Snaith John Collis

The Sailor

John Snaith

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Snaith J.

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Содержание

Snaith J. C. John Collis
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BOOK I
GESTATION

I

A large woman in a torn dress stood at the gate of a rag and bone dealer's yard. The season was November, the hour midnight, the place a slum in a Midland textile town.

Hanging from the wall of the house beyond was a dirty oil lamp round which the fog circled in a hundred spectral shapes. Seen by its light, she was not pleasant to look upon. Bare-armed, bare-headed, savage chest half bare and sagging in festoons, she stood stayless and unashamed, breathing gin and wickedness. A grin of quiet joy was upon her alcoholic countenance. Nay, more than joy. It was a light of inward ecstasy, and sprang from the fact that a heavy carter's whip was in her hand.

Not many feet from the spot on which she stood was the wall of a neighbor's house. Crouching against it so that he was scarcely visible in the darkness was a boy of thirteen. Without stockings or shoes, he wore only a filthy shirt, a thing that had once been a jacket, and a tattered lower garment which left his thighs half naked.

His face was transfigured with terror.

"Enery Arper," said the woman with a shrill snigger not unlike the whinny of a horse, "Auntie said she'd wait up for you, didn't she? And she always keeps a promise, don't she, my boy?"

The figure six yards away the fog was doing its best to hide cowered yet closer to the wall.

"And what was it, Enery, that Auntie promised you if you come 'ome again with ninepence?" The wheeze of the voice had a note of humor.

The boy was wedged so close to the wall that he had barked the skin off his bare knees. The woman, watching him intently, began to trail the heavy lash on the cobbled yard.

"Said she'd make it up to a shillin' for you, didn't she? … if you come 'ome again with ninepence. Said she'd cut the heart out o' you … same as if it was the eye of a pertater."

A powerful arm was already loose. The eye of an expert had the distance measured to a nicety.

"Clean out."

A scream followed that was not human. The heavy whip had caught the boy round the unprotected thighs.

"I'll do ye in this time."

Mad with pain and terror the boy dashed straight at her, charging like a desperate animal, as with leisurely ferocity she prepared for a second cut at him. The impact of his body was so unexpected that it nearly knocked her down.

It was his only chance. Before she could recover her balance he was out of the gate and away in the fog. A lane ran past the yard. He was in it before the whip could reach him again; in it and running for his life.

The lane was short, straight and very narrow, with high walls on both sides. A turn to the right led through a small entry into a by-street which gave access to one of the main thoroughfares of the city. A turn to the left ended in a blank wall which formed a blind alley.

By the time the boy was halfway down the lane, he realized that in his mad terror he had turned to the left instead of to the right. There was no escape. He was in a trap.

A moment he hesitated, sick with fear. He could hear the heavy footfalls of his pursuer; as she plowed through the fog he could hear her wheezy grunts and alcoholic curses.

"Took the wrong turnin', eh?" She was within ten yards. "Hold on a minute, that's all, young man!"

In sheer desperation the boy ran on again, well knowing he could not get beyond the wall at the bottom of the lane. He could see it already. A lamp was there, faintly revealing its grim outline with fog around it.

"I'll do ye in, by God, I will!"

The voice was so near that his knees began to fail. Overcome with terror he threw himself on the ground near the wall. He had neither the strength nor the courage to try again the trick that had saved him a minute ago.

He knew she was standing under the lamp, he knew she was looking for him.

"Ah, Enery, I see yer," she said, with a savage laugh.

Content to know there was no escape for him she paused to get her breath.

The boy began to wriggle along under the lea of the wall, while she stood watching him. The wall was old, and all at once he made a discovery. Close to his head was a small hole, where three or four bricks had fallen out. It was a mere black space, leading he knew not where. But he didn't hesitate. Hardly knowing what he did, he squeezed his head through the hole. And then with the frenzied desperation of a rat in a trap he dragged his body after it.

An oath came from the woman under the lamp, a short ten yards off. She sprang at the wall. She lashed at it again and again, cursing horribly. But it was no use. Her prey had escaped with one savage cut across the heels. She continued to lash at the hole, but the boy was out of her reach.

