. There was a brief pause in the buzz, but the hubbub that followed was doubled in intensity.

That evening while Miss Pipkin was placing the food on the table she appeared worried. She inquired solicitously concerning the minister's ankle, but there was a distant polite tone in her voice. After supper she asked the Captain to dry the dishes for her, and went to the kitchen. The seaman took his place at the sink only to have the cloth snatched from his hand.

"Josiah,"—she whispered,—“close that door to the dining-room, I've got something to ask you.”

“Ain't you going to let me dry them dishes for you?”

“Of course not.”

The door was closed, and the Captain came back to the sink.

“What's wrong with Mr. McGowan?”

“Too much red pepper, I cal'late.”

“Don't be silly. You know what I mean. There is something awfully wrong. I can't help noticing it.”

“What makes you think that, Clemmie?”

“What I heard this afternoon.... And, you know, the most of 'em knew me, but none excepting Mrs. Beaver knew where I was staying, and she didn't tell. She come over and set down by me, different from what she used to be, quiet and real refined.”

“Eadie Beaver quiet, you say? Well, I cal'late the million is coming, sartin sure.”

“Millennium or no millennium, that's the truth. I was kind of 'feared at first that she wasn't real well.”

“She'd be a real cur'osity in this here new state of hers,” mused the Captain.

“Well, I begun to hear things about him,”—she pointed toward the closed door,—“and Mrs. Beaver was that indignant that she didn't know what to do. From all I heard, it seems the minister has been doing things he has no right to do, fighting and the like. Then, too,”—came in an awed tone,—“he ain't orthodox. He's preaching all sorts of new-fangled ideas that he shouldn't

mention in the pulpit, and though you don't know it, Josiah, that is hairsay! That is worse than killing a man, because it sends their souls to hell."

"If I was you, Clemmie, I'd wait and judge his preaching for myself. You ain't heard him yet."

Miss Pipkin agreed to the fairness of the Captain's proposition, but she was still troubled.

"Josiah, there's going to be some sort of meeting next Sunday night after the regular service, and there is going to be something done to get Mr. McGowan out of his church. Of course, if he ain't orthodox, I'd hate to see the meeting interfered with, but——"

"Clemmie, I ain't up on this hairsay and orthodox stuff, and I ain't sartin I want to be. It all sounds like mighty dry picking to me. But I've been thinking, and I've decided that whatever them things are they ain't real religion. And I've decided that the Lord ain't been sitting in on them church meetings for quite a spell. I cal'late I'll be on hand next Sunday night with a special invitation for Him to cut the pack for this new deal."

Miss Pipkin looked as though she expected him to be struck dead. But he was not. This fact decided her in favor of being present to witness the thing which the Captain intended to do.

CHAPTER VIII

On Sunday evening the chapel was packed. It was evident that many were there, not for the service, but for what promised to be a sensational after-meeting. Members of the Athletic Club were scattered through the room, and the same dogged determination was on their faces as on the night of the boxing affair.

Mr. McGowan hobbled up the pulpit stair. He announced his text: "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets." Captain Pott felt Elizabeth, who was sitting beside him, stiffen. Miss Pipkin leaned forward in her eagerness to catch every word, and as the minister proceeded her expression changed from perplexity and doubt to one of deep respect. There were others who followed the thought of the sermon with keen interest. Elder Fox was present, for the first time in weeks. Occasionally, he would write something on a pad, and then lean back to pull at his silky chops.

Throughout the sermon Mr. McGowan spoke with tense earnestness.

"The time has come when the church must cut the shore lines that have been binding us to the past. If a man persists in dragging the shore line he may get a few good fish, but that does not set aside the fact that he is either a poor fisherman or a coward. He must know the habits of the fish, and go where they are.... The same thing may be said of the church. We may produce a few fair Christians by dragging shore lines of church doctrine, but our success will be due more to luck than to a knowledge of the working of God's laws.... We have been long-shore Christians for a good many centuries; the day has come for us to break away from the surf of man-made ideas, and launch out till we can feel the swell of a boundless love, a love not confined to the letter of denominational law or creed. We must get into us the spirit of Christianity. We must recognize the fact that the spirit is not a thing that we can confine to sand-lined beaches of narrow conceptions of faith and salvation that now exist in our churches....

"Here in Little River we have been an excellent example of what I mean. We have been admiring ourselves,—and not without just cause,—while the world we ought to be serving is forced to take its stand on the outside, oftentimes with

ideals greater than our own.... We have substituted doctrine for Christianity, the letter of the law for the spirit of freedom. We have slavishly worshipped our beliefs about God, instead of worshipping God.... And what is the result? We have shut our doors to many who hold a greater faith than our own; or we have forced them out with no faith because of our own selfish religious intoxication. Of this very thing, this church has been guilty....

“We must admit blame for many conditions that exist in our town. Let us purge ourselves before we seek to cleanse others. Let us first launch out before we call to others to follow. Let us learn the laws by which God works, and then shall we have no trouble to fill our nets.”

After Mr. McGowan had finished, he stood looking out over his congregation. The Captain whispered to Elizabeth, “Ain’t he the finest-looking specimen of human natur’ you ever see, six foot of him standing up there reading the riot act to ’em! And I got all he said, too. I cal’late there’s some here to-night that feel like they’d been overhauled and set adrift.”

Without announcing the usual closing hymn, Mr. McGowan very quietly pronounced the benediction, and left the church by the rear door.

The only move that followed his leaving was made by the members of the Athletic Club. They filed out one by one, but reconvened beneath the window where the Captain sat inside. Captain Pott was plainly nervous when Mr. Fox rose and went forward. He opened the window slightly as though in need of fresh air.

The Elder clapped loudly for order, and the boys beneath the Captain’s window joined in so heartily that the Elder was forced to shout for order.

“This meeting has been called for the members of this church, *only!*” he shouted. “Will those who are not members in regular standing adjourn to the rooms below to complete their visiting?”

Few heard, none obeyed. Instead, all began to take seats as near the front as possible. Mr. Fox grew red in the face, and dark of countenance. But he preserved his dignity.

“Must I repeat that this meeting has been called for the members of the church. Will the others kindly leave us to ourselves?”

It became evident that there was no intention on the part of any to leave the room, and so the Elder called the mixed crowd to order.

The first half-hour proved so tame that some who had remained to see trouble, got up and went home. At last Mr. Beaver rose, and the audience caught its breath. He poised himself on one foot, and began to pump, blink, whistle, and finally to stutter.

“M-M-Mr. Ch-ch-ch-chairman!” he called in a high excited voice.

Elder Fox declared that Mr. Beaver had the floor, and Mr. Beaver proceeded to take it, at least a good part of the section round which he was hopping. People moved back and gave him room, for he needed plenty of space in which to make himself understood.

“The p-p-parish c-committee h-h-has d-decided that M-Mr. McGowan is not the m-m-man for our ch-ch-church. Elder F-F-Fox has the report of the c-c-committee. I m-m-move we h-h-h-hear him now!”

Mr. Fox mounted the platform and came forward to the edge. He looked into the faces of those before him with deep sadness in his own.

“Friends, this is one of the saddest moments of my life,” he began, his voice shaking with feeling. “Some—er—have come to love our young brother who has been called to our church. And he has many very estimable qualities. For that reason I feel very keenly what I am about to say. The committee feels that Mr. McGowan holds ideas that are too far advanced for our humble little church. We must not overlook the fact that we hold sacred some of the things to which he flippantly referred to-night, and it is our duty to protect—er—the sacred doctrines which have been handed down to us from the more sacred memory of our fathers and martyrs of the past.

“Our minister does not believe in the divine inspiration of the Bible. The question was put to him by one of the members of this committee, and he replied—er—that even if every jot and tittle were personally dictated by God—which he doubted—the Bible would remain a sealed book unless it inspired those who read it. It is evident from this answer that he does not believe in—er—our sacred doctrine of the verbal inspiration of Scripture.

“You have heard him to-night, asking us—er—in the common slang of the dock to rid ourselves of all these doctrines on which the church has been founded. What he said proves that he does not believe in the fundamentals of Christian faith.

“I need not go back of this sermon so fresh in our minds to prove to your intelligence that Mr. McGowan is not orthodox. I could call to your attention

many unfortunate statements, but I feel that it is not necessary. Your committee has gone over every detail—er—prayerfully and thoughtfully. Truly, it gives me a pain——”

“Get a bottle of Watkins’ Relief!” piped a shrill voice through the partially opened window.

Taken by surprise, and with his mouth open, the Elder lost every expression of dignity as he gazed in the direction whence the advice had come. Before he could again gather up the threads of his closing remarks several men were demanding the floor. The Elder scanned the faces of all, in order to place friend and foe. He then fixed his glance on some one at the rear of the room. In answer to the Elder’s nod a heavy basso pealed forth.

Every head turned about, and as the buzz of comment broke from the astonished crowd the Elder rapped for order. The Reverend Mr. Means of New York City moved ponderously forward.

The faces of the sympathetic ones in the audience became exceedingly serious as each looked into the face of the city clergyman. Certainly, this meeting must be of tremendous importance to lead so great a man to leave his metropolitan pulpit to attend a gathering in so small a church.

“We must have better order!” cried Mr. Fox, smiling a welcome to the visiting minister. “We have the unexpected pleasure of a visit from—er—our much-loved friend and brother. Shall we dispense with the business of the hour and hear what the Reverend Mr. Means may have on his heart?”

Mr. Means took his position near the moderator. With a long sympathetic look he searched the invisible among the shadows of the ceiling. He was calm, too calm, thought the Captain. He drew his frock coat about him, and plunged the fingers of his right hand in between the two buttons over his heart. That attitude, as of one weary with the struggles of men and yet tolerant because of long-suffering kindness, had an immediate effect on part of the audience. From somewhere near the center of the room applause started, and soon swelled to a moderate ovation. He acknowledged the respect shown him by bringing his eyes down to the level of his audience.

“Brethren,”—his voice trembled as he began to speak,—“I have no special message for you to-night; my heart is too sore from the things I have just seen and heard. I have been in the rear of this room during your entire service. I have listened to the unfortunate sermon which your bright young minister was so unwise as to preach. I do not marvel that you are like a flock of sheep having no

shepherd; that sermon was enough to confuse even me, and I have been in the ministry a great many years. I feel I must say something, but I earnestly pray that it may not influence you in this matter which is yours to decide. I do not intend to even suggest what action you ought to take on the report of your parish committee. You must remember that what you do to-night may affect the future of our young brother, and you must not wreck that future. Mr. McGowan and I do not agree on matters of theology, but that fact does not prevent me from admiring some of his fine qualities to which your senior Elder referred to-night. Time may cool the ardor of his youth into sane and safe ideas.

“But,”—he lifted his hands toward heaven and his voice toward the people,—“what your parish committee chairman has told you in his report is true, only too true. We cannot afford to permit our churches to suffer from such teachings as those given you to-night, and I dare say, which have been given you many times past. Brethren, as great as is our love for this young minister, it is as nothing in comparison with the devotion that should be ours where the doctrines of our church are concerned. I opposed the ordination of Mr. McGowan in the New York Presbytery a year ago on the ground that he was not sound in doctrine, but when my brethren passed him over my protest I acquiesced as a Christian must always do when the voice of the majority speaks. But I must say that I greatly deplored the action taken at that time. Not that I hold any personal feelings against the young man, but because I am opposed to unorthodox men being called to our pulpits.

“Now, brethren, I should gladly waive all this,” he continued, dropping his voice to a soothing whisper, “but theological differences are not all that stand between the young man and a faithful church. You’ve heard him suggest that the church which should be the house of God, and which Scripture calls the house of prayer, be turned into a playhouse for the community. I cannot imagine any man with a passion to save souls holding to an idea that he can accomplish this by desecrating the place of Divine Worship by turning it into a gymnasium. The only explanation possible is that Mr. McGowan has not been reared under the influences of our best families. Not that this is anything against his character, but fact is fact.”

The room became quiet with interest in anticipation of what might follow. It was true that their minister had come to them as an unknown man, and they were certainly entitled to any disclosure of his past that the city man might wish to give. But there was nothing more said on the subject, and a murmur of disapproval ran over the audience.

“I have finished, except to say that I honor your Elder for the firm stand he has taken. Mr. Fox, you are to be congratulated on your courage, and although I repeat that I would not think of influencing the action of this assembly, I hope that every man and woman present may see fit to support you.”

Captain Pott had grown more and more restless as time went on, and now as the city minister began to move from the platform the Captain began to move toward the open window.

“I am ready to entertain any motion which you care to make,” announced the chairman.

Mr. Beaver rose. With the first hiss from his lips, the Captain dropped his hand over the sill and tapped the outside of the casing. Shouts went up from the boys who stood beneath the window. These were answered by cries of fire from various parts of town. The clang of the gong at the fire-house broke through the stillness of the crowded room. Distant alarms were rung with steady regularity. The meeting adjourned in a body.

The seaman had kept his promise, and “Providence had cut the pack for the new deal.”

CHAPTER IX

In an incredibly short time the church was emptied. Each one in the crowd was shouting wild conjectures as to whose place was on fire as they ran in the direction of the blaze. It was a strange sight that met the gaze of the excited people as they came in full view of Dan Trelaw's place. He was busily engaged pouring oil on unburned sections of his hen-coops! Dan's hen-houses were located at the rear of his property, and had been built from a collection of dry-goods boxes. They had been the pride of his life, and as the crowd watched him pour on more oil, some one declared that Dan must have gone out of his senses. Nor would he permit the fire company to play their chemical hose.

"It's come to a purty pass," Dan stated to the onlookers, "when a man can't burn down his own coops to get rid of the mites without the whole blame town turning out to interfere. If the very last one of you don't clear out, I'll use my office as constable of this town to run the lot of you in!"

Hank Simpson was the chief of the volunteer corps, and Dan was chief of the Little River police system. The two chiefs argued as to the rights of the respective offices. Hank declared it was his official duty to put the fire out. Dan as emphatically declared it was his official duty to disperse the crowd. Finally, Hank admitted that Dan had a right to burn his own property so long as the property of others was not endangered. Some say that the chief of police answered the chief of the fire corps with a slow and deliberate wink.

"Now, all of you clear out and leave me to my fire," demanded Dan, as he poured on more oil.

Mr. McGowan had gone directly home after the preaching service. But he did not sleep that night. It was very early on Monday morning when he entered the kitchen. Miss Pipkin was already busy with the preparations for breakfast.

"Good morning, Mr. McGowan," greeted Miss Pipkin, cheerily. "Are you all right this morning?"

"Yes, thank you, Miss Pipkin."

“I was afraid you’d be sick after last night. I didn’t sleep none, I was that excited when I got home. I’ve always been used to quiet meetings, and that last night after you left was a disgrace. But you wasn’t to blame, no siree!” she finished with a vigorous shake of her head.

“I am not so sure that you would find very many to agree with you.”

“Lan’ sakes! How you do talk, Mr. McGowan! Don’t you think I know what it’s all about? I ain’t blind, and what I couldn’t see through, Josiah helped me with last night. You’ve got him to thank that they didn’t vote you out of your position.”

“Miss Pipkin, do you mean that the Captain spoke up in meeting?”

“Well, he didn’t exactly talk, but he stopped others from talking, and that’s about the same thing.”

“How?” asked the minister eagerly.

“He kind of made me promise not to tell a soul, but I don’t think he meant you. Anyhow, you should know. You see, he was setting by a window, and some of the boys from your club was on the outside, waiting. He h’isted the window a little so’s to get his hand through. Hank Simpson and some others was at the fire-house, and when Josiah give them beneath the window some sort of signal, they all shouted ‘*Fire.*’ That was the sign for others scattered round town, and they begun to shout, too. Then, those at the fire-house got the cart out and rung the bells. It was real funny, but don’t tell Josiah I said so, because he was all puffed up last night. He gave his signal just as Mr. Beaver got up to make a motion to have you put out. Things was pretty strong against you after Reverend Mr. Means spoke.”

“Mr. Means!”

“Um-hm. He was there as big as life and sad as Job. He talked so tearful-like that everybody was upset, but they didn’t get to take a vote, and that was a good thing, for there were some there that would have voted against you, being so worked up, who wouldn’t think of it in their right senses. Mr. McGowan, them boys down to the Inn ain’t going to let you go from the town if they can keep you here. Them boys with Josiah got up that fire scare last night.”

“But it was more than a scare, I saw the fire.”

“Course you did. ’Twas old Dan Trelaw’s hen-house that was burned down. The mites was bothering him, and he wanted the insurance to build a better one.”

“He burned his hen-house to collect insurance?”

“That’s what Josiah said.”

“That’s absurd. There isn’t an insurance company in Suffolk County that would write a policy on such junk, and if they did he could never collect a cent if it is known he burned it on purpose.”

“Josiah said it wasn’t a regular company, just local. I guess he’ll get his money, all right. Are you ready for your breakfast?”

A boyish grin slowly lighted the minister’s face as the truth of what had happened dawned on him.

“Do you mean——”

“I ain’t saying right out just what I mean,” she broke in as she paused on the kitchen threshold. “If you’re real bright on guessing, you’ll be able to figure that out for yourself. The thing that’s most interesting to me is that the Lord is wonderful in the performing of all His works, and we ain’t to question how He brings ’em to pass. I wasn’t much in favor of the way Josiah done last night when he first told me, but the more I think about it, the more it seems all right to me. It didn’t seem dignified and nice to break up even a bad meeting that way, but what else was he to do? You’ve got to stay here, that’s plain, and if He ain’t got saints enough to keep you He’ll use the heathen.... Go right in and set down.”

“I’m not sure that it will bring Providence or any one else much glory if I stay here,” said the minister, with a faint smile.

Miss Pipkin returned with a steaming pot of coffee. She took her place at the table and for some time eyed the minister in silence. She was a thoroughgoing mystic in her religious faith, but her mysticism was tempered with such a practical turn of mind that it was wholesome and inspiring.

“Mr. McGowan, it is the will of God that you stay right here in this town. If we do His will we ain’t to worry about the glory part,” she emphatically affirmed. She placed the cups and saucers beside the coffee-pot and filled them. “You hit ’em hard last night, and that is exactly what’s ailing them. You’ve been hitting ’em too hard for comfort. The shoe’s pinching and they’re not able to keep from showing how it hurts. You hit me, too,” she observed, looking earnestly into the minister’s eyes.

“I’m sorry.”

“You needn’t be, ’cause it wasn’t you speaking. It was God speaking through you. Them words you used for your text rung in my ears all night long. I could hear ’em plainer than when you spoke ’em from the pulpit: ‘Launch out into the deep.’ Mr. McGowan, do you believe there is any forgiveness for the unpardonable sin?”

Evidently knowing that a minister of the Presbyterian faith could entertain but one answer and remain a moral man, she did not wait for a reply.

“It was years ago when I first heard them words. They were just as plain to me then as they was last night, but I refused to obey ’em. I didn’t think I could stand the ocean. You know the way I was coming over from Riverhead. Well, I’m always sick on the water, and so I said right out that I wouldn’t set sail as a

seaman's wife. I was young and strong-headed then, and didn't understand. The man I said 'No' to went off, and I never heard from him but three times since. Some said he was drowned at sea, but I know he wasn't. I've been true to him all these years, trying to atone for my sin of disobedience. If he'd come back now, I'd go with him though he'd slay me."

Mr. McGowan wanted to smile at the mixed figure, but the serious face before him prevented him. "Did you say you never heard from him?" he asked, sympathetically.

"No. I didn't say that." She spoke sharply, but immediately her face and tone softened. "I didn't mean to speak cross, but I ain't spoke of this for years, and it upsets me when I think of what I done."

"We'll not speak of it, then."

"It won't disturb me the least bit. It sort of helps to talk about it. I'm thinking all the time about him, how brave he was. He was so manly, too, was my Adoniah."

"Adoniah?" questioned the minister, sitting up with a suddenness that astonished Miss Pipkin.

"Adoniah was his first name. I ain't spoke it out loud for years. It does sound sort of queer, doesn't it? I didn't think so then." She sighed deeply. "The spirit of the Lord seemed to go away from me when Adoniah did. If only he'd come back."

"He has not left you. God is not a hard master, leaving people alone for their shortcomings."

"Do you think He'll send him back to me?"

"He is here now. He has never left you."

Miss Pipkin looked dazed, then puzzled, and finally provoked. "I didn't think you'd trifle, or I'd never told you."

"Indeed, I'm not trifling."

"Then, what happened last night has gone to your head, poor thing! I'd ought to have known better than to have troubled you with my sorrows. You've got all you ought to carry. Poor thing!"

She slowly pushed her chair from the table, eyeing the minister as though expecting signs of an outbreak. But he motioned her back into her chair with a calmness that reassured her.

“I don’t quite understand your meaning, I guess,” she said.

“And it is quite apparent that I didn’t understand yours. You were speaking of the Spirit of God leaving you, and I said He was right here with you——”

“Now, ain’t I a caution to saints!” broke in Miss Pipkin. “I did mix you up awful, didn’t I? What I was asking you about was if you thought God would send back my Adoniah Phillips. He——Why, Mr. McGowan, what’s the matter now?”

The minister had risen and was looking oddly at the housekeeper.

“What on earth have I said this time?” she implored.

“You say your lover’s name was Phillips, Adoniah Phillips?”

Miss Pipkin did not reply, but looked at him fixedly.

“Please, don’t look at me like that, it makes me feel like I’ve been guilty of something,” he said, trying hard to smile.

“You sure you ain’t sick?”

“Of course, I’m not ill. I’m slightly interested in that peculiar name. I’ve heard it just once before, and I’m wondering if there is a chance of its being the same man.”

“You’ve heard of him?”

“Well, I have heard his name.”

“There ain’t likely to be another name like his.”

“Have you any idea where he is at present? You said a bit ago that you did not think he had been drowned at sea.”

“No,” she answered curtly.

“Can you so much as guess?”

“I don’t know if he’s living at all, so of course I ain’t got no idea where he is,” was her snappy reply. “Has he been telling you about me and him?” she asked, nodding toward the up-stairs where the Captain was presumably asleep.

“He hasn’t said anything to me, but——”

“You’ll promise not to repeat one word to him of what I just told you?” she begged, again jerking her head toward the stair.

“I promise to say nothing about what you have told me. But I have my reasons

for wanting to know something about this man Phillips.”

“What are your reasons?”

“I should not have said reasons, for I guess it is nothing but my curiosity that prompts me to ask. If you could tell me more of the facts I might be able to help you locate him.”

“You mean you have an idea that he is still living?”

“I can’t say as to that, but if you’ll only help me I am certain that we shall find out something interesting.”

Miss Pipkin drew the corner of her apron across the corner of her eyes, disappointment written deeply in every line and wrinkle of her face.

“There ain’t much more to tell. Adoniah went to sea. I got a letter from him once from Australia. I wrote back saying I’d take back what I’d said. He answered it, but didn’t say nothing about what I said to him. He spoke of meeting up with some one he knew, saying they was going in business together. I ain’t never told anybody about that, not even Josiah, and I ain’t going to tell you, for I don’t think he was square with Adoniah, but I can’t prove it.”

The thud of heavy boots on the rear stair checked further comment she seemed inclined to make, and she dried out the tears that stood in her eyes with short quick dabs as she hurried to the kitchen.

“Lan’ of mercy!” she exclaimed, returning with a smoking waffle-iron. “I clean forgot these, and they’re burned to ashes. Here, don’t you drink that cold coffee, I’ll heat it up again,” she said, taking the cup. Leaning closely to his ear, she whispered, “Mind, you ain’t to tell a living soul about what I said, and him above all others.”

The minister nodded.

Miss Pipkin entered the kitchen just as the Captain opened the stair-door. He sniffed the air as he greeted the two with a hearty “Good morning.”

“Purty nigh never woke up. You’d otter have come up and tumbled me out, Mack.”

“Rest well, did you?”

“Just tolerable. Clemmie,” he called, “I seem to smell something burning. There ain’t nothing, be there?”

“We was busy talking, and them irons got too hot.”

“Talking, be you? Don’t ’pear to have agreed with neither of you more than it did with those irons.”

“You didn’t pass a mirror on the way down this morning, or you’d not be crowing so loud, Josiah.”

“No, that’s a fact I didn’t. You see, Eadie busted mine during that cleaning raid, and I can’t afford a new one.”

“You must have hit your funny-bone, or something,” hinted Miss Pipkin as she poured a cup of the reheated coffee.

“Now, don’t get mad, Clemmie. I was just fooling. Mack understands me purty well, and he’ll tell you that I didn’t mean nothing by what I said.”

“Josiah Pott! You’re that disrespectful that I’ve a good mind to scold you.”

“What’s up now, Clemmie?”

“The very idea! You calling the minister by his first name.”

“I’ve done it ever since I knowed him, and he wouldn’t like me to change now. Hey, Mr. McGowan?”

“Call me by my first name, Cap’n. Too much dignity doesn’t sit well on your shoulders. You needn’t mind, Miss Pipkin, for that is a habit that was formed before I became a minister, and there is no disrespect, I assure you.”

“You mean you two knowed each other before you come here?”

“You see, Mack come to me one summer when I was starting on a cruise, and he was such a good sailor that we spent four seasons together after that.”

“You never told me that,” said Miss Pipkin.

“I didn’t think to, Clemmie. Mack, have some more of these waffles. They’re mighty tasty. It takes Clemmie to cook ’em to a turn.”

“Just listen to that!” rejoined the housekeeper. “He ain’t had none yet.”

The minister did the unheard-of thing: he refused the offer of waffles!

“Mack, you ain’t going to let them hypocrites and wolves in sheep’s clothing come right up and steal your appetite out of your mouth, be you?”

Mr. McGowan assured him that he had no such intention.

“You don’t know what you’re missing,” declared the Captain, smacking his lips to make the waffles appear more appetizing. “Have just one. Maybe your

appetite is one of them coming kind, and I'll swan if 'tis that one taste of these would bring it with a gallop."

"Don't urge him if he don't want 'em, Josiah."

"Cal'late your talking must have gone to his stomach, hey, Clemmie?"

"Josiah!" she exclaimed, coloring. "He'll soon forget all I said to him."

"You sartin give it to 'em good last night, Mack. It was the best I ever heard. Got most of 'em where they lived, and you took 'em out into the deep beyond their wading-line, too. How about you, Clemmie?"

Miss Pipkin had important business in the kitchen.

"Yes, Mack, that sure was a ringer," continued the Captain as he helped himself to another layer of waffles. "Wonder if Clemmie took what you said about launching out as literal?"

Miss Pipkin returned with a plate of smoking waffles and placed them at the Captain's side.

"Thanks, Clemmie. I was 'feared you'd be setting out to sea in my dory after hearing that sermon last night," he said banteringly, with a twinkle in his eyes. "You'd best explain that your meaning was figur'tive, Mack. I looked up that word once and it means——"

"Josiah Pott! How can you be so cruel!"

With a sob that rose from the depths, Miss Pipkin fled, slamming the kitchen door after her.

"I'll swear, if she ain't crying!" exclaimed the surprised seaman. "What in tarnation do you suppose is up, Mack? You don't cal'late she thought I was relating to her for earnest, do you?"

He rose and started toward the door. Mr. McGowan laid a hand on his friend's sleeve.

"You'd better leave her alone."

"But I never meant nothing. She'd otter know that. I'm going to tell her," he said, pulling away from the minister, and trying the closed door. "Clemmie, be sensible, and come out of there. I didn't mean nothing, honest, I didn't."

But Miss Pipkin did not come out. She did not so much as answer his importunings. When the men were out of the dining-room she went up-stairs, not

to appear again that day.

It was afternoon when Mr. McGowan hobbled out of his study, ate a light lunch, put a few sandwiches in his pocket, and started in the direction of the peninsula road that led to the beach.

CHAPTER X

Mr. McGowan left the highway a little beyond the Fox estate, and followed a crooked, narrow old footpath across-lots. The path dipped and rose with the contour of the land till at last it lost itself in the white level stretch of sandy beach. He walked on and on, so deeply absorbed in his thoughts that he was unmindful of the blistered foot. It was only when hunger pains conspired with the irritation of his foot that he dropped on a log. He drew the sandwiches from his pocket, and proceeded to devour them with genuine relish. For hours after he had finished his lunch, he sat with his back to the warming rays of the afternoon sun, and gazed vacantly across the wide stretches of sand-dunes.

The chill of the evening air roused him at length to the fact that he must be going home. But when he tried to rise, he discovered that his long walk had produced an ill effect on Miss Pipkin's remedy for sprained ankles. He dropped back again on the log, pondering on how he was to retrace his steps. The sun slipped into the misty haze that hung low above the horizon of the autumn sky. The shadows crept slowly up out of the waters and over the landscape. A thin cloud drifted in over the Sound, through which a pale moon pushed a silvery edge. With the gathering darkness there came a deep mystery over land and sea which seemed to creep round and envelop him.

Suddenly, the chill of the evening air was filled with a glowing warmth, as when one senses the presence of a friend. He stared about him. He listened intently. Could it be possible that this sudden change was only a mental fancy? He hobbled a short way up the beach, and as he rounded a promontory his weakened ankle turned on a loose stone. With an exclamation he settled down on the sand.

A figure near the water's edge rose as though startled. She paused, ready for flight. Then with an involuntary cry came toward the man huddled up on the sand.

"O dear, you are hurt!" she cried, as he attempted to rise.

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"Elizabeth!" He spoke her name without thought of what he did, even as she had unknowingly used the word of endearment in her exclamation of surprise and

concern.

“You should not have walked so far,” she said, her tone cordial, but her eyes holding a smoldering fire. She helped him to a near-by stone, and sat down beside him.

“I somehow felt that you were near.”

“You thought—what?”

“No, I did not think it, I just sensed it.”

“You certainly have a very fertile imagination.”

“Yes. It has been both my blessing and curse.”

“But how did you come to feel I was about here?”

“I don’t know. It does seem strange, doesn’t it?” he mused. “But I was certain——”

“Perhaps you were thinking——” She stopped abruptly.

“Of you,” he finished for her. “I was. I was feeling quite lonely, and couldn’t help wishing I could talk with you.”

“I heard to-day that you are thinking of leaving Little River,” she suggested, tactfully changing what she considered a dangerous subject.

“You heard that I intend to leave? Pray, tell——”

“Then you’re not going?”

“Quite to the contrary, I intend to fight this thing through if it takes a whole year.”

“I’m so glad!” There was deep relief in her voice. She hesitated before continuing. “I had a terrible quarrel with Father this evening.”

“Why did you do that?”

“I was very angry, and left him to come out here. It is the first time we have ever really fallen out. I’ve thought over some of the unkind things I said to him, and I am ashamed. I was about to go back to him when you fell on those stones and hurt yourself.”

“You are right, Miss Fox. Go back to him. He will see differently, too, now that he has had time to think it all over.”

“That is what worries me. He won’t see differently, though I know he is in the wrong. I’m afraid we’ll quarrel again.”

“Then, I should wait. He will come to you in time.”

“Father will never do that,” she said, sorrowfully. “I hurt him more than I had any right.” Searching the minister’s face under the dim light, she concluded: “Please, Mr. McGowan, don’t blame Father too severely for what happened last night! He is not himself.”

“Miss—Elizabeth! Did you quarrel with your father about me?” His heart gave a bound into his throat.

She nodded, looking for the world like a child grown tall. Her eyes did not waver as they met the hungry look in his own.

“About me?” he repeated incredulously.

“Yes.”

A wild passion swept through him as he listened to the quiet affirmative.

“It began about you and the Athletic Club. Father does not understand about your work among the boys. It ended about you and the action of the church last night.”

“But that action was not voted through.”

“I know. But the end is not yet.”

“Do you think that my relations with the Boys’ Club is all that was behind the abortive action last night?”

“I—”

“Would you advise me to give that work up for a while till all this blows over?”

“No, indeed!” she declared strongly. “I think—Well, he says that you are not orthodox. Do you need to preach like that?”

“If my theology is of poor quality, I can’t help it. I can preach only what is truth and reality to me.”

“But couldn’t you be more careful how you do it? Couldn’t you be less frank, or something? Should you antagonize your people so?”

“I’m sorry if I have really antagonized any one by what I say. Do you find anything unorthodox in my sermons?”

“That isn’t a fair question to ask me. I’m not familiar with such things. I thought you might preach less openly what you believe so strenuously. Coat the pills so they’ll go down with the taste of orthodoxy.” She smiled faintly. “I hate to see you putting weapons in their hands.”

“And do you honestly think I’d be dealing fair with myself or with those to whom I preach to sugar-coat my thoughts with something that looks like poison to me?”

She did not reply, but with a quick look she flashed from her wonderful eyes a message he could not fail to catch even in the semi-darkness. She dropped her hand lightly on his sleeve, and his fingers quickly closed over hers. She drew nearer. He could feel the straying wisps of fair hair against his hot cheek. His emotions taxed all his powers of self-control.

“We must be going,” she said, rising. “Oh, I forgot your foot! You must wait here till I send the trap for you along the beach.”

“Don’t do that. I’ll get on very well, if you’ll help me a little.”

“Please, wait till I send Debbs. You’ll hurt yourself.”

“Your father might object to my riding in his carriage,” he remarked, with a light laugh.

“Mr. McGowan, you must not talk like that. I know you don’t like him, but he is really the best father in all the world!”

“Forgive me, Miss Fox. I didn’t mean to be rude. I’m afraid I was just trying to be funny. As a matter of fact, I do like your father, but there has been no opportunity——”

“Have you tried very hard to find an opportunity? You’ve stayed away from our house pretty consistently, and have not asked him one thing about the church work.”

“I stayed away because I was requested to.”

“That was only for the time he was ill.”

“I’d be glad——”

“Why will you grown men act like children sometimes?”

“Miss Fox, please be seated again,” requested the minister, a note of authority in his voice. “I have something important to say to you, and the time may not come again.”

The girl obeyed, taking her place close beside him on the stone.

“I see you do not understand what has brought this trouble between your father and me. Neither do I, but I don’t think that it’s a matter of doctrine. Nor do I believe that it’s the work I’ve been doing down at the Inn with the boys. Some cause strikes deeper than both. They are merely excuses. You remember that he made no objection to me in the beginning along these lines, and I preached no less strenuously then, as you call it, than I do now. In fact, had it not been for your father I doubt very much if the installation had gone through last summer. Behind the scenes there is another man, and he is pulling the strings while he directs the play. When I was ordained to the ministry in the New York Presbytery, that man fought me desperately, while he raised no objections to others who were ordained at the same time, and who held views far more radical than mine. That man was at the installation. When your father told me that he was coming, I made no protest, for I saw that there was a fast friendship between the two. You know what that man tried to do at the installation. You doubtless know, too, that he has been much with your father of late. You also saw him at the meeting last night.

“Miss Fox, if we knew all the facts, we should be able to lay the blame for this trouble and your father’s condition right where it belongs.”

“You refer to Mr. Means?”

“I do. What it is——”

“Mr. McGowan, if you think any man can influence my father, you do not know him. I dislike Mr. Means, maybe because he is so preachy. But he cannot influence Father.”

“I wish I could believe that!”

“You must believe it. You are letting your imagination color your judgment.”

“I should like to believe anything you tell me, but I can’t believe anything else than that Mr. Means stands behind this whole mess. Just why, I don’t know, but it looks very much as though there is a skeleton concealed in his closet, and he’s afraid that I’m going to let it out.”

“Why did you say that?”

“I don’t know. I can’t see what connection I could possibly have with the man.”

“You are talking nonsense!”

“Perhaps, but truth sometimes masquerades in the garb of the court fool.”

“Just what do you mean?”

“I wish to heaven I knew!”

“Do you think——” She paused. She searched his face, which was dimly and fitfully lighted by the moonbeams as they broke through the phantom-like clouds that were beginning to sweep the heavens. “Tell me, please, just what it is you are thinking.”

“I dare not. But there is some reason not yet come to light, and it is sheltered in the mind of Mr. Means.”

“Perhaps he knew you before you entered the ministry?” she half suggested, half questioned.

“I have no recollection of even so much as meeting him before coming before the ordaining Presbytery of which he was a member. So far as the history of my life is concerned, he may find out the whole of it, if he so wishes. It wouldn’t make very interesting reading, though. Miss Fox,”—his voice took on the quality of his earnestness,—“if you have any way of finding out what the actual cause is for the conditions in my church, I shall do all in my power to make amends, providing the fault is mine.”

“Why don’t you go to him? He might be reasonable, and listen to you.”

“Didn’t I go to him? Didn’t I try to find out what I had done till you and the doctor forbid my coming again?”

“I don’t mean Father. Why don’t you go to Mr. Means?”

“Would you, if you were in my position?”

She shook her head decidedly. “But I don’t like him.”

“Perhaps that may be my reason, too.”

“But I thought all ministers had to love everybody.”

“We might love the man, but not his ways.”

“There’s no merit in saying a thing like that when a man and his ways are one and the same thing, as is the case with Mr. Means.”

“I’m honest when I say I have nothing against Mr. Means. I don’t know the man well enough for that. I suppose he can’t help his ways.”

“There, you’ve gone and spoiled it. I was beginning to think that you are like other men.”

“Like other men?”

“Men who love and hate. I suppose you’ll be telling me next that you are really fond of that man who fought you at the Inn.”

“He was a good boxer,” was the enthusiastic reply.

“And you like him?”

“I might if I knew him.”

“Can you fight everybody like that, and still have love for them?”

“Self-control is the better word. Unless a man can learn that, he had better stay out of the ring. What is true in boxing, is just as true in life.”

“But, when there are those who threaten to wreck your whole life and your work, what are you going to do?”

“That is the time when one needs to summon every ounce of self-control he possesses. It is when the other man is seeking to land a knock-out blow that one needs to keep his head the coolest, for unless he does he can’t make his best calculations.”

“Oh, Mr. McGowan! You’ll keep that way in this trouble, and not let any of them get in that kind of blow?”

“Yes, if you will only help me.”

“I help you? But I can’t!”

“No one else can.”

“Oh!” cried the girl, beginning to take in the meaning of his words.

“Elizabeth—”

“Don’t say it, please!” Her fingers went to her lips in a hurt gesture. “You may spoil everything.”

“I must speak. I love you! I have loved you from the first day beneath that old elm-tree on the Captain’s place.”

“Oh!”—she sprang to her feet and faced him,—“now, you have made it impossible for me to help you, where before I might have done something!”

“Only if you say so.”

“I did so want to help you! You seem so alone in this trouble! I thought you were going to give me an opportunity. I thought you would tell me how!” Her mobile lips puckered as the shadow of pain flitted across the light of her eyes.

“Elizabeth!” he called, holding out his hand.

“Why did you say that to me?” she cried, her youthful face deeply furrowed as though she had grown suddenly very tired.

“Because I could not help it. I’ve known so little of love in my life that since this has come to me it hurts like the turning of a knife. I’ve never been accustomed to human care like other men. Had I been, I should have been able to hide my feelings behind the screen of pretense. You asked me a while ago why I do not love and hate like other men. I do love, and I hate! I have been schooled all my life to hide my hates, but experience neglected me with the other. Elizabeth——”

She drew farther from him.

“I don’t think I understand you,” she said, her eyes widening in the light of the moon till they appeared like two shining orbs. “Have I given you any reason to think of me like that?”

“No. But I thought——”

She drew into the shadows that he might not see the rapid rise and fall of her bosom. “Forgive me, if I have!”

“I’m the one to be forgiven. I’ve never had much instruction concerning social custom. I was reared where they were little known. In school I was too busy to bother about them. I’m crude. But, Elizabeth, I love you. I see now that I’ve no right to tell you, but I couldn’t help it. I’ve been driven to desperation. I have been like a caged animal for weeks past. I’ve been wild for just a little love and understanding in the midst of all I’ve gone through. But you don’t love me!” His breath was coming hard. He trembled as he rose. “You will love me some day! God will not let a man love as I do and give nothing in return!”

Stirred with pity, Elizabeth came to him from out the darkness.

“Forgive me,” he said as she came nearer. “I had no idea it would be like this.”

She did not take the hand he extended, but folding her arms behind her, she stood quite still and stared. “I’m so sorry! But I don’t understand you at all.”

“You need not try. I don’t understand myself. I have never been through anything

like this in all my life. I thought instinct would lead you right to me. I never questioned but that you would understand. But don't try, for I can't explain. This afternoon I had just one thought: to tell you how I love you. I thought it would make me happy. Happy!" He laughed bitterly. "I didn't stop to reason. It seems I have no reason."

"Mr. McGowan, please stop! You frighten me," cried the girl, drawing away again as he limped a step in her direction.

"Hate!" That one word was like the sharp sudden sting of a whip. "I hate this age of social position, where money stands above the man. I hate the shell of so-called good families, as if lineage made the man, instead of man making the lineage. I hate——"

"You must stop! Love that gives such torment as you have been describing to me is apt to turn out as nothing more than infatuation. I care for you, but in no such way as you have indicated to me. I want you for a friend. Don't spoil that!"

He hobbled off down the beach as rapidly as his limping foot could travel. The girl came to his side and slipped her arm through his. "Lean on me just as heavily as you like," she urged. "I know you think me unkind and cruel, but I do so want to help you." Her voice broke unsteadily.

"I don't think you unkind, Miss Fox," replied the minister as he accepted her proffered assistance. "The cruel thing is this that has been burning within like fire. If you only knew——"

"Mr. McGowan,"—she interrupted kindly,—"I cannot tell you as to the height of esteem in which I hold you. Nothing can ever harm that. But even if I cared for you as you ask of me, don't you see how impossible it would be for me to go back on Father? I can't help but think there must be some real reason for the attitude he has taken against you."

"Do you honestly believe what you have just said?"

"Is there any reason why I should not believe it?"

"I suppose not," he replied, heavy fatigue in his voice.

She saw from his averted face that her question had pained him. She wanted to speak, to soften her question, but no words came to her dry lips.

The way home was traveled in silence. They reached the pile of stones below her father's place, and Elizabeth released her aching arm. In silence they watched the strangely mottled effect where the moonlight fell in patches across the water

as the clouds flitted past. A patter of rain, accompanied by a sharp whistle of wind, warned them of coming storm.

"I'll go up the path with you, and go home by the road," volunteered the minister.

"No, indeed. It will be much easier walking for you along the beach, and you'll not need to climb any hill. I'll call to you from the back gate, and you'll know I'm safe." She turned toward him once more. "Harold came home to-day, and Father has been worse since that. Harold found out something about the man he went over to Australia to look up. He must have told Father about it to-day. Since then he has been in a terrible state of mind. It seems that Harold found out something about you, too."

Mr. McGowan was too surprised to reply.

"Against you, Father says. I was not going to tell you this, but you have compelled me to do it by what you said to me. I know nothing of your past life."

"Miss Fox, will you be kind enough to explain?"

"I have nothing to explain. All I know is that from the way Father acted it must not be to your credit."

He looked his amazement.

"Good night," she said, extending her hand. "You will not forget what you said about the way one should do in boxing, will you?"

He smiled faintly.

"Mr. McGowan, you are not going to disappoint me, are you?"

"Would it make much difference? You seem to have already formed your opinion from the things you have heard."

"If you are going to give up like that it will make no difference what you do. I thought you were more of a man than that."

She turned and ran up the path. At the top of the pile of stones she stopped, her slim outline silhouetted in clear-cut lines against a patch of moonlight, and her loosened hair giving the suggestion of a halo as the mellow light played through. She lifted her hand as she declared, "And you are more of a man. I do not believe that whatever Father thinks he has found out can harm you in the least. That is what we really quarreled about to-day. Does that tell you how much I care? 'Now is the time when you need to summon every ounce of self-control

you possess. When other men are seeking to land the knock-out blow you should keep your head the coolest, for unless you do you cannot make your best calculations.' You see, I have not forgotten, and neither must you. And in everything, Mack," she finished, hurriedly.

The rear gate clicked, and she sent him a light trill.

The minister went to his study as soon as he reached home. For hours he sat, his mind a blank. He was roused at last by the opening of his study door. He looked up into the face of his old friend. The blue eyes, usually clear and steady, had a faded look as though the fire in them had suddenly gone out.

CHAPTER XI

"I've been shut up with the most onreasonable feller I ever see in all my life," said the Captain to the unasked question in the minister's eyes. "I cal'late I'll keep my thoughts to myself to-night, Mack, and sleep on them. The way I feel wouldn't be conducive to prayer-meeting language. Good night, son."

It was scarcely daylight when Miss Pipkin began work in the kitchen on the following morning. Shortly afterward the Captain descended.

"Morning, Clemmie." He held the kitchen door ajar, and his voice wavered as he spoke.

Miss Pipkin did not reply. The Captain, to reinforce his courage, stepped back into the dining-room. Miss Pipkin walked over and closed the door. This spurred the seaman to action. He cautiously pushed the door open again, and peeped through a narrow crack.

"Clemmie, be you in there?"

"Where else do you think I'd be, down the well?"

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"Can't I talk to you, Clemmie?"

"No. I don't want you to come sneaking into my kitchen at this hour in the morning. You ought to be in bed."

A note of friendliness in her voice led him to open the door a little wider.

"You're up too early, Clemmie."

"I've got a lot of work to do."

"If you ain't too busy, I'd like awful well to speak to you about something."

"Well, I am busy, leastwise too busy to be bothered with your nonsense."

"It ain't foolishness this time."

Something in his tone made her look up into the face framed in the crack of the door.

“Josiah!” she cried at sight of the drawn features.

He threw open the door and entered.

“Mr. McGowan ain’t sick this morning, is he?” she asked.

“No. Leastwise he wa’n’t when I passed the time of night or early morning with him on my way to bed.”

“Are you sick, Josiah?”

“What I got might be called that, Clemmie. I’m sick of the hull damn round of life,” he said, despondently.

“Josiah Pott! How you do talk! What do you mean by it, anyhow?”

“Purty much as I say. I’m always bungling things of late. I—well—”

“Now, you set down in that chair, and stop staring at me for all the world like an old wood-owl, ’most scaring the wits out of me. One would think you’d gone clean out of your head. I never heard you talk so in all my born days. If you ain’t sick, you’re in a heap of trouble. Now, do as I tell you and set down. Tell me what’s wrong, that is if that’s what you come down for.”