II

Where was he? He didn't know. Half dead with fear he could hear her lashing at the wall, but she wouldn't be able to get at him.

With a great effort he rose from his hands and knees. He had hardly strength to stand up. He seemed to be in a sort of garden. There was mold under his feet. It was too dark to see it, but he knew by the smell; also it was damp and sticky. He moved a few yards and his feet became entangled among roots and bushes. And then suddenly a dog began to bark and his heart stood still.

For quite a minute he dared not move another step. The dog sounded very near, yet he could not return by the way he had come. No, in spite of the dog he must find another outlet from this garden. Very cautiously he moved a yard or two, and then stopped to listen. Shaking with terror he then moved on again.

Groping about in the fog and darkness, his teeth chattering with cold, his brain quite numb, it seemed that he would never be able to find a way out. Where was he? He had no idea of anything except the ground under his feet. Now it was a stretch of gravel, now a rubbish heap, now moist earth, now roots and bushes, and then finally, after the lapse of hours as it seemed, he came up against a wall.

It might be the wall through which he had crept. Of that he could not be sure, but yet he did not think it was. He began to follow the line of it, taking care to do so in the opposite direction to the dog whose barking was incessant. As he walked he rubbed his hands along the surface of the wall in the hope of finding a gate.

For a long time he groped through the darkness, but came upon nothing in the least resembling a gate. Again he grew desperate. He would have to wait there until daylight. But he simply dared not do that with the dog straining at his chain, seemingly, only a very few yards off.

Sick with cold and shaking in every limb he began to cry feebly. His knees were knocking, he was at the end of his wits. There was no way out of the garden, yet if he stayed in it the dog would kill him. Suddenly he decided upon the only possible course; he must climb the wall. Not knowing its height, or what there was beyond, or whether it was merely the wall of a house, he began to "shin" up it for all he was worth, grasping its rough surface as well as he could with his hands and his knees and his bare toes. There must be some kind of a top to it, and when the dog broke his chain, as every moment he threatened to do, he might not be able to reach him.

Wild and precarious struggling, in the course of which he was several times within an ace of toppling backwards into the garden, brought his numb fingers at last to a kind of coping. He had just strength enough to draw up his body on to the narrow ledge, only to find that he could not possibly remain on it. The top of the wall was sown thickly with broken glass.

He knew his hands and knees were cut, yet he could hardly feel anything. There was only one thing to do now; he must jump for it – one side or the other. He came to no deliberate decision; at that moment he was completely unbalanced in body and mind, but a voice inside him said suddenly:

"Chance it!"

Hands and knees instinctively gripping as hard as they could, he slipped over the other side. But it was impossible to keep a hold. He slipped and swayed and slipped again, and then he knew that he was falling … falling … falling through space into the unknown.

III

Something hit him, something so hard that it seemed to crack him as if he had been an egg. It was the earth. He lay a moment almost without sensation, and then he realized that the dog was no longer barking. Feeling reassured he made an effort to rise. He couldn't move. The sensation was horrible. Perhaps he had broken his back.

He tried several times, and because he could feel no pain the thought seemed to grow upon him. Presently, however, he found he could stand. Still dazed and shaken in every bone, he knew now that he had had the luck to fall upon soft earth. But as soon as he stood up there came a savage grinding pain in his left leg, and he lay down whimpering feebly. He then got up again, and then lay down again, and then suddenly he wished he was dead.

If only he had had the luck to kill himself! But every moment now made the wish seem more vain. He was conscious of one ache after another, in every part of his body; his hands and feet were bleeding, he was sick and sorry, but he seemed to know that death was a long way off. Suddenly he stood up again. The cold, wet earth under him was unendurable. Where was he? He set his teeth, and began to drag his left leg after him in order to find out. Where was he? This place seemed a sort of garden too. But there was no dog in it. The damp soil was merged very soon in substances less gentle to the feet; old crocks and scraps of metal and other debris, the prelude to a rubbish heap. And then without in the least expecting it, he came upon water. The question was answered. He was on the bank of the canal.