“That’s why I come down, Clemmie,” he said, slouching into one of the kitchen chairs. “I heerd you come down-stairs, and I just had to follow. Fust of all, I want to tell you how bad I feel about them things I said yesterday morning that hurt your feelings so.”

“For the lan’ sakes! Be that what’s ailing you? I thought it was something that amounted to something,” she declared, the color rising into her faded cheeks.

“That does amount to something. It means a lot to me. That ain’t all, but I wanted to get it off my chest fust. I was never intending less to hurt nobody than when I said that to you. I thought ’twould cheer you and Mack up a little; you was both looking a mite blue. You’re a good woman, Clemmie, and any man that’d insult you would have me to settle with purty tolerable quick. You know how much I think of you.”

“Be you beginning to propose again?” she asked, her arms akimbo. “If that’s what’s ailing you, and you’re asking my pardon just to get ready to ask me—”

“Don’t get mad, Clemmie. No, I ain’t going to get down on my old prayer-bones, they’re a mite too squeaky, though I’d be willing enough to do it if I thought it would do any good. I ain’t going to pester you any more about that. You know your mind, and it ain’t right for me to be disturbing it at my time of life.”

“Then, Josiah, if you ain’t love-sick, what is it?”

“Maybe that’s a part of what’s ailing me. But what I want you to say this morning is that you ain’t got nothing against me for what I said yesterday about you taking to sea in my dory.”

“Josiah, that was awful foolish in me. You’d best forgive me, too, for the way I acted.”

“Thanks, Clemmie. You’ve sartinly done me many a good turn, and it would be a wonder if I wa’n’t in love with you. You’ve always been mighty good and kind to me. But, there, don’t you get excited again, I ain’t going to say nothing more about it.”

“Tell me about your trouble, Josiah.”

The old seaman pulled hard at the ends of his ragged moustache, and his voice grew husky. “I felt just like I had to tell somebody. I was going to tell Mack last night when I see a light in his study, but when I went in I see he had all he could tote, so I just went on up to my room without telling him.... You know I’ve been out of a job for quite a spell.”

“It has been long for you,” nodded Miss Pipkin as she drew another chair opposite. “But you’ve got the church to look after.”

“That ain’t my trade, and it comes hard. I feel all the time like I’d clumb onto the wrong deck. I’d hoped to get a ship afore now. Jim promised me one, and—”

“Do you mean you’ve been expecting to get a ship through Jim Fox? Why, Josiah Pott! He’d not give you a splinter to hang on if you was drowning. Depending on him! Pooh! I thought you had more sense than that.”

“But I ain’t. I’m just what I’ve told you afore, an old fool. I cal’late I know how you feel about Jim. I’d always felt that way, too, till he come honeying round me this spring. You called me once an old fool with good intentions. I cal’late you ain’t far off in your soundings.”

“I never said that!” she rejoined. “Anyhow, I didn’t mean it like that.”

“You don’t need to excuse what you said. It’s God’s truth. That’s exactly what I be.”

“You ain’t, neither, and I don’t see why you want to talk that way. What I don’t see, neither, is why you want to go hanging round, waiting for that man to give you a ship. There’s plenty of others that would be glad to get you.”

“I ain’t sartin ’bout that last p’int. You see, I ain’t so young no more. I’m getting up in years, and ship-owners ain’t hiring none but young men.”

“Nonsense! There you go again. As long as you think and talk like Methuselah there ain’t no owner going to take a chance on you for fear you’d forget the name of the port he’d ordered you to. You get that idea out of your head along with the notion that Jim Fox is going to help you, and you’ll get a ship. The very best there is afloat, too.”

“It’s mighty kind of you to say that, Clemmie. I cal’late the notion about Jim is purty well shook out. That’s one thing I wanted to talk to you about. You know the old place here had been sort of run down for a good many year. I’d always held to the idea that some day I’d come back here after I’d got rich, remodel the home, and get the best woman in all the world to ship side by side with me as best mate. I’ve told you all that afore, many the time, Clemmie.”

Miss Pipkin barely nodded. The suggestion of moisture gathered in her eyes as she gazed at the tragic face before her.

“Well, I’m back, and it looks like it was for good and all, but I ain’t got no money, and I don’t see no way to get any unless I rob somebody. And the law won’t let me do that. The trouble is that I’m up to my gunwales in debt.”

“In debt!” To Miss Pipkin’s mind there was no greater calamity in the world than to be in debt. She, too, had suffered a like fate many years ago.

“Yes. In bad, too. Jim come up to my house last spring just afore the minister took up his new quarters here, and he says to me: ‘Here’s some money to repair your place with. There’ll be no interest on it. It’s because of my civic pride in the affairs of Little River that I make you this liberal offer.’ Well, it did look too good to be true, but I couldn’t see nothing wrong, and he promised me on his word to see that I got a ship, the very next one his company was to send out. I ain’t much up on them legal papers. I ain’t had nothing to do with any kind of papers for years ’cepting owners’ orders. I took his word for ’em being straight. I wouldn’t have took a cent of the money if them papers had been straight as the Bible, but he promised me so fair and square to place me that I fell for him hard. You know he’s one of the owners of the Atlantic Coastwise Trading Company. Well, I went right down to the city next day, and for several days I hung round. Then, they told me another feller got in ahead of me. When I was going out I see Jim in one of them little glass rooms talking earnest-like to some of his partners, and I heerd him speak my name. I knew right off that there was something up the mizzenmast. I come home, and waited. It was then I found Mack in the house.

Mrs. Beaver put him in here while I was away. I also found the painters all over the place. I knew right off that Jim had me on the hip, but I couldn't make out what his game was. Yesterday the thing come tumbling down on my head; a lawyer brought it. Them papers I signed up has turned out to be a mortgage on my old home."

Miss Pipkin gasped. "A mortgage and a lawyer was here to see you yesterday?"

"They sure was. One of 'em brung the other, and I had to meet 'em both alone. They seemed real glad to see me, but I wa'n't none too friendly with either of 'em."

"Josiah, stop your joking. You say there was a lawyer here to see you, and he brought a mortgage on your place?"

The old man looked away and cleared his throat. "The feller come from the city. He showed me how them papers called for a settlement afore the fust of November. I ain't got a chance in the hull world to get hold of any money afore then. He said something about a foreclosure, too, and he said that meant I was to lose my place. He see how hard I took it, and was real kind. He said he'd come all the way from the city just to let me know."

"Kind! Pooh! You'd better have showed him the door like you told me you did Harry Beaver."

"It wa'n't his fault, Clemmie. He was real sorry. He was just doing his duty. He offered to buy the place after I'd showed him about. What he said he'd give wa'n't what it's wuth by a heap, but it would pay Jim off and leave me a mite."

"Offered to buy it, did he? Well, you didn't tell him you'd sell, did you?"

"Not for sartin, I didn't. I told him I'd think it over a spell and let him know."

"Let him know! Pooh! I should say you will think it over, and for a purty long spell, too. You ain't going to sell a foot of it! That feller wasn't here for himself. He was playing one of Jim Fox's tricks on you."

"But, Clemmie,—"

"Josiah, you mark my word, that lawyer feller was here to buy this place for Jim Fox. It's as plain as the nose on your face, and I don't need to look twice to see that. Don't you dare to sell one inch of this place."

The Captain rubbed the organ to which Miss Pipkin referred, and thought for some time. "Suppose your guess is right, and he did come for Jim, there ain't

nothing left for me but to sell. That's better than losing everything." He tried to clear his husky voice. "It's kind of hard. I've got you and the minister here now, and I'm sort of obligated to you both. It's kind of hard."

"Obligated, fiddlesticks! I ain't so young that I can't take care of myself, nor so old, neither. I'll get on all right, and the minister, too, for that matter." Her voice dropped with an unsteady quality. "But what you're going to do, I can't see."

He shook his head wearily. "I've been trying to see some way all night long, but I can't, 'cepting to sell."

"Josiah,"—she crossed over and laid her hand on his shoulder,—“there's a picture in the setting-room that says beneath it something like this: ‘Don't Give Up the Ship.’ I was looking at it yesterday after I'd been so silly about what you said to me. I must have been sent to the picture for a purpose in this hour of our trial. We ain't going to give up the ship, not till we have to.”

"But he's got the law on his side, and I ain't got nothing on mine."

"You've got a clear conscience, and that's more than all the law with which he's clothing his guilty mind. And, then,"—she eyed him closely,—“you've got me. Does that help? We ain't going to run up the white flag till we have to, and I don't care if he's got the whole creation on his side.”

He rose and laid his rough palm over the bony fingers on his shoulder. "Do you mean that you're going to stick by me, Clemmie?"

She nodded.

"I cal'late that'll help a heap, even if things go dead against me. It's purty nigh three weeks afore he can close up on me," he faltered, as though he dared not hope even in the presence of this unexpected aid that had come to him. "What are we going to do?"

"The fust thing you're going to do is to see Jim Fox himself, and you're going to tell him that you're going to see a good lawyer, the best you can find. If them papers ain't straight he'll show plain that he's worried." She drew her hand from his. "Josiah, I'm going to show you something I ain't ever showed to a living soul. It ain't much, but it might start you along the right way of finding something out."

She went to her room, and soon returned with a piece of paper. It was yellow with age, and had to be handled with care to keep it from falling apart at the creases. She handed it to the Captain, indicating a section for him to read. He

nearly tumbled from his chair as the truth it conveyed concerning the past life of Jim Fox flashed into his mind.

“Holy mackerel!”

The entrance of the minister prevented further comment, except for the Captain to whisper:

“Thanks, Clemmie. ’Twill help, I cal’late. You’re a good woman,” he finished, taking her hand between both of his. “You’re smart, too. You’ve helped me more than you know, and God bless you!”

CHAPTER XII

That evening the Captain dropped the brass knocker to the Elder's front door with a heavy thud. A servant opened the door.

"I want to see Mr. Fox."

"He's not in, sir. Will you leave any——"

"Who is it, Debbs?" called a voice from the top of the stair.

"Captain Pott, sir. I thought you was to see no one to-night, sir."

"That's all right. Send him right up to my room."

The Elder's den was across the hall from his daughter's room, in the most quiet part of the house.

"Right in here, Josiah. We shall be more private here than down-stairs."

The Captain entered, and took the chair indicated by the Elder.

"I was very busy, and told Debbs I was not to be disturbed, but I recognized your voice, and—er—wanted to see you. It has been quite a long while since we have had a friendly chat, Josiah. I wish you would come more often. I get very lonesome in this big place. Have a cigar? No? I shall, if you don't mind."

"We ain't been none too neighborly, as you might say."

"Why don't you come up once in a while?"

"Cal'late for the same reason you don't get over to the other end of the road. For one thing, I'm too busy paying off debts."

The Elder looked questioningly at the seaman as he touched the lighted end of a match to his cigar. "That is true. We—er—are busy, too busy for our own good. We ought to be more sociable here in Little River. We need something to stir us up."

"We're too damn selfish, if you ask me. As far as stirring goes, I cal'late we've got as much of that as any town along this coast. About all a feller can do is to

set his teeth against the hurricane and grin.”

The Elder laughed without restraint, and his visitor began to show signs of uneasiness.

“You’d best be careful with them delicate blood-vessels,” mildly suggested the Captain.

“True, Josiah. But that was a good joke, a very good joke. One can take it in two ways.”

“Not the way I mean it. There’s enough gossip——”

“Yes, we are too selfish,” broke in the Elder, “and it is too bad. I often think of the time we were kids together. We had our little scraps, made up, and were ready to fight for each other.”

The Captain could recall no occasion when he had fought for Jim Fox.

“How long ago that all seems! Yet how—er—happy were those days. No cares. No sorrows. No troubles. No misunderstandings. Excuse me, Josiah. I don’t know why it is that I hark back like this when we get together. But it does me a world of good.”

“Maybe you’ve got another fish to fry,” suggested the Captain, wholly untouched by the Elder’s memory picture. “That was the way you done when you wanted us boys to do something for you, and you ain’t got over it with age.”

“I was quite a diplomat in those days, wasn’t I? But we can’t bring them back. No, sir, we can’t. They are—er—gone forever.”

“I ain’t sartin I want to fetch ’em back. Leastwise, that wa’n’t my purpose in coming here to-night. I come over to see you about that mortgage you slipped over on me.”

“Mortgage?”

“Yes, mortgage.”

“Oh! You refer to that little loan I made you some time ago? That was—er—real humor calling it a mortgage.”

“It may be funny to you, but it ain’t to me.”

“I hope that little matter isn’t bothering you.”

“It ain’t, but a feller from the city is. He told me you was intending to take my place.”

“I’m sorry he told you that. I do not know what I should do with it if I had it.”

“I don’t know what I’d do without it, Jim.”

“I think it can be arranged without difficulty. It is such a small matter.”

“It may look small to you, but it looks a heap sight different to me.”

“I know, Josiah. It is very opportune that you have come to me to-night. Not more than an hour ago I was thinking of you, and wishing I might—er—see you. I have been thinking, too, of others, some who stood by me in time of peril and poverty. I feel greatly indebted to them, and since they were members of your family, I must now show my appreciation for their kindness.”

“I cal’late you’re referring to them you served a dirty trick over in Australia.”

“Why, Josiah! I have told you a hundred times that I was never in Australia,” declared the other, paling slightly.

“That’s so, you have, Jim. Excuse me.”

“As I was saying,” he continued, showing great relief, “I feel indebted to them, and I want to pay back—”

“Look here, Jim, you needn’t offer none of your blood money. It don’t look good to me.”

It was a bold stroke, but it went home. The color crept slowly from the Elder’s sanguine face.

“I have no intention of offering you charity.”

“You know damn well you dasn’t. I’m not speaking of charity, and you know that, too, Jim. I’m speaking of blood money, and I mean just what I say.”

“You are still the same doubting Thomas, I see. Do you recall how you were always the last one—er—to be won over to a new enterprise?” The Elder tried to smile.

“I had good reason to go slow. A mite of caution is a purty fair endowment of nature where some people’s schemes is concerned. If I’d used a little of it last spring I’d not be in the fix I am to-day.”

“But that bump of caution on your head is pretty hard on your friends.”

“I cal’late it won’t hurt my friends none. We wa’n’t speaking of them just then. Anyhow, it’s kept me with a clean conscience to sleep with, and I’d a heap sight rather ship with clear rigging than be ballasted with some people’s money and

have to make bedfellows with their conscience.”

“Yes,—er—ahem—quite true,” was the hasty reply. “What can I do for you, Josiah? If I can be of the least service,—er—I shall be only too glad.”

“It depends on what you’ve got to offer me. The fust thing I’d like to suggest is that you stop that there er-ing and hem-ing. There ain’t no one here but me, and it don’t make no impression. Being that you’re so infernal anxious to get back to boyhood days we might just as well go all-hog on it. You didn’t try none of that foolishness then.”

“What you say is quite true.” The Elder stroked his chops thoughtfully.

“You didn’t have them things to pet, neither. You might just as well stop that. It makes me nervous.”

Elder Fox eyed him narrowly. He had a mind to tell this man to leave his house at once. He even entertained the thought that it might be a good thing to call Debbs and have him put out. But a certain fear, which had for years haunted the Elder, laid a cold restraining hand on his inclinations.

“Yes, Josiah, those are habits that I have formed in business. Dealing with so many different kinds of men makes us do odd things at times, and if repeated often enough they become habits. I have always tried to be courteous even to men that bore me, and I presume I took on those senseless little syllables to temper my natural brusqueness.”

“Well, you don’t need ’em to-night, and you can be as brusque as you like.”

“Before we speak of that little matter between us, I have something else I want to say. When we have finished, I trust there will be no need to mention the other.”

“If it’s advice you’re wanting to give, I’ll tell you right off that I’ve had enough of it. What I need is time on that mortgage you and your crooked lawyer put over on me.”

“There may be lots of money in what I have to propose. In fact, there is, if you do as I say. How badly do you want a ship to man and command?”

“See here, Jim, I ain’t in no frame of mind to be fooled with to-night. If you don’t mean just what you’re going to say, you’d best not say it.”

“I mean every word of it, but I shall expect more consideration and respect from you before I open my mouth again.”

“If you’re in dead earnest, Jim, I beg your pardon. This damn mortgage has got on my nerves purty bad. Heave over your proposition, and get it off your chest.”

“I shall have to exact one promise from you.”

The Captain took one step toward the Elder’s chair, his swarthy old face alight with anticipation and hope. One promise! He would give a hundred, and keep them all. The Captain was fine-looking at all times, every span of him a man and a seaman. But when his face was bright with eagerness, and his muscular body tense with anticipation, he was superb. To those less steeled against human magnetism than Mr. Fox, he was irresistible at such times. The Elder merely waved him back to the vacated chair.

“That one promise will bind us both,” he said coldly. “In fact, it is to your interest as well as to mine to make it. You will not see it at first, but time will prove that I am right in asking it.”

“I’ll promise anything that’s reasonable if you’ll only swing me the job of skipper.”

“Very well.” The Elder began to shuffle some papers with deft fingers.

“But that there mortgage, Jim, is soon due, and——”

“We shall not speak of that for the present. There are other ways of disposing of mortgages than by paying them,” he remarked, striking a match and holding it significantly beneath a piece of paper which the Captain recognized as the one displayed by the lawyer yesterday.

Captain Pott did not take his eyes from the face of the man across the table. A suspicion was forcing its way into his mind, and it was as unpleasant as it was unwelcome.

“How do I know that you’ll keep your end of the promise, Jim?”

“You have my word.”

“I had that afore, at the time you give me that money, but it didn’t get me nothing.”

“I do not remember that I gave any definite promise. I said I would do my best for you, and I did.”

“Maybe you done your best, but——”

“We’ll not quarrel about that. There is nothing indefinite about the position I have to offer you this time. I have the papers here on my table, and the command

is yours in less than five minutes after you make the promise. At the same time the note for my loan to you goes into the fire.”

“Well, is there any special reason why you should take so long to get this thing off your chest?”

“I want you to realize the importance of the request I have to make.” The Elder threw aside what little mask he had been wearing. An imperious note crept into his voice, giving it a hard metallic ring. “It is time for you to recognize, Josiah, that I have you about where I want you. I can make or ruin you in five minutes, and it all depends on how you reply now. Think hard before you answer.”

“That’s right, Jim, you’ve got me with a purty tight hip-hold,” admitted the Captain. “But I’m waiting just now for them orders to see if I’m going to sign up.”

“You’ll sign up, I’m not afraid of that. That is, if you really wish to keep your place. The promise that you are to make to me is concerning the man staying in your house.”

Captain Pott stiffened, and threw up his guard. He carefully concealed his rising anger, however. He must be more certain of his ground before he made any leap that might prove dangerous.

“What in tarnation has he got to do with this affair?”

“He has everything to do with it, so far as you are concerned at this particular moment. We must get that man out of this town. You must believe me when I tell you that such action is as much to your interest as mine. If he is permitted to stay here——”

“Heave to, there, Jim!” exploded the seaman. He leaned across the table and glared at the man on the other side.

“There, now, sit down and compose yourself,” soothed the Elder. “I was prepared for you to take it this way at first. I don’t mean anything against the man, so far as his personal character is concerned, but his presence here is a decided menace both to you and me. If I dared to tell you the whole truth, you, too, would see the sense of my request. It is best that he go for his own good, too. Some physical violence will certainly be done him if he remains. You must see with me that it is best on that one point that we remove him quietly from the town. Sim Hicks has sworn to do him harm. Now, you are the logical man to go to Mr. McGowan, and show him the sense of his leaving Little River. You seem to be the only one who can influence him in any degree.”

“By the Almighty, Jim Fox! If it wa’n’t for your darter, I’d swipe up this floor with your dirty carcass!”

“It will be best if you take this calmly, Josiah, and stop your foolish raving. Just listen to reason for once in your life. There is a past in that man’s life known to a very select few. I came across it accidentally. If it became known it would create no end of scandal and ruin our little church. That man had no good intention in putting in his request for the Little River pulpit. What is more, he is not a real minister of the gospel. He is using it merely as a pretext.”

The Captain caught his breath. “He ain’t a minister? What do you mean by that?”

“Nothing more than what it conveys to your mind. I cannot tell you more, just now.”

“Jim, you’re lying to me!”

“Be careful, Josiah. You are making a very serious charge, and I may decide to make you prove it in court.”

The seaman reached into his coat-pocket for the yellow bit of paper which Miss Pipkin had given him that morning. But he quickly withdrew his hand without the paper. The thought flashed through his mind that he could not prove with certainty the truth of the message written thereon.

“I’ve got something here in my pocket that’d interest you a heap, Jim. But I ain’t able to prove it all, so it can wait for a spell. But if it leads in the direction I think it does, the Lord pity you!”

“I’d advise you to hold your tongue, as it might get you into trouble. If you will drop all that foolishness about getting even with me for imaginary wrongs, we shall be able to talk business. Here are the receipts for the full amount I loaned you, and here are papers waiting your signature and mine that will put you in command of the best vessel put out by our company in many years. It all depends now on your willingness to help me get Mr. McGowan out of our town.”

Mr. Fox shoved the papers temptingly across the table, keeping one hand on the corner of them. The Captain appeared to waver. Of course, he acknowledged, it did seem easy. But he did not touch the papers. He rather drew back as though they were deadly poison. He eyed the Elder narrowly.

“Well, what do you say?”

“Jim Fox,”—began the seaman slowly, his voice lowering with the rise of his anger,—“you’re a white-livered coward! You’ve always been getting others to do your dirty work for you, and I’m sartin now that you’re offering me a bribe to help stack your damn cards against Mack. There ain’t money enough in the world to make me do that. I see your game just as plain as though you’d written it out like you done them papers. You mean to wreck Mack’s life, and you’re asking me to sit in with you and the devil while you do it. You mean to throw him out of a job, and you mean to keep him from getting another by working through that Means hypocrite. Yes, I can see through you, as plain as a slit canvas. There’s something infernal back of all this, and that something is your goat. You’re skeered that the minister is going to get it, and that’s what is ailing you. By God! I’ll be on deck to help him, whether he’s a preacher or a detective from Australia looking for crooks. You’ve been lying all these years about where you made your money. You’ve been telling that you got it in Africa, trading in diamonds. I’ve got a piece of paper in my pocket that blows up your lies like dynamite. You was in Australia all them years. By the Almighty! I’m going to sign up with the preacher, and I don’t care a tinker’s dam if you get the last cent I have, and send me up Riverhead way to the Poor Farm to eat off the county. Foreclose on my property! That ain’t no more than you’ve been doing to others all your miserable life. It ain’t no more than you done to Clemmie Pipkin years ago, leaving her nothing to live on. But mine will be the last you’ll foreclose on, and I’m going to see one or two of the best lawyers in the city afore you do that!”

“THERE AIN’T MONEY ENOUGH IN THE WORLD TO MAKE ME DO THAT.”—Page 242.

The Captain strode from the room and down the stair. Mr. Fox called feebly, begging him to return. But the seaman was deaf with rage, and he left the house without hearing the mumbled petition of an apparently penitent Elder.