The knowledge chilled right through him. Here and now was his chance. It wouldn't take more than a minute if he jumped straight in. But the water looked still and cold and horrible. As he came to the edge he found he couldn't face it. He simply hadn't the pluck.

He limped on a few yards. It might seem easier a bit lower down. But when he came a bit lower down he couldn't face it either, and he stood at the edge of the water crying miserably.

After a while he dragged himself away from the canal. He stumbled over rubbish heaps and stones and brickbats, varied now and then with nettles and twitch grass. He came to a low bridge and crossed it. Nothing would have been easier than to slip over the side; it might have been there for the purpose; but this was one of the places where the fog had lifted a little, again he caught a glimpse of the water and again he moved on.

At last he came to some wooden railings and got through a gap where one or two had been broken. Here the fog was so thick that he lost his bearings altogether. He didn't know in the least where he was, he couldn't see his hand before him; and then he stumbled over something which jarred his hurt foot horribly. The something was a wire.

Of course, it was the railway. He remembered, almost with a feeling of excitement, that the railway was in the next field to the canal. A moment he stood trying to make out things and noises in the fog. Yes, he could hear, at least he thought he could hear, wagons being shunted in the sidings. After he had moved a few yards towards the sound, he was able to make out a red light in the distance.

For some odd reason which he couldn't explain, the feeling of excitement began to grow with the certainty that he was on the line. He could feel the metals, icy cold, smooth and slippery under his feet. He limped along until a dim shape loomed ahead. It was a signal box. By this time his excitement was almost terrible.

He stood a moment listening to the snortings of an engine which he couldn't see, and the clang-clang-clang of the wagons as they were being shunted in the sidings. And then all at once the signal under which he was shivering dropped with a great clatter, and something very deep down in him, a something he had not known existed until that moment, gave a sort of little exultant cry and told him that now was his chance.

Excited almost to the verge of joy he limped past the signal box in order to get away from its lights. If the thing was done at all it would have to be done in darkness. Presently he looked round, and with a sensation of downright terror, found that the lights of the signal box were no longer to be seen. Here the fog was quite thick again; whichever way he looked there was not a single object he could make out in the darkness. But under his bare feet he could feel the broad metals icy, smooth, inexorable.

"Now's your chance," said a gentle voice deep down in himself.

Instantly he lay full length in the six-foot way.

"Set your head on the line," said the voice.

He did as he was told. The sensation of the icy metal under his right ear was so horrible that his heart almost stopped inside him.

"Close your eyes," said the voice, and then it said a little more gently as if it knew that already he was half dead with fear, "Stay just as you are and you'll not know nothink about it."

He closed his eyes.

"Don't move," said the voice. "Stay there and it'll not hurt you."

If he had had a God to pray to, he would have prayed.

The engine seemed a long time on the way. He daren't move hand or foot, he daren't stir a muscle of his body. But as the seconds passed an intense desire came upon him to change the position of his head. It felt so undefended sideways on. Surely it would be better if he turned it round so that…

"Don't move," the voice commanded him. "Keep just like that. Quite still."

He was bound to obey. The voice was stronger than he.

"Eyes shut, and you'll not know nothink."

It was as a mother would have spoken had he ever heard a mother speak.

… The engine was coming. He could hear it snorting and rattling in the distance. He simply daren't listen. He tried to imagine he was already dead. But a frightful crash suddenly broke in upon his brain, and then another, and then another … he had never realized how much it took to…

"Fog signals," said the voice. "Keep just as you are … eyes shut … quite still … quite still."

There it was, grunting and rattling… Know nothink! … there … now…

Grunting, rattling, snorting, what a time it took! In spite of himself he opened his eyes, and found that he was still alive.

"You were on the wrong line after all."

The sound of the voice turned him faint.

IV

There was only one thing to be done now, and this he did without delay. He took his head from the metals and stood up as well as he could. His body was all numb and lifeless, but there was a queer excitement in him somewhere that for the moment made him feel almost happy. After all, he wasn't dead. And in that strange moment that was like a dream he was almost glad he wasn't. Yes, almost glad. It was hard to believe that he should wish to find himself alive, and yet as he stretched his limbs and began to move he couldn't honestly say that after all he wasn't just a little bit pleased.