Captain Pott half ran, half stumbled, down to the wharf. He hurriedly untied his dory, and rowed out to the *Jennie P.* A little later he anchored his power-boat in the harbor of Little River where the railroad station was located. He rowed ashore, secured his dory, and ran to the depot. He climbed aboard the city-bound train just as it began to move.

CHAPTER XIII

Daylight was beginning to peep through the morning darkness when the Captain threaded his way along the crooked path to the rear of his house. He drew off his boots outside the kitchen door, and tiptoed to his room. Without removing his clothing he threw himself on the bed. The sunlight was streaming through the eastern windows when he awoke. He stretched himself off the bed, and threw back the covers so that Miss Pipkin would think he had slept there the night through. He went down to the kitchen.

“Anything special to tell me this morning, Josiah?” whispered the housekeeper as he entered. “How pale you look! Ain’t been seeing ghosts, have you? You look like one yourself.”

“Maybe ’twas ghosts I see, but they looked purty tolerable real to me. Yes, Clemmie, I’ve sartin been looking on things what ain’t good for a healthy man to see. One of ’em is that I’m a ruined man, and there ain’t no help for it.” 246

“Don’t talk such nonsense! Get out and fill your lungs with fresh air. That cures the blues quicker than anything I know.”

“It won’t cure this fit. If it would, I’d had it cured long ago, ’cause that’s all I’ve been doing for a good many weeks. If I’d talked less and done more I’d been a heap sight better off.”

“I thought from the way you was staying up there last night that you was doing something. I never heerd you come in at all.”

“Maybe I wa’n’t up there all that time. The fact is, Clemmie, I went into the city last night.”

“You went into New York last night? What did you do that for?”

“I went in and pulled a lawyer friend of mine out of bed for a little confab. I don’t mind telling you who it was. It was Harold Fox.... Clemmie, that feller that was here to see me about that mortgage lied to me about the date it was due. Harold says the time is up on it next Saturday.”

“Josiah!”

“I also talked with another friend of mine who knew Jim purty well in his palmy days, and he says what that letter of yours says is so. He told me a lot more stuff, too.”

“What? About Jim or Adoniah?”

“Both. What would you do if there wa’n’t no way to save my place excepting by ruination of the other feller?”

“You’d see him stop for you, wouldn’t you? I’d not give it a second thought, I’d just——”

“That ain’t it, Clemmie. There’s his darter, the sweetest little thing that God ever made. It would kill her, and I ain’t got no right to hurt her just to save my own skin.”

“You’re right, Josiah.”

“But what I’m to do, I don’t know.”

Mr. McGowan entered with an armful of wood, and as he stooped to drop it into the box Miss Pipkin looked sorrowfully at the Captain and shook her head.

“I’ve done my best,” said the seaman, slowly.

“You’d think he was making his last will and testament from the way he’s talking,” remarked Miss Pipkin, trying hard to appear as though she was without the least concern.

“Maybe I be, Clemmie. Maybe I be.”

“What’s the cause for all this dejection?” asked the minister.

“Cause enough, Mack.... I’ll be going back to the city to-morrow. I hate to leave you to the wiles of the menagerie, for if I ain’t terrible mistook they’re out for your blood, and they think they’ve got a whiff of it. But I cal’late they’ve got their ropes crossed. They’ve got the idea they’re h’isting the mains’l, but it ain’t nothing but the spanker. If I was going to stay aboard I’d give ’em a few lessons the next few days that they’d not forget all the rest of their lives.”

“You’re certainly mixing your figures in great shape this morning,” commented the minister good-naturedly.

“Well, if mixing figures is like mixing drinks, making ’em more elevating to the thoughts, I cal’late I’d best do a little more mixing. There’s going to be a squall

right soon that'll test the ribs of the old salvation ark to the cracking p'int. If I was you I'd furl my sails a mite, and stand by, Mack."

"We're so accustomed to trouble now that——"

"Trouble? This is going to be hell, that is, unless luck or Providence takes a hand and steers her through. Your Elder thinks he's on the home stretch to winning his laurels, but if I was going to hang round here he'd wake up right sudden one of these fine mornings to find his wreath missing."

"Josiah, you're as wicked as you can be this morning. What on earth has come over you?" exclaimed Miss Pipkin with deep concern.

"You'd feel wicked, too, if you was dealing with that kind. But that there Elder puts me in mind of a tramp printer that come to work for Adoniah one time. Adoniah was a brother of mine," he explained in answer to a quizzing look from the minister. "Adoniah was managing a country paper down the line then, and being short on help he took this tramp printer on. He gave him something to set up that the editor had writ,—you couldn't tell one of the letters of that editor from t'other, hardly,—and that feller had a time with it. The piece was about some chap that was running for office, and it closed up with something like this: 'Dennis, my boy, look well to your laurels.' When that tramp got through with it, it come back to the editor like this: 'Dammit, my boy, bark well at your barrels.'"

Mr. McGowan laughed heartily, and Miss Pipkin struggled against a like inclination, doing her best to appear shocked.

"Josiah Pott!" she said at last. "I'd think you'd be ashamed telling such things!"

"It ain't nothing more than what Adoniah told, and it happened just as I spun it. You used to think what Adoniah said was all right."

The minister sobered instantly.

"But it ain't right defaming the dead like that."

"I ain't defaming no one. Don't get mad, Clemmie. Adoniah told the yarn himself."

"Well, it ain't to his credit, and I ain't so sure he told it with that bad word in it."

"He sartin did. That's what makes it funny."

"If you wasn't so anxious to use them words you'd not be telling such stories, and, of all people, to the minister."

“He’s heerd me say lots worse ones than that. I was telling it for illustration. You see, Jim has got the idea that he’s looking to his laurels, and he ain’t doing nothing but barking at his barrels, and empty ones at that.”

“You’d best not try to illustrate if you can’t use words decent enough to listen to,” answered Miss Pipkin as she left the room.

Late that evening Mr. McGowan drew the Captain into his study. A cheery fire was crackling in the fire-back. The minister placed a chair before the grate and slid another near. For some time the two men sat looking into the fire. As Mr. McGowan tossed in another stick of wood, he turned toward the seaman.

“I did not know that you had a brother by the name of Adoniah,” he said.

“It ain’t often I make mention of him. I wa’n’t over fond of him. He didn’t treat Clemmie fair. Then, he wa’n’t nothing but a half-brother.”

“Don’t tell me his last name was Phillips?”

“Sartin was.... What was that you said, Mack?”

“I didn’t speak. I was just thinking.”

“I’d a heap sight rather you’d speak out loud than grunt like that. What in tarnation is the matter with you?”

“If you can throw any light on this man Phillips, I wish you’d do it. I’ve heard his name mentioned twice, by two different people, with quite different effects.”

“What do you mean by me throwing light on him?”

“Tell me about him, all you know, good and bad. What does Miss Pipkin know about him? Where is he?”

“Heave to, there, Mack! One at a time. I don’t know if Clemmie has any idea where he is now. She was purty thick with him once, and heerd from him once or twice after he went off to sea.”

“She was in love with him?”

“That’s putting it purty tame. I cal’late—Say, has she been speaking to you about him?” asked the seaman eagerly.

The minister nodded. “I’m breaking a promise to her by talking with you about it, but—”

“Breaking a promise you made to Clemmie? How’s that?”

“She made me promise to say nothing to you. But I must. This thing is getting too interesting for me to keep my hands off any longer.”

“You mean she made you say that you’d not tell me that she was in love with Adoniah? That’s funny, ain’t it? Why, I knew——” He broke off abruptly, a new light coming into his tired eyes. He leaned forward and whispered hoarsely: “Mack, it ain’t likely she’s in love with—well,—with any other feller, is it?”

“She didn’t——”

“With me, for example,” broke in the seaman. “You don’t think maybe that was the reason she made you give that promise, do you?” The Captain made no effort to hide his eagerness. “I don’t mind telling you that I love Clemmie. I loved her long afore Adoniah come along and sp’iled it. He was smarter than me, and went to school. He was real bright and handsome. It wa’n’t that Clemmie loved him, but she didn’t know the difference. And I know right well he didn’t love her. He had took a spite against me because I was left the home place, and he took it out on me by stealing my girl. You don’t s’pose she sees now that he didn’t really care——” He slowly settled back into his chair, and shook his head. “I cal’late that ain’t possible. You heerd what she said about his sacred memory this morning. Good Lord! Why won’t she ever forget!”

“She may some day, Cap’n. No man can predict to-day what a woman may do to-morrow.”

“The most of ’em are that way, but Clemmie’s different from the common run. I know I’m an old fool for wishing it, but it ain’t easy to give up the woman you love, even after long years of her saying no to you.”

“You’re right, Cap’n. It isn’t easy to give up the woman you love.”

The minister gave the fire a vigorous poke, sending a thick shower of sparks up the chimney. The seaman glanced at him.

“Have you the slightest idea where your brother is?”

“No. I ain’t heerd from him for more than twenty years, and then it wa’n’t direct. He left because he was ’feared Clemmie was going to make him marry her, and he knew if he took to sailing the seas she’d never foller him. Damn him! He didn’t treat her square. That’s why I don’t have much use for him. If he’d told her out and out that he wa’n’t going to marry her, I’d forgive him. But——”

“Did Mr. Fox know this half-brother?”

“About as well as he knew the rest of us about town. He always was sort of

h'ity-t'ity, Jim was.”

“Did he know him better after they left Little River?”

“Mack, I ain’t got your tack, yet. Mind telling me where you’re heading?”

“You asked me once if anything out of the ordinary took place that night I dined at the Fox home. Do you remember?”

“Yes, I rec’lect I did ask you something like that. But——”

“You may also recall that you suggested that what happened to Mr. Fox took place in his head instead of in his heart.”

“Yes, I said that, too. But, Mack——”

“Just wait, and I’ll tell you what this is all about. I had mentioned to Harold that I was born in Australia——”

“Mack!” The Captain was out of his chair in one bound. “You born in Australia? Why in tarnation didn’t you ever tell me that afore?”

The minister looked puzzled. “My announcement had a similar effect on the Elder.”

“Go on, Mack. Don’t mind me. I’m a mite narvous. All unstrung, I cal’late.”

“As I said I had just mentioned that fact to Harold, and the conversation naturally turned back to the days of the early traders who went to that country. Harold then told his father that the law firm, of which he has recently been made a junior member, had put him on a case which necessitated his going over to Australia. It seems that they had been trying to clear it up for a long time. The case came from Sydney, and had been referred to him because he had once spent some time over there. It was when he mentioned the name of the client that Mr. Fox nearly fainted.”

Mr. McGowan gave the fire another vigorous poke before continuing. The Captain slid to the edge of his chair, holding on to the sides.

“Do you know of all the movements of Mr. Fox after he left here?” came the disappointing question from near the fireplace.

“No, I don’t. But you was speaking of the case from Sydney, Mack. Who was the feller whose name hit Jim so hard?”

“Was Mr. Fox a sailor?”

“Lordie!” ejaculated the Captain. “Jim Fox a sailor? Why, he couldn’t sail a tub in a flooded cellar.”

“You mean he never crossed the ocean as a trader?”

“He done that, I cal’late, but as far as him being a sailor——” He sniffed a

contemptuous conclusion.

“How many years ago was it that he followed the seas?”

“I ain’t able to say, exactly, but it wa’n’t long after Adoniah left home.”

“Cap’n Pott, Mr. Fox knew your half-brother after they had both left this country.”

“How do you know that?”

“Just by putting two and two together.”

The seaman took the yellow bit of paper from his pocket, and in his excitement crumpled it into a wad. “But Adoniah went to Australia, and Jim says he was in Africa,” he said, testing out the other’s fund of information.

“I know all about that story, but I don’t believe one word of it. Mr. Fox did not make his money in Africa, and he knew your half-brother.”

“What’s all this got to do with that there client Harold spoke of the last night you ate up there?”

“Everything. The man he mentioned was a trader in Sydney. He had married an only daughter of an older trader, and then something happened. The younger man disappeared very suddenly. The old trader searched for years, but in vain. Recently, he died, leaving a large estate. His wife has taken up the search for the lost daughter. It was the name of the old trader’s son-in-law that crumpled up Mr. Fox like an autumn leaf. The young trader’s name was Adoniah Phillips.”

Though he had been anticipating this, the Captain fell back into his chair and stared blankly at the minister. “But why did he act like the devil toward you, Mack? That’s what I want to know.”

“I don’t know. That is the thing that puzzles me.”

“What more do you know?”

“Harold said that Mr. Phillips came over to this country.”

The Captain again sprang from his chair as though hurled out by a strong spring. Mr. McGowan rose to face him.

“My brother in America? Mack, it’s a lie! He’d have looked me up!”

“Perhaps he had reasons for not wishing you to know about him. He may have been an outlaw.”

The minister then asked abruptly, "What connection was there between him and Mr. Fox? That is the thing we must find out."

The Captain was trembling. "Have you seen Harold since he come back?"

"Not yet. But I intend to."

"No you don't! For God's sake, boy, don't do it!"

"But I must. I want to help you and Miss Pipkin. Then, for some unknown reason, I seem to be a part of all this mystery, and I intend to ferret it out."

"Mack, please don't!"

"Is it because you fear disgrace to your family name?"

"That's it!" shouted the seaman, seizing the minister by the arms with a crushing grip. "I'll tell you the hull miserable yarn some day, when I get to the bottom of it. But keep your hands off now! Them's orders!"

"And if I break them?"

"Then, by the Lord Harry, I'll break——" The Captain stopped abruptly. "Mack, what be you doing in Little River?"

Miss Pipkin had been disturbed by the noise, and now opened the study door. She looked alarmed. The swarthy face of the Captain was a sickly green where the white reflected through the deep tan.

"Of all things!" exclaimed the housekeeper. "I s'pose I should pity the two of you if you feel the way you look. But, for the lan' sakes, Josiah, let go the minister's arms this very minute. You're crushing them."

The Captain's hands relaxed and fell limply to his sides. The tense muscles of his face eased into a silly grin.

"We was having a friendly little argument, hey, Mack?"

The minister assented.

"Then, I'd hate to see you in a real fight. Things must be going to your head, Josiah."

"That's a fact, Clemmie, they be, but they're clearing it up."

"You need some of that liniment. Your worrying has put your stomach out. I'll fix up a dose for you."

"No you won't neither. It ain't liniment I want, it's something for the outside."

He started for his hat and coat.

“Josiah! You’re clean off in your head, going out a night like this! It’s raining pitchforks, and is past ten o’clock.”

“Don’t you worry, Clemmie. I ain’t crazy. I’ve just got back what little sense I was born with. I’m sailing my *Jennie P.* to the city. Good-bye.” Before she could enter any protest, he stooped and kissed her.

Miss Pipkin stood as one paralyzed while the Captain snatched his rubber hat from the nail behind the kitchen door, and slipped into his slicker. He was out of the house before the coat was fastened about his neck.

MISS PIPKIN HAD BEEN DISTURBED BY THE NOISE.—Page 261.

“Now, ain’t that a caution to saints! And us a-standing here and not trying to stop him. He’s gone plumb off in his head!” lamented the housekeeper, dropping limply into a chair. “What ever shall I do, Mr. McGowan? I know he’s coming down with that terrible fever again. I know it! I know it!” She wept bitterly. “There ain’t been no one so kind to me, and that cares for me like him! And I ain’t never give him any chance!”

“Do you really care for the Captain?”

She straightened, and dabbed her apron into the corners of her eyes, attempting at the same time to marshal a legion of denials. But the legion refused to be marshaled. She gave up, and admitted that she did care for Captain Josiah, very much.

“Then, he’ll come back, have no fear. A twenty-mule team couldn’t keep him away.”

“What good will it be if he does come back, if he ain’t got his senses?”

“In my opinion he was never more sane than he is to-night. He has not taken leave of his senses; he is not a man so easily dethroned. He has merely taken a leave of absence from town, and all his five senses have gone with him.”

After Miss Pipkin had gone to her room somewhat comforted, Mr. McGowan spied the yellow piece of paper which the Captain had dropped. He stooped down, picked it up, smoothed the crumpled page, and began to read. His eyes

widened with each additional line.

“Jim and I are going into partnership over here in Sydney. It isn’t just what I’d like, but there are certain advantages. He is a keen fellow, and I’ll have to watch him pretty close. There is an older man who has taken us into his firm, so Jim can’t have his own way. There is loads of money here, and I mean to get my share of it.

“Jim and I are both fighting for the same girl. She is the daughter of the old man who heads up the firm. May the best man win, providing I’m the best man. I’ll give him some run for his money, anyway. I think I’m on the inside track for the present.

“I guess you’d better not say anything about Jim being over here. He isn’t using his own name, and says he wants it kept a dead secret. Just what his game is, I don’t know. But there are lots just like him who are hiding behind assumed names.

“I’m too harum-scarum a sailor for a quiet home-loving woman like you, so just forget me. Be good to——”

Here the page ended, and the remainder of the letter was in Miss Pipkin’s trunk.

Before he had finished reading, the chug-chug from the Captain’s power-boat floated in from the harbor, and the minister longed to be with him.

CHAPTER XIV

Elizabeth Fox was sitting alone in her room when the familiar chug from the exhaust of the *Jennie P.* fell on her ears. She raised her window-curtain, and watched the dim lights move out of the harbor in the direction of the Sound. An unreasoning fear seized her, and it steadily grew more and more acute as the exhaust from the engine exploded less and less distinctly. As the lights went out of view into the rain-soaked night, resentment replaced fear. The minister had doubtless heard of the plans that were being laid by Sim Hicks for his forceful ejection from Little River, and rather than face further trouble was slinking away like a coward under cover of night and storm.

Her better judgment soon began to form excuses for his action. The Athletic Club, thoroughly reorganized, had been placed under good leadership, and Mr. McGowan doubtless thought that the members could get on without his further aid. In all probability, he feared that his presence might interfere with the promised consummation of fellowship between the club and the church, and was leaving quietly so another man less aggressive than he might accomplish the thing he had so well begun. Had he remained, he would have been compelled to fight his way through by brute force. He had been forsaken by all those who should have stood by him. He was not a coward! He was taking the most difficult course. His going was the most heroic act of all.

Why had every man's hand been against him? Why had her father not so much as lifted a finger to stay the persecutors? She drew in her lip between her teeth, and mercilessly bit the pretty Cupid's arch. She kicked her foot against a stool till the piece of furniture lay beyond reach of her toe. Her father had not made a single effort to prevent one action of those who had set themselves against the minister. Instead, he had aided them, and in many instances had even led in the opposition against the young man.

One thought at length inhibited all others. She drew back from the window, and sinking into a deep chair, covered her face with her arm. Mack McGowan had gone out of her life! Suddenly, she knew that she loved him, loved him as passionately as he had declared his love for her. Why had she been unable to

understand him that night on the beach? Had she really tried? She classed herself with all the others who had been so blind as to force this man to leave their village.

She jerked the pins from her hair, letting the fair mass fall over her shoulders. The stand she had taken had been because of the attitude of her father. He had no right to come between her and the man she loved. Why had he done it? Her fingers paused in the act of delving for a buried hairpin, and her arm fell limply over the wing of the chair. A vision of her father's face had come before her, startling her imagination. She saw him again as she had seen him that night when Harold had announced his intended trip to Australia. She recalled his ghostly features on the night of Harold's return from abroad. Could there be some unknown reason for her father's actions against the young minister? And did that reason justify his action?

Her conjectures were cut short by the sound of footfalls on the stair. The tread was heavy, as though the climber were dragging himself up by main force. On the top landing he halted, and turned toward her door.

What caprices emotion plays with judgment! One moment judgment may map out a course as clear as the noonday, and the next moment emotion may lead judgment into a blind alley. Thus did the emotions of Elizabeth suddenly halt her judgment, leaving all her reason deaf, dumb, and blind.

"Beth, are you asleep?" whispered a tired, husky voice.

"No, Father. I haven't retired yet. Come in."

She blindly felt that her father had need of her, and although she could not understand the meaning of the battle he had been called upon to general, she must give him her aid.

Mr. Fox entered and felt his way across the dark room. He found a chair and dropped into it.

"You're in the dark, dear," he observed.

"Yes, Father. I've been thinking here since twilight. Lights always interfere with my thoughts, and so I did not turn them on."

"Why, my dear, how long you have been sitting like this! It is now nearly eleven o'clock. Your thoughts must have been pretty active."

"I had no idea it was that late!" she exclaimed. "I have been thinking a great deal."

He stirred uneasily. Since the Captain's visit the Elder had been on the verge of collapse.

"Pretty bad storm," he commented, and his voice trembled.

Elizabeth reached out into the darkness and took his hand. As she pressed it to her lips she felt it shake.

"Thank you, Beth."

"Are you well, Father?"

"Not very. But it is nothing serious. At least, the doctor so assures me. I presume he ought to know."

"Why don't you go to the city and consult a specialist? These country doctors may not understand how to diagnose your case fully."

"All the specialists in Christendom couldn't help me."

"Father!"

"Don't grow alarmed," he said, with a short nervous laugh. "The only thing any doctor ever removes from his patient is what is worth the doctor's while. Present day physicians get away with a lot that is no credit to their profession. The main thing that interests them is not the disease, but the sufferer's pocketbook. If they can remove the latter, they will keep coaxing the former along."

"I suppose it is the spirit of the age to want to get all the money one can. Others, besides doctors, do that."

"Yes. Yes. There are still others who are grossly misjudged simply because they have money, too."

"Of course there are. But let's forget both those classes and talk about you. Please, tell me all about your troubles. It hurts me to see you suffering so, and I want to help you. I'll try very hard."

"I can't tell you everything, Beth."

"Oh! Yes, you can. I'll be your doctor, and I'll promise not to remove more of your money than is absolutely necessary for a new frock. Try me this once, and see how well I'll prescribe."

"Money is not troubling me, and I'll see that you get all the new frocks you wish. But I fear you would not understand if I should tell you all."

"I shall try most awfully hard, Father. You have told me lots of times that for a

girl I have excellent ideas about business dealings. Please, tell me. It will at least help you to unburden your mind.”

“But I have told you already that what is troubling me has nothing whatever to do with business. I tried to talk with you the other evening, and you failed to understand. We must not quarrel again. That is harder for me to bear than all else.”

“I am very sorry for that, Daddy. I fear I lost my head. I am ashamed of the way I acted, and of what I said. Will you not forgive me?”

“Yes, my dear. We were both pretty severe. We are living too much on our nerves of late.”

“Now, that the past is cleared up, tell me what is troubling you to-night.”

“You say you have been sitting here for a long while?”

“Since twilight. It didn’t seem so long, though.”

“Did you see anything strange, or hear anything familiar?”

“I saw Uncle Josiah’s boat leave the harbor.”

“Didn’t it strike you as being rather odd that he should be going out this time of night, and in such a storm? He went out last night, too.”

“Yes, it did seem very strange to me.”

“Beth?” The Elder’s voice wavered.

“What is it, Father?”

“I know I’ve no right to worry you like this, but I don’t stand reverses like I once did.”

“Reverses! You told me it wasn’t money! And, anyway, what does Uncle Josiah’s action have to do with your reverses?” She switched on the light at her desk. When she saw her father’s face she gave a little cry.