He was not able to move very fast; he was so dreadfully cold for one thing, and then his left foot was hurt. But now, as he walked along the six-foot way, he felt somehow stronger than he had ever felt in his life before. Of a sudden he crossed the metals and plunged recklessly sideways into the fog. He stumbled over some signal wires and fell on his knees, got up and stumbled over some more. What did it matter? What did anything matter? After all, it was quite easy to die. He must find the right line and make a job of it.

He stopped a moment, and turned this thought over in his mind. And then he heard the voice again.

"*Henry Harper, you'll never be able to do that again as long as you live.*"

The words were gentle and composed, but they struck him like a curse. He knew that they were true. Not as long as he lived would he be able to do again as he had just done. It was as if the judge in his wig whom he had seen that afternoon riding to the Assizes in his gilt carriage had passed a life sentence upon him. His knees began to crumble under him again; he could have shrieked with terror. Crying miserably he limped along into the sidings. He came to a lamp. All around were silent, grim shapes upon which its feeble light was cast. They were loaded wagons, sheeted with tarpaulins. With the amazing recklessness that had just been born in him he determined to find a way into one of them in the hope of being able to lie down and sleep. It was not very difficult to climb up and get under one of the sheets, which happened to have been loosely tied. Also he had the luck to find a bed that would have been more or less comfortable had the night not been so bitterly cold. The wagon was loaded with sacks full of a substance soft and yielding; as a matter of fact, it was flour.

Henry Harper lay down with a feeling of relief and burrowed among the sacks as far as he could get. A mass of aches in body and soul, anything was better than the darkness and damp fog and icy substances cutting into his bare feet. Presently, with the sacks piled all round him, he felt less miserable, and he fell asleep.

How long he slept he didn't know. But it must have been some little time, and the sleep must have been fairly sound, for he was only awakened by a great jolt of the wagon. And before he was fully awake it had begun to move.

Hadn't he better jump out? No, let it move. Let it do anything it liked. Let it go anywhere it pleased. What did it matter? Again he fell asleep.

The next time he awoke he was shivering with cold and feeling very hungry. But the wagon was moving now and no mistake. It was still pitch dark, although the fog seemed to have lifted a bit, but the detonators which had been placed on the line were going off now and again with tremendous reports, signals flew past, and while he lay wondering what he ought to do now, he passed through an array of lights which looked like a station.

He soon came to the conclusion that it was useless to do anything. He couldn't get out of the wagon now even if he wanted to, that was unless he wanted to kill himself. Yes … that was exactly what…

"Lie quiet. Go to sleep," a stern voice commanded him.

He tried to sleep again but soon found he couldn't. He was cold and ill, but after an attack of vomiting he felt better. Meanwhile the wagon rattled on and on through the night, and it seemed to go faster the farther it went.

Where was it going? What did it matter where it went so long as he went with it? But – the sudden thought was like a blow – that was just what did matter! They would find him lying there, and they would give him to the police, and the police would do something to him. He knew all about that, because they had done something to him once already for taking an apple off a stall in the market place. He had only taken one, but they had given him six strokes, and in spite of the cold and the pain in his left leg he still remembered just what they were like.

Perhaps he ought to jump for it. No, that was impossible with his leg like that; the wagon was going too fast. He had better lie quiet and slip out as soon as the wagon stopped at a station. He burrowed far down into the sacks once more, for the sake of the warmth, and after a while he went to sleep again.

And then he had a dream that filled him with terror. The police had found him. The police had found him in the wagon.

He awoke with a start. Rough hands were shaking him. Yes, it was perfectly true!

"Kim up … you!"

It was the voice of the police.

He turned over with a whimper and lifted up his head, only to drop it instantly. He had been blinded by the glare of a lantern held six inches from his eyes.

"Well, damn me," a great, roaring voice surged into his ears. "Here, Ike!"