“I have told you the truth, Beth. It isn’t money. I wish to God it were nothing more than that! There are reverses far harder to bear than financial ones.”

Her father appeared older than she had ever seen him. Dejection showed through every line of his haggard face. The side-whiskers, which to his daughter’s mind he had worn with great distinction, now gave to his worn features a grotesque expression.

“I feel pretty well worn out to-night, my dear,”—weariness was in every word he uttered,—“and as if I need some one to lean on. If I did not need you to help me, I should not be bothering you at this hour of the night.”

The girl drew before her father’s chair the footstool which earlier in the evening she had kicked into a far corner. She sat at his knee, and, taking his hand in hers, pressed it against her cheek. For some time they sat thus in silence. Her father broke in on the quietness of the room with a peculiar question.

“The Bible tells us that we should love our enemies, doesn’t it, Beth?”

“But, Father, you have no enemies worth worrying about! Why should you ask such a question?”

“They may not be worth worrying about, but as I said before I don’t seem able to fight off worry as I once could.”

“Nonsense! When all this blows over you will see where you have been very foolish to have worried in the least bit. You are not strong, and everything appears worse than it really is.”

“I don’t know about that, my dear. I’m not so certain, either, that my enemies are not worth worrying about.”

“Of course they’re not. Just think how all the people have honored you for what you have done for Little River. Your gifts will not be so quickly forgotten that a total stranger can change the feeling of respect for you among your lifelong friends.”

“I’m aware of all that, and I appreciate it.”

“What has all this to do about Uncle Josiah’s leaving town?”

“I’m coming to that. Suppose one of those you called my lifelong friends proved to be just the opposite?”

“That can’t be true about Uncle Josiah!”

“Public expressions of gratitude can never atone for the knife which a supposedly close friend drives into one’s heart.”

Elizabeth unconsciously drew away. The movement was slight, but her father noticed it.

“Beth, Josiah has gone to the city to-night for no good purpose.”

“Do you think he went alone?” With a savage leap the question got beyond the

bounds of her lips.

“I doubt it. Just what part the other will play, I don’t know. But of one thing I’m certain, Josiah is bent on ill.”

Elizabeth felt that her old friend was being weighed in the balances. She could not trust her words to the emotion she felt.

“Do you think you are in a position to understand what I’m trying to tell you?”

“Father,” she said, speaking slowly that she might not lose control of herself, “if you were not so serious about this, I should be tempted to laugh at your little melodramatic farce. It is the most ridiculous thing in all the world for you to imagine that Uncle Josiah would play double with us! He is too good-hearted for even one evil suggestion to get into his mind.”

“I did not want to tell you the fact, but I fear I must. Of late he has been openly hostile to every suggestion I have made. I presume he thinks I should have secured a boat for him. That may account for his action.”

“What dreadful thing has he done? I can’t imagine——”

“Crookedness comes from the most unexpected sources,” cut in her father, curtly.

“But such a thing would not be unexpected from Uncle Josiah, it would be impossible.”

The Elder lowered his eyes to meet those peering at him from the tangle of fair hair. “As I have already suggested, you might not understand me. It seems that you are determined not to understand. It would be very hard for me to have another falling out with my little girl. Maybe I should say nothing further.”

“If you are intending to say something against Uncle Josiah, perhaps you had better not say it. I’m afraid I wouldn’t understand.”

She turned from her father and tried to gaze through the window. The beating storm, and the light from within, made the pane opaque. She stared against this till her eyes ached.

“Beth!” There was a note of command in his tone.

She turned to face her father.

“Come here,” he ordered.

“Uncle Josiah untrue to us!” she said, without moving from her place at the

window. "I cannot believe it. There must be some mistake."

"There is absolutely no mistake about it. I should like to believe it more than you. I have even tried to make myself believe that my imagination was getting the better of me. But he was up here only last night, and confirmed all my fears."

"Uncle Josiah untrue! He could not be after all you have done for him. You loaned him money, and helped him fix up his place. Why, Father,—"

"That is the thing that makes it hurt so," broke in the Elder. "He seems ungrateful for all I have done. I don't care half as much for the praises of people inspired by a crowd as I do for one kind word from an individual whom I have helped."

"Some one has influenced Uncle Josiah, if he has taken this attitude against you."

"I have had the same fear. But even that would not excuse him for cursing me and threatening me with violence under my own roof."

Elizabeth looked doubtful.

"It amounts to that, my dear. The things he said to me last night are too vulgar to repeat. He swore vengeance against me. I am compelled to take a certain action against him, and naturally he is not able to see—"

"Father!" cried the girl. "Then, it is you who are threatening to do something against him."

"So it seems to him on the face of the action I must take. But at bottom it is an act of true friendship. He does not know the particulars, and I am in no position to explain."

"What is it you are going to do?" she asked, drawing farther into the corner near the window.

"I must request that you ask me no questions. You are not familiar enough with the law to comprehend."

Her gaze was fixed on him, and the Elder hitched sideways in his chair, vainly trying to avoid her eyes. Failing in this, he attempted to meet her look squarely. His eyes shifted unsteadily, and he looked above her head. But the eyes of his child continued to bore into his guilty soul.

"Why do you stare at me in that manner, Beth?" he questioned, motioning her to his side.

“I don’t know.” She gave no evidence that she saw his effort to draw her near him.

“Then, stop glaring like that. How many times have I told you that it is unladylike?”

“You’re going to take his place from him because he cannot pay that loan!” she whispered. “How can you be so cruel?”

Mr. Fox was left without excuse or reply. When he spoke, his voice was harsh, and his words were sharp.

“I see, I have been unwise in telling you.”

“You didn’t tell me, but I could not help guessing the truth.”

“I’m doing it for his good, and unless you believe me,—”

“For his good! You can’t mean that! You shall not stoop—”

“Stoop!” He caught up the word with a hiss. But he soon controlled his anger, and dropped his pale face into trembling hands. “God help me! They that hurt me are even of my own household!”

“Father, I don’t want to hurt you. I’m not your enemy!” she cried. “I’m only your little Beth trying so hard to see why you must do this terrible thing.”

“Come to me,” he begged.

She took her place on the footstool, and took his hand.

“I shall try to tell you all about it, if you will listen. I didn’t intend to, but it is more than I can bear to have my own daughter question my honesty and integrity. Harold’s unjust insinuations are almost more than I can bear. Now, if you—”

“Don’t say it, Father! I have not doubted your word yet. I don’t want to now. I won’t doubt you. Tell me all, and I’ll try to see this from your point of view.”

“You guessed rightly about what I have to do. The mortgage on Josiah’s place—”

“You can certainly extend that, if only for six months. You don’t need the money.”

“Don’t interrupt me again, please. It’s a far more serious thing than the small loan I made to Josiah to repair his place with. The old homestead was willed to Josiah’s half-brother, providing he should outlive Josiah. Josiah knew nothing

about that fact, and when he was so informed by his friends years ago, refused to listen to any of us. The half-brother left the country rather than quarrel with him over the estate. Later, this half-brother was in serious financial trouble, and I happened to come across him when he was in dire need of money. Knowing of the will, I loaned him all he needed, and took out a first mortgage on his property. Owing to peculiar circumstances, I put in a provision that there was to be no foreclosure so long as the interest was paid. I even went beyond the request which the man made, by including another clause which prevents me or my heirs from foreclosing before the expiration of two years after the last payment of interest. Have you followed me closely?"

She nodded.

"Well, each year the interest has been paid in full up to the last two. As long as it was forthcoming I said nothing. I have not mentioned a word of this transaction between the half-brother and me, for I knew his hot temper would get the better of him. He thinks the man was drowned at sea, and it is best that he continue to think so. I have misled him into the belief that I was foreclosing because of the small loan I made last spring, and I trusted to his usual secrecy and apparent ignorance to say nothing about it to any one. But from the arrogant manner he maintained toward me last night I fear he has said more than is good for him. And I have every reason to think that the meddler is the minister. I doubt not but that is the reason why he has gone to the city to-night, and I don't think he has gone alone."

"When must that interest be paid?"

"Before midday, Saturday. The other loan does not come due for more than two weeks, but the time was so near that I did not think of Josiah questioning it."

"Who has been paying the interest on the other loan?"

"I do not know, but it has doubtless been coming from some estate of the father-in-law of Josiah's brother."

"Why was it dropped?"

"That I cannot tell you. I should have done nothing even now had I not learned that this half-brother has come into that estate through the death of the wife's father. I have every reason to believe that he could pay not alone the interest, but the principal as well, if he so desired."

"Perhaps this half-brother does not know about the inheritance."

“That is absurd. He does know, or should. The fact is, he is an outlaw and is hiding from justice.”

“But why should you make Uncle Josiah suffer for what his half-brother did?”

“That is the very thing I am trying not to do. Can’t you see where it would place him if I told him the truth?”

“Yes. But I see no reason why you can’t let things go on as they have, and forget the unpaid interest.”

“I have no power to do that. I put the matter in the hands of my lawyers in order to force the hidden rascal to take action.”

“I think it would be best to tell Uncle Josiah all about it, and let him help you find the one who should pay.”

“Such action would be senseless for two reasons: it would give Josiah grief and pain, and he would be unable to meet the obligation. It was larger than what the place would cover when first made, and with the deterioration in the value of the property it now far exceeds its worth. Then, there is the interest for two years.”

“Why don’t you offer to buy the place, even paying more than the mortgage calls for? It would be a kindness.”

“I made such an offer through my lawyer, but Josiah refused.”

“Then, why not cancel it altogether?”

“That would be very unbusiness-like,” he declared curtly. “But even if I so desired, it would be impossible now. I have permitted my lawyers to use the foreclosure as a threat, and I’m duty bound to see it through.”

“If it is absolutely necessary to go through with this, I don’t see that it would make it any more terrible if we should tell Uncle Josiah the whole story. It would, at least, save his thinking ill of us. Then, there is the chance that he might suggest something.”

“Beth, I’m bound by my word to say nothing. That was the one promise I made to Adoniah.”

“Adoniah!” exclaimed the girl, her eyes growing wide.

“Yes. I did not mean to speak his name, but it can do no harm.”

“Why,—that was the first name—Is he the same man Harold is trying to find?”

“I’m sorry to say that he is.”

“The one whose last name was Phillips?”

“Yes. But why do you take such interest in him?”

“And he is a brother of Uncle Josiah?”

“A half-brother,” he replied, showing that he was becoming nettled.

Elizabeth rose from her stool, and crossed over to the door that led into the hall. She did not seem to sense just what she was doing till her hand touched the cold knob. With a start, as though wakened from a bad dream, she turned about and faced her father.

“Father,”—her breath came in short gasps,—“you have no right to keep your word to such a man as you say this Phillips person is. There is but one thing for us to do: go at once to Uncle Josiah. I’m certain he can get enough money to pay the interest, if that is what you want.”

“But, Beth, I cannot do that. My business honor is at stake, and I must permit the law to take its course.”

“You may be right about the legal part. But how about the moral side? Is there not something at stake there, too?”

“It does seem a moral injustice, but I cannot help that. It is hard, for Josiah will see only the moral side of it, and the people of the village will think it unjust. Josiah may find out the facts, that is, enough of them to prove to his mind that I can’t foreclose on his property because of the little loan. What more he may discover, I cannot even guess. It will depend somewhat on the lawyer who advises him. But no matter what he discovers, my conscience will be clear in that I did not break faith with his renegade brother.”

“What right have you to keep faith with him?”

“My little Beth, please do not question my action,” he entreated. “It will all be clear to you some day. I’m willing to wait for my vindication, but I must know that my little girl trusts her daddy to do what is right. If you don’t, it will kill me!”

There was such deep pathos in his voice that she recrossed the room. She laid her hand on the arm of her father’s chair.

“After all, Father, I am only a girl, and know very little of law and business. Forgive me if I have hurt you. I don’t see why you feel as you do about carrying this thing through at so great a sacrifice of lifelong friendships. But I believe that

you must be doing the best you can as you see your duty.”

“I can hope for no more than that, my dear.”

Suddenly she shook the hair from her shining eyes.

“Father!”

“Yes?”

“I tell you what I’m going to do!” she cried. “I’m going to Uncle Josiah just as soon as he gets back, and tell him as much as I think he ought to know. May I?”

“Certainly, if you wish. I’ll trust to your discretion. He will listen to you. I think you know what must not be said, from our conversation this evening.”

“I’ll do it!” she exclaimed eagerly, and stooped above the chair to kiss her father’s forehead. “Now, you go right to bed. That is my first remedy. My second is like unto it: don’t do one single bit of worrying. Remember! Good night.”

The Elder rose and smiled benignly on his daughter. At the door he paused, and turned back.

“Beth, this may affect the minister.”

“Affect the minister? Affect Mr. McGowan? How can it do that?”

“He has doubtless urged Josiah to take this rash step to consult a lawyer, and when all the facts come out he may be forced to leave Little River. As you know, his popularity is quite dubious as matters stand at present.”

“But I hardly see——”

“We’ll say nothing more about that. Good night, my dear.”

Her door closed, and her father crossed the hall. She was no sooner alone than a rush of unbidden thoughts and emotions swept over her, carrying all her promises like chaff before a hurricane. While her father had been in the room she had thought herself quite determined to take the hard step of explaining to Uncle Josiah just enough to remove the blame from the one she loved to the half-brother. But now that the Elder had gone her will to explain seemed gone, too. Again he rose before her imagination, a white trembling figure. She heard Harold speak the name of Adoniah Phillips, and saw her father stagger from the table. Had these two things been a mere coincidence? Doubts began to rise. Why must the mortgage be foreclosed on Uncle Josiah’s place? Why had her father acted so on the evening when Harold had spoken his client’s name? Had her father told her all? Why should all this involve the minister, even though he had

advised the Captain to seek the counsel of a lawyer?

Long into the night she puzzled her brain in seeking for answers to her many questions. Of one thing she felt sure, Mr. McGowan would not leave Little River. Just between waking and sleeping she at length recalled the words of love which he had spoken to her on the beach, spoken as she had never heard them before, and they carried her along dreamy paths into a happy visionary future.

CHAPTER XV

“Heigh-ho! Heigh-ho! Heigh-ho!
Ships may come and ships may go,

But I sail on forever!”

Certainly, no audience would be moved to tears, either by the quality of the voice, or by the ditty that was thus rendered. And yet, there was a blue-eyed, fair-haired girl, seated on the rocks below her father’s place, whose eyes filled with tears as she listened. Elizabeth thought she was prepared to fulfill the promise made to her father three days ago, but, now that the opportunity was upon her, she felt her resolution slipping away. She loved her dear old friend as never in all her life.

The singer rounded a projection of sandy beach just beyond the rock-pile where the girl was sitting. He was hurrying up the shore in the direction of his home, his dejected figure revealing his utter loneliness, despite the lightness of his song. His brow was puckered, more with furrows of perplexity than with lines of anger, as he made his way with labored difficulty up the steep incline from the beach.

“Oh, Uncle Josiah!” involuntarily cried the girl as she caught a glimpse of the haggard face.

The old man stopped, turned about, and looked up.

“Now, ain’t this surprising good luck to find you here!” he exclaimed. “I was just thinking about you, Beth.”

“Do your thoughts of me always make you sing like that?”

“That there song ain’t got much music, and I cal’late it don’t improve to speak of with my voice,” he answered, his swarthy face breaking into a broad smile. “It must sound funny for an old fish like me to be serenading a young lady like you. Glad you liked the entertainment, Beth.”

“I didn’t say I liked it. It made me feel very bad,” she said, loosening a stone

with the point of her shoe and sending it rolling to the water's edge.

"Well, I don't just rec'lect that you spoke favorable on that p'int. I honest didn't know you was about else I'd tried something more fitting to the occasion. Fact is, Beth, I was singing to keep my spirits up."

"You should be happier than you look, then, for your singing is better than a vaudeville show."

"You ain't none too partic'lar about classing me, be you?"

"Singing isn't in your line, and if I were you I'd not try it."

"Beth, what's wrong? You don't seem real glad to see me."

"Of course, I'm glad to see you, my dear old sailor Uncle," she said, rising and putting her arms about his neck.

"Thanks, Beth." He choked out the words, for as he looked down he saw the sign of tears in her eyes. "I've been cruising round nigh onto three days, and that's a purty long spell for the land-lubber I'm getting to be."

"Your return was as sudden as your departure, wasn't it?"

"Sudden? What do you mean by that?"

"Just what I say. I was looking for the *Jennie P.* to come into the harbor. Perhaps she came as she went, like the ships that pass in the night."

"You see me go out, did you, Beth?"

She nodded. "But I did not see you return."

"I did sort of sneak out. What did you think of me for doing a thing like that?"

"I didn't think very highly of you, if you want the honest truth," she declared, releasing her arms from about his neck.

"You ain't mad, are you, Beth?"

"Don't you think I have a perfect right to get angry? It was the first time you ever left home without telling me good-bye. Should I like that?"

"I never thought of that. But this here cruise was like the proposing to the old maid: unexpected-like. For that reason I wa'n't prepared for saying good-byes." His eyes clouded as he slowly continued, "It's a fact, I never went off afore without telling you good-bye. I don't——"

He stopped and looked down at the girl. She was no longer the child who had clung to him on the eve of departures for long cruises, asking, "Take me 'long,

Unca Josi?" She had grown to womanhood! He wondered that the thought had not occurred to him before. And yet, as he continued to gaze, he saw the eager child staring up into his face from the big eyes.

"I cal'late I ain't got no right to expect them partings no more," he faltered.

"Why, Uncle Josiah Pott! I don't like that one little bit."

"You seem so growed up, Beth, and I cal'late you're getting too big——"

"For you to love me?"

"No!" he said vehemently.

"Then, just what do you mean?"

"I don't know." He drew awkwardly back as she approached him, and fumbled his hat till it fell from his fingers. "You're getting to be quite a woman," he observed.

"And you're getting very foolish! Now, you kiss me before I get angry."

He stooped, kissed her hastily, and wiped his lips with the back of his coat-sleeve. He picked up his hat, and began to rub it vigorously with his finger-tips.

"If ever you talk like that again I'll punish you by never giving you another kiss."

"I ain't got no right to expect it, anyway, Beth."

"Uncle Josiah, don't let me hear that again. I want to hear all about your voyage," she demanded as she settled herself on the rocks, and motioned him near her.

"There wa'n't none, that is, none to speak of."

"Oh! But there was, and it must have been the most mysterious of all. You went in the night, and you came in the night. Did you do all your trading in the night, too, slipping about through the streets in some unknown country with moccasins on your feet, like you once told me about the Chinese?"

She laughed, but the Captain did not catch the restrained note and manner.

"There, now! That's more like it!" he declared, joining in with a cracked laugh. "It seemed afore like I was talking to a young lady I'd never seen. Feel more like I'd got back home with you laughing like that."

"I haven't been indulging much since you went away."

“You ain’t?”

“But tell me about your trip.”

“You was right on most p’int, excepting I didn’t cruise back in the night.”

“Then how did you slip into town so quietly and unseen? I’ve been sitting on these cold stones for two days looking for you.”

“I come back by railroad, and just now was walking over from the station.”

“But where did you leave the *Jennie P.*? Why didn’t you come back with her?”

“I run her into dry-dock down to the city for repairs,” he said quietly.

The girl noticed a slight catch in his voice.

“I thought you did all your own repairing.”

“I do when there ain’t nothing bad wrong.”

“You sailed the *Jennie P.* all the way into the city and left it there?”

“Something went wrong with the engine, and I didn’t have no time to tinker with her afore I had to come back. Them there gas engines is worse than a team of mules when they get to bucking and balking. They——”

“Captain Pott! Tell me the truth. Why did you leave your boat in the city docks?”

“For the reason I told you.” He was looking away from her.

“Look at me, Uncle Josiah.”

“Can’t just now, Beth. I’m watching——”

“Oh, please tell me all about it!”

“There ain’t nothing more to tell.”

“You did not leave the *Jennie P.* in dry-dock for repairs!” she cried with apprehension.

He did not reply, but tightly gripped the hand which had been slipped into his.

“Tell me, please!” she implored. “You said a little while ago that you were singing to keep up your spirits. Something dreadful has happened. Did you wreck your boat?”

“Hey? Me wreck the *Jennie P.*? I tell you honest, Beth, there ain’t nothing——”

Elizabeth lifted her hand and turned his face toward her. He looked down and

gave up.

“There ain’t no use pretending to you. I sold her.”

“You sold the *Jennie P.*?”

“I sold the *Jennie P.*,” he repeated slowly, as though it were hard for him to comprehend that fact. “You see, I didn’t have no more real need for her, and ’twas kind of expensive to keep her afloat.”

“Nonsense!” exclaimed the girl.

“It was a mite expensive, honest, Beth.”

“Uncle Josiah! Why didn’t you come to me if you were in need of money?”

“I owe your father more now than I’d otter.”

“But I love you so!”

The big shoulders gave a decided heave. “That’s wuth more to me than all the money in the world.”

“Then, why didn’t you come to me?”

“I didn’t think of doing that.”

“Oh, Uncle Josiah!”

“Yes, I sold my boat. There wa’n’t no wonder I was singing, was there?” he asked, passing his hand across his face as if to clear his vision. “I cal’late that song wa’n’t much like music to you, but I just naturally had to do something to keep my feelings afloat, didn’t I, Beth?”

“Yes.”

“I sold her,” he said, speaking as though his thoughts were coming by way of his tongue. “It wa’n’t easy. Just like parting with an old friend. It sort of pulled on me. Odd, ain’t it, how an old boat like that can get a hold on a feller?”

“No, it is not odd. Some of the happiest moments of my life were spent on board the *Jennie P.*”

“Do you honest feel that way about her?”

“Yes.”

“I’m mighty glad, Beth,” he said, his eyes gleaming with pride. “She sartin was a worthy craft.”

“Who bought your boat?”

“Feller by the name of Peters, who runs a fish business down on East River near Brooklyn bridge. I knew him years ago. His wife’s name is Jennie, and I named my boat after her ’cause he was the first man to help me sail her.”

“Why did you go to him without first telling me?”

“There wa’n’t no time to tell no one. You’d not likely——”

“Oh, you men! You treat us women as if we were numskulls. If you had given me the slightest idea that you intended to sell I should have put in my bid along with others.”

“Do you mean you would have bought my *Jennie P.*?”

“Why not, pray tell? Haven’t I as much right to own a boat as any man you know?”

“I do believe you’d have bought her, sartin as death!”

“Of course I should. If——” Her eyes suddenly widened. “Why did you sell?”

“Same as I said afore, I didn’t have no need of her, and she was getting expensive to keep up.” His face darkened, and an expression of pain shot through the shadows.

“You said you were not going to pretend to me. Tell me the real reason.”

“I can’t.”

“In other words, that is the secret of your mysterious trip to the city.”

“Yes, that’s my secret.”

“My dear old Uncle!” she cried. “I know your secret! You sold your boat to get money with which to pay Father. You’ve sold your one little luxury to pay a debt you can never pay.”

“You’re mistook. I can pay your father every cent I got from him to overhaul my place.”

“But that isn’t all!”

“It ain’t all?”

“I thought I could tell you all about it, but I can’t!”

“Do you mean you’ve something you want to say to me, Beth?”

“I can’t! I can’t! It is so——”

She broke down and cried without restraint. The old seaman put his arm about her.

“There! There! Don’t cry like that. She ain’t wuth it.”

“But you are!” she sobbed.

“All that there flood sartinly ain’t for an old feller like me! Tut! Tut! I sartinly ain’t wuth it. I’m nothing but a leaky old ark what had otter been towed in long ago, safe and high to some dry-dock.”

“Uncle Josiah, you are the only uncle I’ve ever had. I love you next to my father. You are the only man who has ever understood me. I have many times come to you before going to my own father. And, now, that you are in trouble, and I might have helped you——”

“Tush. Tush. Don’t cry over an old salt like me. I tell you I ain’t wuth it, not one precious drop.”

“If you only knew!”

“Maybe I ain’t so deep in the fog as you think. I took another trip while I was in the city to see a lawyer, and I found out some mighty interesting things.”

“But he couldn’t tell you everything.”

“Beth, is there something you’d otter tell me?”

“There is—there was—but I guess—Did you see a good lawyer?”

“The best I could find.”

“Then, why did you sacrifice your boat? It was so needless.”

“I had to have that much money right off, and there wa’n’t no time to look about. I didn’t think you’d take it like this or I’d sartin never done it.”

“If you had only come to me I could have let you have that much without you having to sell your boat.”

“It would have been a mite queer to borrow from you to pay your dad, wouldn’t it?”

“What does that matter?”

“Nothing, much.... But you was going to tell me something.”

She lifted her tear-stained face, and slowly shook her head. "Not now. I might cry again, and I've been silly enough for one day."

"You ain't been silly, not one mite. I had no right to make you cry by telling you things that don't consarn you."

"Indeed, you should have told me, and it does concern, far more than you think," she replied, drying her eyes and cheeks. "I know I must look frightful."

"You don't look nothing of the sort. You couldn't if you tried to."

"Will you be home to-night, Uncle Josiah?" she asked, looking at her wrist-watch. It was half-past ten o'clock.

"Cal'late to be."

"May I come to see you?"

"That's a funny question. I should say you can come. Clemmie will be real glad to see you, and so will the minister."

"I'm coming to see you," she said, coloring. "I'm going home now. Good-bye."

She hurriedly kissed him, and before he had time to speak she was half-way up the hill. At the rear gate she waved, then disappeared behind the mass of shrubbery that lined her father's place.

Ten minutes later the Captain heard the roar of the open exhaust from the girl's motor. Like a red streak the car shot down the hill of the Fox estate and into County Road. The Captain gasped as he watched a cloud of dust engulf the flying car.

CHAPTER XVI

All those who saw the flying car stood and stared after it. Hank Simpson, who was on his way over from the Little River railroad station with a load of merchandise, heard the roar, and sprang from his wagon-seat. He ran to his horses' heads. But no sooner had he seized the bits of the frightened animals than he let go. He recognized the girl who sped past him. He clambered back into his wagon and whipped his team into a dead run. He drew rein on the racing horses before a group of gaping men in front of the general store.

"Did you see anything down yon way, Hank?" asked Jud Johnson.

"See!" exclaimed Hank, rubbing the dust from his eyes. "See! Good God! Boys, that damn thing was running away! Hear me? It was running like hell! What are you gaping fools standing here for, looking like a passel of brainless idiots! 'Phone!" he screamed.

"'Phone what? Who to?" asked Jud with exasperating calm.

"Everything! Everybody!" was the doubly illuminating reply. "She'll be killed! Do you hear me?"

"We'd have to be deaf as nails not to hear you," said Jud as he spat a mouthful of tobacco juice against the front wheel of the wagon. "All the 'phoning in creation won't stop her. If she ain't of a mind to pull that thing up to a halt from the inside, it ain't likely that a fellow could do it by getting in its path and yelling whoa, even if he'd holler as loud as you've been doing at us. Why didn't you try it when you see her coming?"

"But they've got to stop it! The constables——"

"How?"

"How'd you suppose I know? Get out of my way and let me get at the 'phone!"

"You ain't going to do nothing of the kind," replied Jud as he stepped in front of the belligerent Hank. "There's some reason for driving like that. I don't know what's up, but the first feller to interfere with her joy ride is going to get hurt. I

was in the cellar of her dad's place doing an odd job of plumbing for him when she come to me, and said: 'Jud, I'm going for a drive.' I 'lowed that was real nice, wondering why she'd be telling me that. 'I may have to drive pretty fast, and I want you to telephone ahead as far as you can to have the road clear. Tell the policemen my name, and ask that they don't stop me.'"

"But her dad——"

"Her dad ain't home. He went over Riverhead way more than an hour ago."

"But, Jud——"

"Dry up that butting, Hank, or we'll lead you out in the alley behind your store and feed you tin cans."

Hank climbed back to his wagon-seat, and Jud, noticing the determined expression in the storekeeper's eyes, deputized two men to keep watch of him while he went inside and did some telephoning.

Elizabeth Fox reached the city limits without being molested. She then looked at her watch, and slowed down her car. She kept the speedometer needle wavering within the speed law till she set her brakes before the building where the law firm of Starr and Jordan maintained their offices. Harold was so surprised to see his sister that he gave her the name of the Trust Company for which she asked before he realized what he was doing. She glanced at the clock, hastily scribbled the address on a card, and ran from the room. Harold stood still in dumb amazement. He walked to the window and looked down into the street below. He recognized her red motor-car as it glided through the traffic at an alarming rate. A mild oath escaped him as it dawned upon him that the name of the bank was that of the firm through which the interest payments had been made on the Phillips loan. What on earth could she be up to?

It was far past the noon hour when Elizabeth returned. The office was empty, the force having gone home for the Saturday half-holiday. She turned from the locked door, but it flew open, and Harold called to her.

"I thought you'd come back, Sis. In fact, I meant to tell you that I wanted you to take dinner with me, but you blew in and out so suddenly that I didn't have time to collect my thoughts. What are you up to, anyway?"

"Oh, nothing much."

"How did you learn of this Phillips affair? I take it that that was what all your hurry was about."

She only laughed in reply, her eyes dancing.

“I didn’t know that you were on the inside of this, and I don’t know yet how much you really know.”

“I know a lot.”

“How did you find out?”

“Everybody has told me a little, and I have been piecing it together for several days. But can’t we sit down, or go out to lunch? I’m really very tired, now that it’s over, and awfully hungry.”

“How did you know that I had the name and address of the firm which has been paying Father the interest on the Phillips loan?”

“Why, you told me.”

“In my sleep?”

“Indeed, no. You were quite awake.”

“Sis, have you been eavesdropping?”

“Harold Fox! The very idea!” she said indignantly. “I don’t like you one bit for saying that. No, sir, I have not.”

“I honestly didn’t think it of you, but I couldn’t imagine any other way you could get the notion in your head.”

“You never told me a word till to-day.”

“You didn’t know that I had that name in my possession till you blew in here and asked for it?”

“Not really and truly, I didn’t. But I took a chance. And you are such a poor actor that I was certain you’d tell me. Of course, I knew that you went over to Australia to find out about the man.”

“The treats are certainly on me.”

“Make it a good big lunch, please,” she said smiling and starting for the door.

“Wait, Bets. What did you do over there at the George Henry Trust Company?”

“Must I tell, just now?”

“Of course not, but I’d like to know if you care to tell. It may save me from something very unpleasant.”

“You mean you will force me to tell?”

“Mercy me! No. I am better acquainted with you than to try a thing like that.”

“Will you keep a secret, without giving away one little word of it?”

“A client’s counsel seldom repeats a confidential business transaction.”

“I paid the two years of interest just a few minutes before that horrid old mortgage was due, so Uncle Josiah would not have to lose his place.”

“Gosh!” was the inelegant reply. “You’re a brick!”

His brow puckered.

“Won’t that save him?” she asked with concern.

“Sure. But how did you know that Uncle Josiah was a party to this mix-up?”

“Father told me that.”

“You should have been the lawyer of this family. I never saw any one like you for finding things out.” Still apparently worried, he added: “But your check will give you away. What if that happens to fall into Dad’s hands?”

“I didn’t use my check. I went to our bank first, and drew out all my money. I didn’t have enough left to put back, so I—well, I didn’t put it back.”

“What under heaven did you do with it?”

“I went down to an East River fish wharf, and——”

“Took a corner on fish?”

“Harold, don’t think me foolish. Uncle Josiah had sold his boat, thinking to pay Father off and save his place. I——”

“You bought back the old fellow’s boat!”

She nodded.

Harold did not laugh. Instead, he turned toward his desk and busily fumbled papers. When he spoke there was a note of tenderness in his voice. “You’re the best little sport in seventeen States.”

“Well, that doesn’t keep me from starving.”

“You didn’t come for anything else?”

“No, except that I did want to talk with you. We can do that while we eat.”

“I’d rather you would ask me any questions before we go out. State secrets have been known to leak out from restaurant tables.”

“Tell me where this Adoniah Phillips lives.”

“Whew! You don’t pick the easy ones, do you? You certainly go right after what you want, Bets. But why do you ask?”

“Because I want to know.”

“You’ll have to think up a better reason than that.”

“If he is one of your clients, why don’t you make him pay that interest?”

“Lawyers may advise, but they can’t drive unless they hold the reins of litigation.”

“You are just as exasperating as all lawyers,” she said with a show of impatience.

“Do you know that your client has fallen heir to a very large fortune? And do you know that he could pay the principal as well as the interest?”

“Good Lord, Sis! You’re a wonder! How on earth did you ferret all this mess out?”

“That doesn’t matter. The thing that matters is what Father and that Phillips person are trying to do to Uncle Josiah. We must stop them. If you know the truth about the transaction between Father and Mr. Phillips you have no right to allow this thing to go on.”

Harold’s eyes narrowed. “Trying to trap me again, Bets?”

“Of course I’m not. I’m just trying to get you to look at things from Uncle Josiah’s position.”

“How many of the facts do you know about this case?” asked Harold in deep seriousness.

“I know enough to form pretty good conclusions of the injustice of the whole thing.”

“Do you think you know everything?”

“No-o, not when you look at me like that,” she said, surprised by the earnestness of his voice and manner.

“Has any one beside Father talked with you?”

She hesitated, then slowly shook her head. “You must not ask me that.”

“Have you talked with Mr. McGowan?”

“I can’t tell you,” she answered, quickly checking the look of surprise that leaped into her eyes at the unexpected question.

“I don’t know just how far Mr. McGowan’s information may have led him into this matter, but I have feared all along that he is not half so ignorant as he appears. Come in here, Bets,” he requested, pushing open a door to an inner office. “I have some things I want to show you.”

“Mercy, Bud! How mysterious you can be!”

“An ounce of precaution is worth a pound of lawsuits, and I don’t want the slightest possibility of a leak,” he said as he locked the door.

“My sakes! I had no idea you could be so serious. Is this the way you act with all your clients? I’d think you’d frighten them all away. You almost do me. It reminds me of the way you would lock me up in the hall closet to scare me when we were children.”

“For once in my life I am serious, Sis. We are no longer children, and this is far from play. I wish to God it were nothing more than that!”

“Why, Harold!”

“Bets, you’ve got a close tongue and loads of good sense. I’ve carried this thing just about as long as I can without breaking under it. I’ve got to let off steam. You know I’ve tried to be on the square since my little fling, and even then I was straight, but Dad has never believed it. I’m tempted now to go wrong, and——”

“Why on earth are you talking like this? Has some one been accusing you of doing wrong? Oh, Harold! You didn’t fall into trouble after all over in Australia, did you?”

“No, nor in love either,” he replied, trying to smile.

Elizabeth blushed.

“I see that doesn’t apply to all our family.”

“I don’t think you’re nice to say that. And I don’t care——”

“Why, Bets, are you really in love with him?”

“You have no right to jest about such things.”

“I’m not jesting, honestly. I’ve never been so far from it in my whole life. I don’t blame you for liking that minister.”

“Then, you were not making fun?”

“No! I’ve had all the fun-making knocked out of me.”

“Harold,” she said, coming nearer, “I’ve made him hate me.”

“Hate you? There isn’t a man living who could do that. No one was ever blessed with a more wonderful sister than I’ve been.”

Elizabeth stared at her brother. Never had she heard him make such a sentimental statement. He had turned from her, and was looking into the street below. With a sharp swing he faced about.

“Come, tell me all you know about Phillips and the estate.”

“I guess I really don’t know very much more than I’ve told you. I know the man is a half-brother of Uncle Josiah, and that he mortgaged the old homestead to Father, and that he married some trader’s daughter in Australia, and that the trader died, leaving a large fortune. That’s all.”

“Read those,” said Harold, handing her some papers which he had brought with him from his own desk. “And keep your nerve. There are more.”

Elizabeth read the papers through. One was the original document of the trader’s will; the other was an Australian Government paper, exonerating Mr. Adoniah Phillips. A postscript to the will stated that Mr. Phillips had left Australia for America.

“I knew all that,” said the girl as she returned the papers. “But they do help to make matters clearer. I wasn’t really certain he had come over here. Have you found him?”

“No. I’ve never seen the man. What is more, not one penny of that vast estate has yet come into the possession of Adoniah Phillips.”

“Why, Harold! Do you mean to tell me that you know where this man is, and that you have not looked him up? You say he has not received his inheritance? What are you trying to tell me?”

“I know what I’m saying. Neither he nor his heir has received one cent.”

“And yet you know where they are?”

“I didn’t say I knew of their whereabouts. But I will say that I know where to find the heir, a son.”

“You should go to him at once, then, and give him the opportunity to pay off that

mortgage on Uncle Josiah's home."

"Yes, I can do that. But it isn't so simple. Right there is where I've struck the snag that has nearly driven me insane. How to do it——"

"How? A lawyer saying a thing like that? Just go to him and explain how it all came about. If he is half a man he will do what is right without any litigation. That is so very simple that I wonder at you."

"Read that," he said, drawing from an inside pocket another paper, and handing it to her.

In the upper right-hand corner was an Australian stamp.

At the end of the first line the letters began to dance before her eyes, and to crowd into one another. Elizabeth turned to her brother, wild-eyed.

"Harold, this is false! Tell me it is false!"

"I wish to God it were, Bets. But you must keep your feelings under better control if you are to help me out of this miserable state of affairs."

"You know it is false!" she implored. "I shall tell everybody it's a lie! No one can know him and believe that."

"You must remember that this all happened years ago, before you and I were born."

"But, his life now! Oh, Harold, you don't believe this! Tell me it isn't true!"

"I've been almost sweating blood over it since I discovered the truth. I've tried to find some other explanation or solution, but there is none other. Father is guilty of the crime for which Adoniah Phillips was made to suffer. I don't know how they got hold of his true name, for he was going under an assumed one over there. But they did, and the worst of it is, the old trader's wife is here in the city right now. She is on Father's track. I've been staving her off, but she smells a rat in the fact that I bear his name, and I can't hold her much longer from locating him."

"No! No! You shall not tell me that Father is a criminal! You must take back that awful word about him!"

Harold groaned, and settled back into his chair. The girl fell back into hers, and covered her face with trembling hands. She sprang suddenly to her feet and to her brother's side.

"Father was never in Australia! He made his money trading in Africa. We've

heard him say that many times, and I believe him. I shall not believe those papers. They are blackmail.”

“Then, I must go on alone. My temptation was to cover this up, but, Bets, I can’t. I had hoped that you’d go through it with me, for it’s going to be a mighty dirty mess to clean up. But if you persist in believing Father’s story instead of mine——”

“I do believe you, too! But can’t there be some mistake?”

“If there had been the slightest chance I should have discovered it before now, but there isn’t. It is God’s truth. All these years Father has been safe only because Adoniah Phillips refused years ago to disclose his identity. It’s awful, Sis, but true.”

“It’s too awful to be true! It seems like a horrible dream.”

“You have no idea what agony it has cost me. Do you think you can go through it with me?”

“I’ll try, Harold. But, oh, it’s hard!”

“Yes.”

“Don’t you think that Father might clear the whole matter up if we should tell him all we know? Maybe he could explain things——”

“That was the first thought that occurred to me. But the longer I worked on the case, and the more I discovered of the truth, the more impossible I saw that to be. I’m not so sure that we’d want him to save his skin, anyway. He ought to face the music for his wrong just the same as any other man.”

Elizabeth did not once take her gaze from her brother’s face, while she spoke slowly and distinctly: “Father will not be afraid to face the truth, even though it may mean financial ruin. He is brave, and he is honest now. I shall tell him all.”

“Don’t be too hasty, Bets. I admire your spunk. But answer me this: did it strike you as strange the way Father acted that night when I announced my contemplated trip to Australia to look up Phillips?”

She nodded ever so slightly.

“And did it strike you as strange the way he treated Mr. McGowan when he offered to help him to his room?”

“But why do you bring Mr. McGowan into this?”

“Bets, if I had known one grain of the truth that night I’d have flatly refused the appointment to this case at the risk of losing my position in the firm. Father was afraid that night. Here is one more paper I wish you to read. I had it copied in Washington last week.”

Elizabeth unfolded the paper, and read: “Be it known that one Adoniah Phillips, after due application, and upon his own request, for reasons herein stated, is authorized to change his name to——”

The paper fell to the floor. The room began to swim. The furniture violently rocked. Elizabeth reached out and clutched her brother’s arm.

“Mack McGowan!” she whispered faintly. “Oh, what am I saying? Why am I saying that name? What has happened to me?”

“Poor little girl! I thought my little sister was stronger than that. I’ve been a fool for letting you read all those papers after the strain you’ve been through.”

“Mack McGowan!” she repeated. She seized the paper which her brother had lifted from the floor. “Oh, it’s in that paper, and it’s *his* name! Harold, what does it mean?”

“You must brace up, Beth. The man you are in love with is the son of Adoniah Phillips. He bears his father’s new name.”

She was suddenly weary. She felt just one desire: to get back home. She took Harold’s arm and led him toward the door.

“I want to go home, and I need you to drive the car.”

CHAPTER XVII

During the homeward trip Elizabeth was as one in a stupor. When they reached the brow of the hill above the village, Harold stopped the car. Elizabeth half turned about in her seat, resting her elbow on the back above and lifting her hand to her eyes to shade them from the light. She gazed upon the glory of the western sky where the sun was dropping into a bed of gold, lavishly splashing the low-hanging clouds with a radiance that seemed to drip from their edges. A shock suddenly brought her back to reality with a pain at her heart. Silhouetted against the gold of the sky-line, his head bared, his shoulders thrown back, was a tall figure: the son of Adoniah Phillips!

“That’s a good view for sore hearts, Bets,” commented her brother.

She caught her breath in quick gasps. “Yes. But, oh, Harold, it’s so hard!”

“I know,” he agreed, taking her hand. “Have you thought out a line of action? Where shall we begin?”

The girl did not answer. Harold followed with his eyes the direction of her gaze. His hand tightened in hers. The minister had just recognized them, and was waving his cap high over his head in welcome. Elizabeth lifted her handkerchief and permitted the light breeze to flutter it. Harold answered with a swing of his arm. Mr. McGowan started toward them.

“Drive me home, Harold. I can’t see him now.”

“But, Sis, this may be our only time together. Tell me what to do. I’m lost. I don’t know which way to turn.”

“I must see Uncle Josiah first. He has had time to think a lot, and he may know how to help us. I’m going to his place to-night.”

“By George! You’re right. I hadn’t thought of going to him. He does know something about this. He was in my office the other day, and asked a host of questions. He’ll help us if he can. Why not stop there now?”

“Not now. I’m not decent to see any one, or be seen. Please, take me home.”

He threw in the clutch and the car shot down the hill, past a curious crowd in front of the general store, and on up the knoll into the Fox estate.

Mr. Fox had not yet returned from Riverhead. He had telephoned that he might get home for dinner. But the dinner hour came and went, and still he did not return. After the silent, and all but untasted, meal, Elizabeth left the house by the rear entrance. She hurried along the walk, out through the wicket gate at the back, and down to the beach. From here she turned into the path that zigzagged across town-lots, over sand-dunes, through brush heaps, to the rear of the Captain's place.

She walked round the house to the side door. She lifted the heavy knocker, and held it tightly as though fearing to let it drop against the rusty iron plate. What if Uncle Josiah had forgotten his engagement, and was not home? But Uncle Josiah had never yet forgotten a promise he had made her. She let the piece of iron fall. The sound echoed through the house. It frightened her, and she poised as though of a mind to run. Instead of the usual hearty boom for her to "Come in," the door swung wide, and she stood face to face with the minister.

"Oh!" she cried, stepping back into the shadows.

"I've been expecting you, Miss Fox. Will you come in?" he cordially invited.

"You were expecting me? But I——"

Hardly knowing what she did, and certainly not realizing why she did it, she accepted the invitation and entered. Her eyes slowly widened as he closed the door. She stood poised like a wild thing ready for flight at the slightest warning.

"I trust that your father isn't ill again?" said the minister solicitously.

"No-o. That is, not yet. He's quite well, thank you. He isn't home, or wasn't when I left."

"I'm glad."

"I beg your pardon?"

"I'm glad your father isn't ill," he explained, growing quite as embarrassed as she.

"Oh! Yes. Thank you."

"Miss Fox, something must be wrong. May I help you?"

"No. Really, no. That is, not bad wrong, yet," she stammered. "Only he promised to be home, and—well, he isn't."

"The Captain will be back soon. He asked me to entertain you till his return. I fear I'm not doing it very well."

"Indeed, you are. That is, I guess you are. Is the Captain far away?"

"He took Miss Pipkin over to Miss Splinter's. Miss Splinter is very ill. Won't you be seated?"

"Yes, thank you. No, I think I'll stand. Dear me! What can be the matter with me? I'm acting quite stupid and silly, am I not?"

She tried to laugh, but her dry throat gave a cracked sound. Mr. McGowan noticed, and did not complete the smile that was beginning to form about his own lips.

"Really, I think I'll be going, and come back again. I feel so very queerly, and—uncomfortable with—with——"

"With me in the room?" he finished with a sad smile. "I'm sorry. I'll step into my study. If you need anything, please call."

He had reached the door and the knob had turned under his hand when she gave a cry, between a sob and a plea. He swung quickly about.

"Don't leave me, please!" she pleaded. "I mean, don't go on my account."

"But I seem to be disturbing you, and I don't wish to do that," he said kindly.

She broke down completely. "Oh, I do need you so much! Please stay! I'm afraid, afraid of everything, afraid of myself! You said one should keep a cool head, but I can't! I can't! I've tried so hard. Oh, Mack—Mr. McGowan, please help me!"

She finished her broken plea in muffled sobs in the folds of his coat. He drew her against him till his arms ached. She knew now that she could make of her love

for this man no voluntary offering in order to save her father humiliation. All afternoon and evening she had been forming that resolution. But this love that had come to her, pure and undefiled from the hand of God, could not be denied for the sins of one man, even though that man be her own father. She felt herself being swept out into an engulfing current, nor did she wish to stay its overwhelming power. For the first time that afternoon she was conscious of real strength.

Mr. McGowan tried to lift her face from his shoulder, but she clung the closer.

“I want to look at you,” he said jubilantly.