"What's up now?" said a second voice, roaring like the first.

"Come and look at this."

The boy dug his head into the sacks.

"What's up?" said voice the second.

"What about it? Must ha' got in at Blackhampton."

"Well, damn me."

The boy burrowed deeper and deeper into the sacks.

"Here, come out of it." The owner of the first voice took him by the ear and dragged him out of the wagon.

"What's yer name?"

No answer.

His captor shook him roughly.

"Enry Arper," whimpered the boy.

"Enry what?"

"Enry Arper."

"Enry Arper, is it? Well, you are going to have something to 'arp for, you are, my lad."

"Ever had the birch rod, Mister Enry Arper?" inquired the first voice with a kind of grim pleasantness.

The boy didn't answer.

"No? Not had that pleasure? The police are going to cut the skin off o' you and sarve you right. They'll larn you to trespass on to the railway. Fetch the foreman, Ike."

While the boy, securely held by the ear, stood shivering, Ike went leisurely in search of the foreman shunter. It was six o'clock, and that individual, who had been on duty since that hour the previous evening, was on the point of going home. Ike found him in the messroom, where he had gone to exchange his lantern for the small wicker basket in which he brought his meals. His name was Job Lorimer, and being large and fat and florid he sauntered up to the scene of action with an air of frank acceptance of life as it is, that seems to go as a rule with his type of physique and countenance.

"Why, blow me, Iggins, what's all this year?"

"Allow me to introjuice Mr. Enry Arper o' Blackhampton. – Mr. Job Lorimer, foreman shunter, Kentish Town."

"'Owdy do, young man. Pleased to meet you." Mr. Lorimer winked solemnly at both his subordinates. "What can we do for you?"

"Twelve strokes with the birch rod," said subordinate the first.

"Eight for the first offence," said subordinate the second.

Suddenly the boy fell down senseless at the foreman shunter's feet.

V

"Well, blow me," said the Foreman Shunter. "Show the light, Pearson."

The second subordinate maneuvered the lantern. "On'y a kid. And I never see sich a state as he's in. No boots. No stockings. Just look at them feet. And his hands all of a mush. Gawd!" said the Foreman Shunter.

"What'll you do about it, Job?" said subordinate number one.

"Do about it?" said the Foreman Shunter sharply. "Do about what?"

"Might let him go this time?" said subordinate number two.

The boy opened his eyes.

"I'll take him 'ome to the missus and give him some breakfast," said the Foreman Shunter with an air of asperity.

The odd thing was that both subordinates seemed silently to approve this grave dereliction of a foreman shunter's duty.

"Can you walk, me lad?"

"O' course he can't, Iggins, not with them," said the Foreman Shunter. "Can't stand on 'em, let alone walk on 'em. Here, catch holt o' the bawsket."

The Foreman Shunter took the boy in his arms and carried him away from the goods yard as he would have carried a baby.

"Leave the bawsket at No. 12 when you come off duty," he called back to the first subordinate.

"Right, Job, I will," said the first subordinate rather respectfully, and then as the Foreman Shunter passed out of hearing, the first subordinate said to his mate, "Fancy taking a thing like that 'ome to your missus."

In the meantime the boy was shivering and whimpering in what he felt to be the strong arms of the police.

"Let me go, mister, this once," he whined as awful recollections surged upon him. He had been getting terribly hurt all through the night, but he knew that he was going to be hurt still more now that the police had got hold of him.

But his faint whimpers and half-hearted wriggles were without effect upon the majesty of the law.

"Lie still. Keep quiet," growled the Foreman Shunter, adding as quite an impersonal afterthought, "Blast you!"

It seemed a very long time to the boy before he came to prison. Up one strange street and down another he was carried. As he lay in the arms of the police he could make out lamp after lamp and row after row of houses in the darkness.

It was a long way to the station.

"Let me go this once, mister," he began to whine again. "I'll not do it no more."

"Quiet, blast you," growled the large, rich voice of the police.