“Not just yet!” she sobbed. “I want to get used to this.”

“Then, let me hear you say you love me!” entreated the man.

“Mack McGowan, I love you!” She drew back a pace. “Now, you may look at me just once, though I don’t look like much with my eyes all swelled up and red.”

He drank in the beauty of the face before him. “Thank God! You do love me! It isn’t just pity.”

She nodded her head so vigorously that the wisps of fair hair fell about her large blue eyes. “Yes, I love you, Mack. There, now, you’ve looked long enough. Kiss me, please.” She lifted her face.

Mr. McGowan was unstintingly obeying the command when a loud knock jarred the side door. They started and sprang apart.

“Who can that be knocking like that?” asked the girl, hastily tucking away the stray locks of hair.

“It must be the Captain. But I wonder——”

Elizabeth laughed, and pointed toward a window where the curtain was above the lower sash. The Captain had seen them!

“I don’t care if he did see. Let me go to the door.”

She had taken one step in that direction when the door flew back and in came Mr. James Fox.

“Father! You!”

Without replying, Mr. Fox glared ferociously at the minister. His hand trembled on the head of his walking-stick. The blood surged into his face. Elizabeth,

growing alarmed, started toward her father. But the Elder waved her back. Mr. McGowan broke the awful silence.

“We can’t help it, Mr. Fox. I’m very sorry that this has come against your will.”

“So it is true. God help me!” The Elder’s words came with surprising calm, but his tone was harsh and hard. “So it is as I was warned. It is hard to believe that my little Beth has proven untrue to me.” He was breathing hard. Pointing his stick in the direction of the minister, he finished with savage calm, “My little girl here alone, and with a man like you! God help me!”

“Be careful!” ordered Mr. McGowan. His words were sharp, as with blazing eyes he met the glare of the Elder.

“Father, you must not talk and look like that.”

“Alone with him!” repeated Mr. Fox. “I saw the whole shameless proceeding through that window, and it is needless for you to deny what has happened.”

“We are not trying to deny it, Father. I’m proud of it. We tried so hard not to love each other, too, when we found out how set you were against it. But we couldn’t help it. We did try, didn’t we, Mack?”

“You tried!” sneered her father. “I suppose this man forced you to steal from your home under cover of night, and come to him, over paths that were dark and out of the way, against your will. Do you expect me to believe that?”

Elizabeth came between the men as the minister took a step toward the Elder.

“I’ve done nothing to be ashamed of. I came here of my own accord, and you have no right to spy on me through those who are willing to do such vulgar things because you pay them. I came here to see Uncle Josiah. He wasn’t in, and Mr. McGowan was—well, he was entertaining me.”

“That will do! You shall not add perjury to your sin. You knew perfectly well that Pott was not home. You knew he was in the city. Your stories don’t hang together.”

“Father, you must not talk to me like that. Uncle Josiah came home this morning, and I made arrangements to meet him here to-night.”

“And he was conveniently out, I suppose, so you might meet this fellow here alone.”

“If you refuse to listen to reason, you may think what you like. I love that man you’ve been maligning!” she cried, her eyes filling with angry tears.

“You love him? Are you brazen enough to stand there and say that to my face?” he shouted, losing his self-control. “Him! You! I’ve a mind—Why, you silly little sentimental fool. You go so far as to flaunt—”

“Mr. Fox, allow me to explain,” interrupted the minister.

The Elder did not heed the note of warning in the steady voice, but clutching his walking-stick with nervous fingers he started toward his daughter.

“Stand back!”

Mr. Fox stood back, almost falling against the wall. The minister’s voice was as hard as his own.

“It seems that the time has come for a reckoning,” said Mr. McGowan. “You have stood in my way long enough. Elizabeth, will you kindly step into my study?”

“I prefer to remain here, Mack. You may need me.”

“What I say may be quite unpleasant.”

“I may need to add to what you say. I’ll stay.”

“Very well. Mr. Fox, our strained relations must come to an end. If you can show any just cause why I’m at fault, I shall do all in my power to rectify it. I do not know the slightest reason for your attitude against me, but—”

“You lie, sir!”

The minister’s lips tightened. “Only your age protects you in the use of that word to me. I repeat what I have said,—and it will be as well for you not to question my integrity again,—I do not know why you have treated me as you have. I now demand an explanation.”

“If you will favor us with a little of your family history first,” said the Elder with a sneering laugh, “there will be no need of any further explanation on my part.”

“You seem to think me a vagabond, or something quite as bad if not worse. Well, I’m not. My family history is nothing to brag about, but the record is clean. If you’ll be seated I’ll be glad to furnish you with such bits as may be of interest to you. It isn’t so difficult to hold one’s temper while sitting.”

Elizabeth lifted an imploring face to the minister. “Please, dear, don’t say anything more! For my sake, don’t. Wait till you both have had time to think over how foolish this all is.”

“Foolish, you think! He need not speak, so far as I’m concerned,” declared Mr. Fox, refusing the proffered chair. “I know his whole miserable story. I knew his parents. I take back my request. You doubtless would not tell the truth. What I wish my daughter to know, I shall tell her in the privacy of our own home.”

Elizabeth looked as if she could not trust her own ears for what she had just heard from her father’s lips.

“Mr. Fox, Elizabeth shall know my story now, and from my own lips. I have absolutely nothing to hide or be ashamed of. My father and mother were honest people. If it be a crime to be poor, then, they were guilty beyond redemption. They came to this country from Australia when I was little more than an infant. My father took ill and died shortly after our arrival. Mother said his death was the result of confining work he had done in Australia. I can remember my mother quite well, but she died before I was five. I was taken into a neighboring family, almost as poor as mine had been. As I grew up I worked hard, and saved every penny. My mother had left me one heritage that was priceless, a craving for knowledge. The people who brought me up sacrificed to help me along till I reached high school. I worked my way up through four hard years, into college, and then on into the seminary.

“That is about all there is to my uninteresting history. I came here as a candidate for this church. For the first time in my whole life I was beginning to taste real happiness. But no sooner had I taken my first breath of independence than I saw I must fight to hold the ground I had gained. I gloried in the opportunity. I was glad that I could do for your town what no other minister had been able to do. I took special delight in getting hold of those lads and men at the Inn. Hicks and his crowd didn’t trouble me one bit, or even alter one plan I had for the members of the club. I didn’t even grow discouraged when the opposition came from you, for I kept hoping that you’d see your mistake and come over to my aid. But time went on, and you did not. I sought reasons for your injustice. I concluded at last that you had discovered my love for your daughter, and that you did not consider my family connections to be sufficiently strong to permit any such union. I did all in my power to argue myself out of that love. But I soon discovered that a man cannot argue a cyclone out of his heart any more than he can argue one out of God’s sky.

“If there is no other reason for your actions, sir, than my love for Elizabeth your opposition may as well be withdrawn right here and now. Otherwise, I shall marry Elizabeth against your will.”

“It seems to me, young man, that you are quite sure of yourself about something you can’t do. I admire your nerve,”—the Elder was pulling out each word with violent tugs at the side-whiskers,—“but we’ll see, sir, who holds the trumps.”

“You mean that you offer me no other alternative than to fight this through to a finish?” asked the minister.

“I offer you no alternative whatsoever. I command you to remain away from my daughter.”

“And I refuse to obey any such order unless you give some just and adequate reason.”

“I shall give you reason enough. Why did you stop with that little bit of family history where you did?”

“I had nothing to add of any importance.”

“You do not think it of importance to tell us what that confining work was your father did in Australia?”

“I haven’t the slightest idea. If Mother ever told me I was so very young that I have forgotten.”

“Perhaps your mother wished to spare you. If so, I do not intend to tell you at this late hour in your life. But what he did is sufficient reason for my forbidding you to carry your attentions any further.”

“Father, this is getting really ridiculous,” declared his daughter. “We love each other, and that fact is greater than all else. Not one word which you may say against Mack’s people will make the slightest difference with me.”

“My dear child, if I dared tell you one-tenth of the truth,—but I dare not.”

“You shall not talk like this any longer. It’s silly.”

“Since when has my child taken to giving her father orders? You are forcing me to speak. I’d rather cut off my right arm than do it, but I must save my little girl from——”

“I shall not listen to another word!” broke in the girl.

“Be still! I shall speak, and you shall listen.”

“Father! You dare not. I love him, and——”

“You’ll blush at the thought of having used that word in connection with that man before I have finished.”

“It doesn’t matter what you say, you can never change——”

“Beth, I must ask you to stop interrupting me. This man’s father is an out——”

“You’d better not say that, Father!” cried Elizabeth. “You’ll wish you hadn’t when it is too late.”

The Elder’s face grew livid. His hands trembled violently as he steadied himself to deliver his final blow. Elizabeth drew close to Mr. McGowan as though to shield him, and shot a defiant glance at her father.

“I shall tell the truth, and you shall hear it. That man’s father is an outlaw. He is a fugitive from justice. All this prattle about him being dead is a hoax.”

The Elder now stood back to watch the result of his bomb. But what he saw was far more mystifying than satisfying. It was Mr. McGowan who drew back as the girl threw her arms about his neck. Elizabeth entreated him not to believe one word which her father had just uttered. Mr. Fox stood dumbfounded. Mr. McGowan did nothing but stare blankly across the room.

“Come here at once!” ordered the Elder. “Beth, do you hear me? Come away from that man. Don’t you see he recognizes the truth? Are you entirely mad?”

For answer Elizabeth slipped her hands further over her lover’s shoulders and locked her fingers behind. Mr. McGowan did not seem to realize the utter surrender with which she did this. He saw only the figure across the room and heard a faint whisper from out the past. It came from out his childhood, shortly after his father’s death. It had made no definite impression on his young mind, but like a haunting shadow had stuck to him all these years. In a husky voice he demanded that the Elder explain.

“There is nothing more to explain, sir. You know to what I refer as well as I. If you are any kind of a man you will stop right where you are, and release my daughter from her foolish promise. Beth, if you love this man as you say you do you will come from him at once, for I’ll ruin him if you persist in your sentimental infatuation. If you show a willingness to comply with my wishes, I shall let the matter drop, providing he leaves our town.”

Mr. McGowan tried to push the girl from him, but she only tightened her grip.

“You dare not carry out your threat!” she shot at her father. Then without warning she released the minister, and turned about. The fire of indignation and anger leaped from those eyes that had only given her father love and kindness.

“I shall not threaten longer, I shall act. I shall apply for deportation papers for

this man as an undesirable citizen.”

“He is not that, Father!” cried the girl, making her last appeal.

“I shall have him deported if——”

She gave a dry hysterical laugh. “Try it, if you dare! I know his story. I know yours, too. Don’t you touch me!” she cried, as her father started toward her. She fled again to the minister. “Don’t let him touch me, Mack!”

Mr. Fox stopped abruptly. He dropped the papers which he had taken from his pocket. “Beth,—my dear,—have you lost all your senses? What were you saying?” he barely gasped.

The outer door opened, and Captain Pott entered his house.

CHAPTER XVIII

Captain Pott paused on the threshold. He looked from one to the other of the occupants of the room. He crossed over and picked up the paper which the Elder had dropped. He slowly read the contents.

“Ain’t breaking in on an experience meeting, be I?” he asked.

“Oh! Uncle Josiah! Tell Father it isn’t true!” entreated the girl.

“I’d say ’twas purty likely, according to all the signs.” He chuckled.

“Please don’t laugh. I can’t stand it. Tell Father about——”

“There now, Beth, you and the parson set sail for a little cruise down the beach. I’ve something private to say to your dad.”

“What you have to say to me, sir, will be said in the presence of my daughter,” replied the Elder, making a pathetic attempt at stiffness.

“You’re mistook on that p’int, Jim. I’m skipper aboard here, and them’s orders!”

The Elder’s hands shook uncontrollably as he gripped the head of his walking-stick.

“You’re all wasting good time,” observed the seaman. “You’d best heave to, and obey orders. Mutiny won’t be allowed.”

“I intend to remain right here till this mystery concerning me is cleared up,” declared the minister.

“Mystery about you?” exclaimed the Captain. “Why, Mack, there ain’t nothing like that about you. You’re as clear as an open sky. What I’ve got to say is just ’twixt Jim and me. You couldn’t get in on it to save your soul. Now, you and Beth clear out.”

“Josiah Pott, I recognize no right that permits you to intrude into my family affairs. If what you have to say is concerning the mortgage you had better speak at once. There is nothing about that which is confidential.”

“That’s according to the way you look at it. I’d a heap sight rather say it in private, Jim. It may prove embarrassing——”

“Then, good night. Come, Beth.”

“There ain’t no use of you going off mad, Jim. I only wanted a word with you about something that does consarn us both a mite. You ain’t got no objection to that, have you?”

The show of apparent humility on the part of the Captain made it possible for the Elder to remain, providing the conference should be made brief.

“You ain’t no more anxious to get it over than I be. We’ll step right in here in Mack’s cabin, if you don’t mind.”

The Elder balked. “I prefer witnesses,” he said. “Otherwise, you may come to my home to-morrow evening. I did not seek this unpleasant interview, and since I leave it to my lawyers to carry on my business affairs, I do not intend to hound my debtors personally.”

“You ain’t been hounding me personally, Jim, but there’s some things that you can’t leave even to crooked lawyers. You’d best handle this personally. If that shyster tries to get in on this his neck won’t be wuth the skin that covers it.”

“You still persist in trying to threaten me, I see.”

“No, Jim, this ain’t a threat. If you want the witness part after I get through I’ll accommodate you with plenty of ’em. But I cal’late we’d best talk it over private-like fust. I happened onto a feller the other day by the name of John Peters, and he spun me the likeliest yarn I ever heard about Australia. I thought you’d like to hear it, but I don’t want to take your valuable time. Good night.”

“Hold on, Josiah! I did not catch that name. Who was it you saw?”

But the Captain did not hold on to anything except to his news concerning John Peters. He entered the minister’s study and closed the door.

A little later the side door opened and closed quietly. The seaman thought the Fox had run for his hole. But the study door soon opened. The Captain turned his back, drew out his pipe, and with slow deliberation began to pack the bowl with shavings from a black plug of tobacco.

“I think I can spare you a few minutes, Josiah,” barely whispered the Elder. “I don’t want to seem arrogant and high-handed in the matter of that small loan. And if there is anything——”

“That’s all right, Jim, about that loan. Come right in, and set down. Thought you’d gone hum.”

“That was the preacher going out with my daughter. He shall see the day when he’ll pay for his impudence.”

“Most of us get caught afore we’re through life, Jim.”

“I don’t know why I’m doing this little service for you to-night, except it be for the sake of our boyhood friendship. I am willing to suffer this inconvenience——”

“It’s mighty kind of you,” cut in the Captain sharply. “But for once that boyhood rot ain’t going to help you none. It ain’t going to let you turn any more of them tricks of a black rascal simply because you pose as a shining martyr. The way you’ve treated Mack McGowan——”

“If this conversation is to be about the minister, I shall save you the trouble of speaking by going at once.”

“It ain’t no trouble for me to speak. What I’ve got to say does consarn Mack a heap, and you’d best listen. When I finish you’ll see that it’s best for him to stay right here in this church, if he wants to, after all the mean low-down tricks you’ve served him.”

“I shall not allow you to pick a quarrel. I regret that you are so much inclined that way.”

“You can keep all your regretting till later, you’ll likely need it. What I want to make plain to you is that Mack is going to stay right here in Little River, perviding he wants to.”

“Indeed? You surprise me. I usually get my way about church matters. Permit me to say that you shall not interfere in these affairs any more than in those of my own home.”

“That’s been the trouble with you all these years, Jim. You’ve been getting your own way too long. I’m not going to interfere one mite, I’m just going to dictate for this once. If I ain’t way off in my soundings, you’ll be mighty glad to have him as a son-in-law, too.”

Mr. Fox rose and lifted his cane. He tapped the corner of the desk. He opened his mouth, but his anger choked him.

“You make me nervous, Jim. Set down and set still. I ain’t going to speak of the

parson right off. Ain't you going to set down? There, that's better."

The Elder's face was livid.

"I cal'late I'll talk better if I get this thing going," observed the seaman, lighting his pipe. "Now, Jim, I ain't sartin why I'm going to talk to you in private like this, but——"

"By God! It's time you're finding out! Your impudence has got beyond all bounds."

"I wouldn't swear like that. It ain't becoming to one of your position in the church. Them black scowls and blue cuss-words ain't going to get you nothing."

"You impudent dog! I thought you were intending to pay me that little debt, or I should never have entered this room. Your insults are——"

"Sartin sure. 'Most forgot that." The Captain drew out a bank-draft and handed it over to the surprised Elder. "Thanks for reminding me. It's best to clear all decks afore manœuvres are begun in earnest."

"I shall be going now. But I cannot take that draft. You will learn more about that later."

"Suit yourself on both p'int's, Jim," replied the seaman studying the tips of his heavy boots. "You'd best take this money, though. It pays off all I owe you. Anyway, I'd stay if I was you. You'd sure enjoy Peters' yarn."

The two men eyed each other like a pair of wild animals. The Elder at length rose.

"Pott, I'll not listen to more of your insane talk. I fear all your trouble has gone to your head. I'm sorry if that is the case. You would do well to consult some brain specialist."

"No, it ain't my head it's gone to. It's my heart." His words were gentle, but his eyes were as hard as flint. "I've been itching to get hold of you for some time, Jim, but I ain't seen any handle till now. Since you made me that offer up to your house t'other night I've been wanting to choke you. Yes, to choke you till your lying old pipe of a gullet would shut off your wind for good and all. But the law won't allow me that pleasure." He continued with intense bitterness: "I s'pose you're wondering where I got that money to pay off your filthy loan."

"So this is the gratitude you offer for my kindness?"

"It's a fat lot you've ever done for me! You've just told me this ain't no good."

“The fact of the matter is, my lawyers probably foreclosed on the real mortgage at noon to-day.”

“Then, that lawyer feller I see wa’n’t far off his course, after all,” replied the Captain, laying the draft on the table. “Now, Jim, show your hand and be damn quick afore I call your turn on the deal,” demanded the seaman as though certain that a prior conclusion had proven correct.

“I have nothing to show at this time.”

“By the Almighty, then, look out! I sold my *Jennie P.* to get you that money. It was purty hard to see her go, but it wa’n’t all loss, not by a heap. John Peters bought her. I told him why I was selling her. He was real sorry, and then he spun me the yarn about your crookedness in Australia. I got the rest of the story by installments, about the way you treated Adoniah. John give me some mighty interesting news about an old Mrs. Rogers, who was the mother of Adoniah’s wife. She’s here right now looking for heirs and crooks.”

The Elder had risen again, but the name spoken by the Captain struck him like a shot. He dropped back, his head fell forward, and his hands locked over the head of his stick.

“After that I seen Harold, and he told me where the woman was staying. I looked her up, and she told me the whole enduring yarn. It was Clemmie’s last letter from Adoniah that set me going on your trail, and the old woman cleared up the fog. I had that letter in my pocket up to your place that night, but Providence or something kept me from showing it to you. That old lady had a picture of her darter Emmie, and it nearly knocked me over when she showed it to me. It was the same that Mack has here in this frame of his own mother. Take a look at that picture.” He opened a drawer, lifted out a gilt-frame, and passed a small daguerreotype across to the Elder. “Mack has showed me this often, and I see that he was a chip off the old block on his mother’s side. But I never dreamed the truth, because of his name.” The Captain’s eyes narrowed. “I’ve been wondering, Jim, if that wa’n’t what went to your head that night he had dinner up there,—seeing the likeness, all of a sudden, to his mother.”

He paused to give the Elder time to study the picture.

“Josiah, what on earth has all this nonsense to do with me? Just what are you accusing me of?”

“Nothing yet. I’m coming to that part. I looked up that feller who was with you over there, and I dragged your damned sin out of him. When it comes right down

to it, I hate like time to take away your chart and compass this way, but you've been doing it to others for so long that I cal'late it's coming to you. I'd have let the old lady tear out your side-whiskers if it hadn't been for them children of yours. It was for them that I asked you in here."

The Elder roused and made a pathetic effort to straighten his drooping figure. "I think,—er,—Josiah, I see your game at last. You purpose to frighten me with these wild tales from some old witch. I shall compel you to offer proof, for all your insinuations, in court."

"Insinuations! Proof! Lord, Jim!" cried the Captain, aiming a powerful finger in the direction of the Elder. "I've got proof enough to lock you up in the London Towers, or wherever it was you let Adoniah suffer for your infernal wickedness. Proof! Hell! You ain't that big a fool. Set still and hear me. You never see the shores of Africa. It was in Australia that you and Adoniah got in with that trader Rogers,—Emmie's father,—and you was getting rich trading in opals. Then, the both of you fell in love with Emmie, and Adoniah beat you out and married her. It wa'n't long after that when Adoniah took down with a fever. God, man! When I think what you done to him when he couldn't fight back, I could kill you! You got trapped in a bad deal, and while Adoniah was raving with a fever you took all the money there was and skipped. You was careful to ship all the blame for your dirty work on Adoniah afore you sneaked out a rich man."

"Pott, that is enough. There is not a court in all this country that would believe your wild tale. Try it, and see how quickly they would lock you up in a madhouse."

"They won't believe what I say?"

"I dare you to go into any court and try it. I'm too well known."

"Jim, don't toss me that old line, it's a mite too green and slimy to look tasty."

"I'm through with this stuff and nonsense, sir!" shouted the Elder. He started for the door.

"Well, I ain't through with you. I'm only just begun." The Captain intercepted him. "You set there, or I'll set you. This trader, Rogers, got onto your little game afore you set sail, and tried to get you arrested. But you'd covered your dirty tracks. He caught you, though, and made you sign something—"

"That would not stand in court. I can prove that I was forced to sign a false statement at the point of a gun."

“Thanks, Jim. I’m glad I ain’t got to prove to you that you done the signing.” Carefully choosing his words, the Captain continued. “That feller you had hiding with you that night done some signing, too. I got hold both them papers. I found that other feller and made him dance the devil’s tune. He done some purty things for a missionary of the Son of God. His name was Means.

“You know the rest of the yarn, how Adoniah was taken off on one of them floating hells, called a convict-ship. The thing was nearly wrecked, and he was making his escape after swimming to land when he turned into a mission place for a bite to eat. He come face to face with that fat missionary who got you out of the country. Instead of feeding him, and giving him decent clothing, like a Christian ought to do, he took him to the officers. They put him in a dungeon. For nigh onto two years he was kept there. Then this Rogers feller got hold of a lawyer with as much heart as brains, and they got him out. The old lady said he wa’n’t much to look at when he come out. They sent ’em over here, thinking it would be good for Adoniah’s health. But he was all wore out, and couldn’t hold a job. He was a heap too proud to beg or ask help. Not wanting to disgrace his family name with the damned record you give him, he changed his. The old lady said it was about then that they lost track of ’em. I got the rest of the story from Harold on my way home to-night from Edna’s place. That’s why I was late.

“Adoniah and his family lived in them dirty streets of lower East Side. He was a wreck, and Emmie tried to work to keep things up. Both of ’em died, starved to death, while you and that damn missionary was getting fat on the money you stole. You had busted up the firm so Rogers couldn’t help none then, even if he’d found ’em. The little boy they left was found by some neighbors. He was ’most starved and nearly froze. He was living with an old janitor woman, and she was sending him out on the streets to sell papers! Think of that, Jim Fox! A little boy, five years old, peddling papers to pay your bills with! Them folks found him one morning in a doorway, asleep!”

The old seaman’s voice choked. He slowly refilled his pipe. When he resumed his narrative, his breath was coming heavily. “This Rogers feller lost all track of ’em. He made money fast after he got on his feet, but all his searching got him nothing. The old lady said they kept paying some interest or other on a debt Adoniah owed to you in order to save some property of his. I didn’t tumble just then what ’twas she meant. But I found out to-night. When the old man died, Mrs. Rogers shut down on that paying business and began in real earnest to look for her darter.”

The Elder had slouched forward in his chair.

“You thought you was hid, and so you come back to this town to stick your head in one of its sand-heaps. I tell you, Jim, I ain’t been very strong on the p’int of a Providence directing our ways. It’s always seemed to me like a blind force pushing us from behind. But I’m getting converted. When that there missionary showed up at the installing meeting, the devil come right forward and asked for his pay. Means wa’n’t long in seeing the mother’s face in Mack.

“It was Mack who sold them papers. It was that low-down missionary of a Means who was working in a mission down on the East Side after coming back who put him in with that janitor woman. You both done all the dirt you could to his dad by stealing all he had, and now because you’ve been scared that he’d squeal on you, the both of you are trying to steal his right to live as a man. I suppose if you’d have known that he was as ignorant as a babe about all this, you’d done nothing against him. But Providence come in by way of your own home. Harold got that woman over here afore he knew where the scent was going, but he can’t stop her now. Beth found it all out to-day, too.”

The expected blast of hot denial and bitter denunciation did not follow. Instead, the Elder merely bent his head and acknowledged it all. He did not bewail his misfortune. He seemed beyond that.

“It’s a mighty bad thing, Jim, when a feller lets the furniture of his house get more important than himself, ain’t it? It leaves him kind of bare when it’s all moved out.”

“Josiah, you’re right. It’s even worse when the furniture has been stolen,” remarked the man. He raised his head and looked at the little gilt-framed picture on the desk. He covered his face. With a dry sob he folded his arms across the picture, and dropped his head upon them. “My God! I didn’t mean to do it when I began. I must have been insane. It seemed so easy at the time. I’ve suffered a thousand hells all these years!”

“I know. You just went along the way that seemed easy-like. At fust it ain’t hard to go with the greedy crowd, but the turning’s mighty hard. You sartin went the easiest way for yourself, Jim, but them you done wrong to, died in awful poverty.”

“I can’t stand any more!”

“John told me that Adoniah was going to get your hide after he got back here, but when he see you was married and had a little baby——”

“Stop it, Josiah! Do with me as you like, but don’t tell me any more. I’ll go

insane!”

“I cal’late what you said about suffering your share is as nigh the truth as you’ve come in many a year. If I’d been intending to give you up to that old woman, do you cal’late I’d brought you in here?”

“Josiah, do you mean that you do not intend to give me up?” asked the crumpled man incredulously. He raised his head and peered across the room.

“Not if you’re willing to obey orders. Others have been suffering, and that’s got to stop.”

“I’ll do anything you say.”

“The fust thing, that Sim Hicks and his gang has got to be choked off.”

“I don’t know what you refer to, but——”

“Jim, I thought we’d cut out that old green line of pretending. I ain’t going to nibble, so just stop casting it at me. I mean his booze-selling to them boys.”

“That can be arranged,” hurriedly agreed the Elder.

“Thought it likely could. The second little matter is that Mr. McGowan is going to stay right here in this church as minister.”

“I’ll do my best——Yes, I shall see to that.”

“Now, about that money you stole from his dad. That goes back to Mack with interest.”

“But, Josiah, I can’t do that. It would ruin me. I wouldn’t mind for myself, but my family——”

“I know, that’s the hard part of paying off old debts, the innocent has got to suffer. But that can be fixed so it won’t bother you much. It might do you good to take a taste of your own medicine.”

“Can this be done without the village finding it out?”

“It’s purty hard to give up your position as village hero, ain’t it, Jim? I cal’late it’s going to be purty tolerable hard to dress a hypocrite up like a saint without people finding it out sooner or later, but we’ll try it for a spell. Harold said to-night that he’d draw up papers for you. We’re going to try to keep this a sort of family skeleton.”

“How can I ever thank you!”

“You’d best give them thanks to the Almighty.”

“I do, most heartily.”

“Just touch a match to this paper you dropped. Here ’tis. I cal’late you wa’n’t intending for no one to see this but Beth.”

“That is true, Josiah. I wished to keep her from going any further with Mr. McGowan.” With trembling fingers he set fire to that piece of paper.

“One word more about money. What are you going to do about the loan on this place?”

“You may keep that, Josiah, as a token of my appreciation for what you have done.”

“Not this one,” said the Captain. “That’s honest enough to pass. I mean that one the interest has been paid on all these years.”

“I’m afraid that my lawyers foreclosed on that at noon——”

“From what Harold said, I cal’late you’ll find the interest was paid afore they had a chance to foreclose. If I was you, Jim, I’d just cancel that mortgage. The interest has more than paid it back these years. Mack’s estate otter be clear.”

The man before whom great ones had been made to tremble because of financial power, now meekly nodded assent to a sea captain.

“And we’ll just include everything you owe Mack in the papers Harold is going to draw up?”

“I’ll be only too glad to do as you say. But how about this Rogers woman?”

“I’ll see to her. She’d never recognize you as the dude who beat her son-in-law. You’ve changed consider’ble since then. You’ve even changed a mite to-night.”

The Captain took up his pipe from the table, shook off the ash, and relighted it.

“Is that all, Josiah?”

“Yes. I cal’late you’d best be going.” He handed the Elder his hat, and lifted his walking-stick from the floor.

“Thanks, Josiah. You have been very kind to me. More than I deserve.”

“There ain’t no room for argument on that p’int.”

As the Elder reached the door the Captain halted him.

“If I was you, Jim, I’d keep my oar out of that love affair of Mack and Beth.”

“Quite right, Josiah. Good night.”

The Elder got out of the house and into the road in a stumbling fashion. He climbed the knoll to his estate, a saddened and broken old man, but with a relief of mind and heart that he had not known for years.

CHAPTER XIX

“Now, ain’t you a pair to look at, and you to give your sermon this morning, Mr. McGowan! You look a heap sight worse than Edna Splinter, and she’s been raving with a fever all night.”

Miss Pipkin made this observation while the three of them sat at breakfast Sunday morning.

The minister absent-mindedly asked concerning the condition of Miss Splinter.

“She ’peared to be a trifle easier this morning. But what’s ailing the both of you? Look as if you’d been setting up all night like two owls.”

“Cal’late we’re on our uppers, Clemmie. But we’ll be fit as fiddles when we get some of them cakes stowed amidships, and ballast ’em down with a few swallers of that coffee. There ain’t everybody that can b’ile coffee like you, Clemmie.”

“Don’t be foolish, Josiah.”

After a very light breakfast, Mr. McGowan excused himself from the table, saying he must do some work on his sermon before the church hour. As the door to the study closed the Captain pushed back his plate and chair. He slid the latter round the end of the table, and placed it by Miss Pipkin.

“For the lan’ sakes, Josiah! You ain’t going to make love to me this morning, be you?”

“I ain’t sartin, Clemmie. It depends on your partic’lar frame of mind,” he replied slowly, a quiet kindness in his old eyes.

“I don’t know as I feel like being made love-sick,” she said, but without the old spirit of stubbornness.

“All right, Clemmie,” he said resignedly. “I cal’late you know best. I’m going to spin you a yarn about what took place round these premises last night. That is, if you’re willing to listen.”

“Why, of course I’m willing to listen. Did that lawyer show up here again with

his old mortgage?”

“No, you bet he didn’t. And what’s more, he won’t come prowling round again, either.”

The Captain told his housekeeper the whole story. He passed as lightly as he could over the part where Adoniah had married the trader’s daughter. Miss Pipkin gave no sign that she cared in the least, or that the news had shocked her. But when the Captain rehearsed the treachery of Mr. James Fox, she grew rigid. She dabbed her apron into the corners of her eyes as he unfolded the story of the suffering of the little family. The old man paused to wipe the tears from his own eyes as he recounted the finding of the lad in the doorway with a pile of morning papers in his lap. For some time after he had finished neither spoke. The Captain dangled his bandanna at the end of his nose, and Miss Pipkin dabbed her checked apron against her wet cheeks.

“Josiah,” she whispered eagerly, “have you found the boy yet? Is he still alive?”

“Yes.” A prolonged blow followed.

She laid her hand in his. “Where is he? Do you think I could see him?”

“He’s in there.” He pointed toward the study door.

“In that study with Mr. McGowan? Is that what you said?”

He nodded.

“You brought him here from the city yesterday?”

The seaman shook his head. “He come long afore that.”

“Where’ve you been keeping him? Ain’t you going to fetch him out?” she cried, rising. “I’ll go get him.”

“Wait, Clemmie. It’s been nigh onto twenty-five year since he was born, so he ain’t a baby. Let Mack fetch him. Mack!” called the Captain sharply. A slight twinkle in his eyes offset the assumed severity of his command.

The door opened and Mr. McGowan stood on the threshold. Miss Pipkin stared from the one to the other.

“Be the both of you clean crazy?” she demanded, as the men grinned rather foolishly at each other.

“No, Clemmie. We’ve just woke up to our senses, that’s all.”

“If you think this a good joke,—”

“It ain’t no joke,” said the Captain, motioning Mr. McGowan to come nearer. “I give you my word, it ain’t, Clemmie. There’s Adoniah Phillips’ son.”

With a smothered exclamation Miss Pipkin dropped back against the table. “You—you——” But she ended with a gasp for breath and words.

“The Cap’n is telling you the truth,” confirmed the minister.

“You—and you let me tell you all that nonsense about him and me!”

“You’re doing me an injustice, Miss Pipkin. I did not know one thing about all this till last night.”

Captain Pott had risen. In his eagerness he stretched out his arms to the confused housekeeper. She turned from staring at the minister, and like a bewildered animal fled blindly in the direction of the kitchen. She found herself, instead, in the seaman’s arms. Here she stuck, and with hysterical sobs clung to the old man. Mr. McGowan came nearer. At sight of him she fled to his arms. For the next few minutes the practical, every-day Miss Pipkin did things of which no one had ever imagined her capable. The Captain’s voice roused her.

“Here, young feller, you go loving where you’re wanted. I’ve been waiting for this too many years to be cheated out by a young rascal like you.” He seized the not unwilling Miss Pipkin, and pushed the minister in the direction of the kitchen.

“Clemmie, ain’t this grand?” asked the old man.

“It’s really been you all these years, Josiah.”

“Been me? You mean you’ve loved me all the time, Clemmie?”

“Um-hm,” she nodded vigorously. “But I was that stubborn that I wouldn’t give in. I always looked forward to your proposing. You ain’t proposed to me for a long time, Josiah.”

“But, Clemmie, are you sartin sure it’ll be all right now? If you get your rest, are you sartin you won’t feel different? Don’t you think you’d otter wait?”

“Josiah, ask me right now, so I can’t back out, or get on another stubborn streak. I thought it all out ’longside Edna’s bed last night. She was raving, and calling for some one, poor thing, who she’d refused to marry when she was young. I said then and there that I wasn’t going to my grave with that kind of thing hanging over me. That is, if you ever asked me again.”

“You say you made up your mind last night, Clemmie? You sure it wa’n’t what I

told you about Adoniah being married?"

"That had nothing to do with my decision."

"Then, you mean we're going to get married?"

"You ain't asked me yet."

"Miss Clemmie Pipkin," he began, bending his knees in the direction of the floor, and upsetting the table as he went down with a thud, "will you ship aboard this here old craft as fust mate with a rough old skipper like me?"

"Lan' sakes! Get up off that floor. You look awful silly. Get up this minute, or I'll say no."

The Captain got up with more alacrity than he had gone down.

"Will you marry me, honest, Clemmie?"

"Yes. You see, I kind of wanted to hear myself say it, because I'd made up my mind that way."

An exclamation from the kitchen interrupted what the seaman was doing. The minister had retired thither to clear the mist from his eyes which had gathered there at signs of spring-time in the fall of these dear old lives. He now stood in the door, holding a dripping coffee-pot.

"Oh, my coffee!" cried the housekeeper. "It's boiled all over the place."

"Drat the coffee. Let her b'ile!"

Boil it certainly had, over the stove, on to the floor, and had collected in a puddle at the threshold.

"That's what comes of not attending to your cooking," observed the practical Miss Pipkin. The other Miss Pipkin, who had been sleeping for years in the living sepulcher of her heart, was saying and doing many things quite different.

From the cross-roads came the sound of the church-bell, calling the people of Little River Parish to worship.

"There's the bell!" exclaimed Miss Pipkin. "It's only a half-hour before service. If you'll excuse me, Mack, I don't think I'll go this morning. You don't mind if I call you Mack here at home, do you?"

"I want you to call me that, Aunt Clemmie." He gave her a hurried kiss, and started toward his room. At the corner of the upset table he paused. "If I didn't have to preach this morning I'd stay home, too."

“You mean you’d go walking down ’long the beach,” corrected the Captain.

Miss Pipkin looked oddly at her lover. “Be they engaged?”

“They was, but I guess they ain’t.”

“What do you mean?”

“Jim came nigh sp’iling things last night. Mack said they’d call it all off till he found out more about his people. He was ’feared from what Jim had said to him that he had no right to love Beth. I cal’late he see that it was right enough to go ahead afore I got through with him this morning.”

“Josiah, he’ll marry us, won’t he?”

“You just bet he will!”

“Ain’t it funny he never said nothing about being glad we was engaged?”

“We ain’t told him.”

“But he saw.”

“Script’re says something about having eyes and seeing not, and having ears and hearing not. Mack’s as nigh to obeying the sayings of Script’re as any one I know.”

“That’s so, Josiah. He is so good without trying to be,” declared Miss Pipkin. She lifted a hand to each of the old man’s shoulders, and he put his arms about her. “Do you believe in the care of Providence, Josiah, and in the guiding hand of God?”

The Captain tightened his embrace, and one of the bony hands of the housekeeper slipped into the knotty fingers about her waist.

“I’m larning to, Clemmie, but I’m going to need a heap of help. I ain’t used to these religious channels, and I cal’late you’ll have to take the helm right often.”

They had not heard the sound of footsteps in the outer room. It was Mrs. Beaver’s voice that caused them to start.

“I thought I’d come over to borrow some——”

Mrs. Beaver stopped short on the threshold, looked at the Captain and the housekeeper, and began to retreat. The practical Miss Pipkin was the first to recover speech.

“Come on right in, Mrs. Beaver. That’s a silly thing for me to say, seeing you’re

already in. But what is it you'd like to borrow?"

Mrs. Beaver continued to retreat and stare. She saw the puddle of coffee on the floor. She eyed with interest the upset table. She saw that the Captain was undetermined what he ought to do with his hands. She watched him as he stumbled backward into the cupboard. Her face was a study.

"What was it you was going to ask for, Eadie?" asked the seaman, trying to appear unconcerned in his decided embarrassment.

"Well, I never!" exclaimed Mrs. Beaver.

"We're engaged," announced Miss Pipkin in matter-of-fact tones.

"Engaged! You and——"

"Yes, she and me," finished the Captain eagerly.

Mrs. Beaver's hands dropped helplessly to her sides.

"Is there anything more you'd like to know?" asked Miss Pipkin kindly, as she crossed the room and put an arm about the spare figure of her neighbor. "We're that happy that I wanted you to know, and I'm real glad you come over when you did."

"Anything else I want to know?" she asked. "I should say there is. What has happened to Harry? He come home last night all different, talking for the minister till I couldn't get a word in edgewise. It was awful late, too. And he told me that Sim Hicks had left town, or was going this morning."

"I cal'late some one's clothed Harry in his right mind. You know, Eadie, that's Script're. Sim has took a trip for his health."

"And Harry tells me that Mr. Fox is for the minister, too. Something must have happened."

"Yes, something has happened. Eadie, you rec'lect that time when you fust spoke to me about the minister staying in my house you said I'd be in the way of the Lord if I'd do it. I wa'n't very pleasant to you for going ahead and doing it while I was away, but you sartin did what Providence wanted that time."

Mrs. Beaver did not attempt to reply.

"What was it you wanted to borrow?"

She looked from the one to the other, and made this comment: "I'm mighty glad for the both of you. You're good, and you both deserve what you've got." She

kissed Miss Pipkin on the cheek, and turned toward the door.

“Eadie, what was it you come for?” asked the housekeeper in a strange voice.

“I come over for a pinch of salt, but——”

“Give her the hull sack, dear,” ordered the Captain.

“I guess—I think—I really don’t need the salt,” stammered Mrs. Beaver.

“Here, Eadie, don’t go off mad. I didn’t mean anything by what I said. I’d give half what I own this morning to a hobo if he’d ask for a crust of bread.”

“Thanks, Josiah. But I guess I got what I really come for. God bless you both!”

With that she was gone.

“Now, ain’t that the strangest you ever see?” observed the Captain.

He was cut short by the sound of a familiar toot out in the harbor. He stared at the housekeeper in dumb amazement.

“Clemmie, did you hear that? What in tarnation was it?”

“It sounded like your power-boat.”

“But it ain’t round here.”

Together they went outside. Together they stood on the stoop and watched a boat nose its way to the old mooring of the *Jennie P.*

“It’s her!” whispered the seaman hoarsely. “It’s my *Jennie P.*!”

He did not move from his place beside Miss Pipkin, but held tightly to her hand as John Peters came up from the wharf.

“Here’s a paper for you, Josiah. A girl come into my place about noon yesterday and made me sign it.”

Captain Pott was too surprised to even reach out for the piece of paper offered him.

Miss Pipkin took it, and unfolded it carefully.

“Read it for me, Clemmie.”

“It only says that the *Jennie P.* was bought back by Josiah Pott.”

“But I never——”

“That girl said she’d come to represent you, and paid cash.”

Without a word the three went down to the wharf, and John Peters rowed the dory, with two passengers aboard, out to the *Jennie P.*

It was late in the afternoon when Mr. McGowan left the house. Fall permeated the air with an invigorating twang. Here and there the landscape showed the touch of frost. The marsh grass was turning brown. Among the trees and shrubbery color ran riot. The Fox knoll was a blend of beauty. As the minister passed the estate he sought for a glimpse of the Elder's daughter among the trees, or in the garden. But she was not to be seen.

For a long way he kept his course up the beach. He was thinking. How could he explain to Elizabeth the meaning of his actions last night? Would she listen after he had refused to give heed to her explanation?

Suddenly, he became aware that he stood on the spot where he had turned his ankle the night she had come to him from the water's edge, and his thoughts were choked in the furrows of his brain. He seemed to hear her voice again as she had spoken that night of the impossibility of his love. He looked about. Far up the peninsula he recognized her. She was coming to him as straight as the line of the beach permitted. He started in her direction. She waved him back. He waited. On she came. Neither attempted to speak till she had reached his side.

"I've been waiting for you," she said. "I thought you would never come."

"You still want to see me after the way I treated you last night?"

"Please, don't speak of that. I knew Uncle Josiah would tell you everything."

"He did tell me all. I want you to forgive me for not taking your word that there was nothing in my past which would prevent our love, or mar it. I didn't realize that you knew what you were saying. I feared that I had no right to love you after your father had spoken as he did of my parentage."

With intense anticipation he held out his hands, but she drew away.

"Not now. I did not understand what Father's obligation to you would involve."

"Elizabeth, dear, do you mean you won't forgive me?"

"I have nothing to forgive in you, Mack." In her eyes was a return of the warmth of love she felt, but her attitude was one of firm resolve. "I have come to you to-day because I want to tell you that just for the present we must be only good

friends. I've been thinking all night long about you, and now that you know who you are, and what my father has done against your father——”

“But that is all past!”

“Not for me. Father ruined your father, and has grown rich on your money. Not till every cent of that is paid back can I think of marrying you.” There was the weight of dead finality in every word.

“But, Elizabeth——”

“Please, Mack, don't make it harder for me than you must. This is not easy, but you will see where it is best, when you have taken time to think it over.”

“You have not talked this over with your father, or with Harold?”

“No. Father was ill last night, and Harold was so tired that he has been sleeping all day. It would make no difference what either of them might say. I am doing this because it is right.”

“You do not know of the arrangements that are to be made?”

“All I know is that Father owes you the money, and that it is yours and must be paid back to you.”

“Elizabeth, there are papers to be drawn up, and——”

“Mack, please don't! I'm tired, and can't stand much. Don't try to change my decision.”

“But those papers which Harold is to draw up must alter that decision. That is the only ground on which I shall accept the terms. Your father is to be given all the time he needs to pay me back. At first I flatly refused. I didn't want to take any of his money. But Uncle Josiah made me see that it was the only thing to do.”

“Of course, it is the only thing to do. You are going to let Harold draft those papers because Father must give up what does not belong to him.”

“I'll not permit one stroke of the pen unless——”

“But, Mack, you must! This is your duty to make Father——”

“Elizabeth, dear, it is not your father's money I want. All that means nothing to me. I am consenting to the arrangement simply because I believe it will be best for him to pay it back. It's you I want!”

She turned from him to look out over Long Island Sound. The sun was

completing its daily journey by tossing up glorious hues of gold, splashing the western sky without stint from its unseen pot of blending colors. Her face seemed to catch and hold the glory of the sky.

“Beth, we must not sacrifice the love which God has given us. That is something which all the money in the world cannot buy.”

She turned about to face him. Her eyes were filled with the reflection of the fire that glowed on the inner shrine of her heart.

“You are right, Mack. Our love is God’s gift.”

THE END

Transcriber's Notes:

Archaic and variable spelling has been preserved as printed in the original book except as indicated in this text with a dotted grey line under the change. Hover the mouse over the word and the original text will appear.

One period/comma and one single-quote/double-quote transpositions were silently corrected. Ending punctuation was added to the List of Illustrations. Otherwise, punctuation has not been changed to comply with modern conventions.

The following changes were made to the text.

Page 25: "spelling standardized" (but because some of your **church members** would not try to understand them)

Page 43: "hyphenation standardized" (Very gently stroking his **side-whiskers**, he continued:)

Page 46: Was "exclaimd" (Some **exclaimed** for, and others declaimed against, the candidate.)

Page 56: Was "Baalam's" (here he was, the king of them all, a genuine descendant of **Balaam's** mount)

Page 103: Was "medding" ("Are you ready to call quits and stop your damned **meddling** in my affairs?")

Page 159: "spelling standardized" (The time has come when the church must cut the **shore lines** that have been binding us to the past.)

Page 186: Was "Pipin" ("You must have hit your funny-bone, or something," hinted Miss **Pipkin**.)

Page 212: "spelling standardized" (He was roused at last by the opening of his **study door**.)

Page 285: Was "outaw" (The fact is, he is an **outlaw** and is hiding from justice.)

Page 351: "spelling standardized" ("Then, **good night**. Come, Beth.")

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