At last they came to a door, which in the uncertain light seemed exactly similar to one he had passed through on an occasion he would never forget to his dying day. He began to cry again miserably. Perhaps they would give him something to eat – they did so before – but he would not be able to eat anything this time if they offered it, not until they had done what they had to do.

He could hear sounds a little way off … inside the prison. He gripped convulsively the rough overcoat of his captor. How vividly he remembered it all! They gave it two other boys first. Again he could hear their screams, again he could see the blood running down their bare legs.

He must try to be a man … he remembered that one of the other boys had laughed about it afterwards … he must try to be a man … at least that had been the advice of a fatherly policeman in spectacles who had presided over the ceremony…

"Mother … that you…" The terrific voice of his captor went right through him. "Where are you, Mother? Show a light."

Suddenly a door at the end of the passage was flung open. There came a blinding gush of gaslight.

"Why, Job … whatever…!"

"I'll set him on the sophy."

"Yes, on the sophy. Goodness gracious me!"

The boy realized that he was on a horsehair sofa, and that a fine, clean, handsome-looking lady was standing with her mouth open in front of him.

"Goodness gracious, Job!"

"Come all the way from Blackhampton in a truck this morning. By the 5:40 Express."

"Well, I'm blessed if I ever see such a hobject. I'll give him some tea and a bit o' bacon, and some bread and butter, and then I'll get some o' that mud off him."

"Some of it's blood," said the Foreman Shunter.

"Yes, I see it is. Never … did … I … see … anythink … like him. I'll make the tea; the kettle's boiling." The voice of Mother was the nearest thing to music the boy had ever heard. It was better even than that of the ladies who sang in the bar of the Wheat Sheaf, the Red Lion, and the Crown and Anchor, outside which places he had always stayed to listen when he could conveniently do so. This room was not in the least like the police station. And he was quite sure that the lady called Mother had nothing whatever to do with…

"Set him a bit nearer to the fire, Job," – yes, the voice was music – "and put this round him."

"This" was an old coat.

VI

"I'll give it him in a saucer," said Mother. "It'll be cooler that way."

A saucer of tea was offered to the boy.

"Can you hold it, me lad?"

"Yes, lady," he said, faintly.

"Lap it up, then. Better let me try it first." She sipped a little out of the saucer. "Yes, that's right enough."

The tea was so perfectly delicious that he swallowed it at a gulp. Mother and the Foreman Shunter watched him with surprise.

"Now for a bite o' bread and butter," said Mother, sawing away at a quartern loaf.

The boy seized the bread and butter like a hungry dog. Mother and the Foreman Shunter stood looking at him with queer, rather startled faces.

"I never see the likes o' that, Job."

"No, never," said the Foreman Shunter, solemnly. "Damn me."

"What's your name, boy?"

"Enry Arper, lady."

"Enry what?"

"Enry Arper, lady."

"Could you eat a bit o' bacon, do you think?"

The boy nodded with an eagerness that made the Foreman Shunter laugh.

"I see nothing to laugh at, Job Lorimer," said his wife sharply. Tears had come into her eyes. She whisked them away with a corner of her apron, and then gave a sniff of remarkable violence. "And they call this a Christian land."

"You never heard me call it that, Mother," said the Foreman Shunter.

"More shame to you, then, Job Lorimer."

"I know this," said the Foreman Shunter, speaking in a slow and decisive manner, "whatever this country is or whatever it ain't, there's as much Christianity in it as there is in that hearthrug. And there ain't a bit more."

"Shut your head," said his wife. "And hand me that knife and I'll cut up this bit o' bacon for him."

She took a delicately browned rasher out of a hissing, delicious smelling frying-pan on the fire, cut it into very small pieces, gave it to the boy, and told him to eat it slowly.

After the boy's wants had been attended to, Mother spread a newspaper on the sofa and told him to put up his legs and rest a bit. The Foreman Shunter then passed through a door and performed wonders in the way of blowing and splashing at the scullery sink. When he reappeared his face was very red and shining and the boy was fast asleep.

"I'm thinking I'll have a bite meself," said Job, with a glance at the sofa. "And then I suppose I had better take him along to the police station."

Mother made no reply, but gave her husband a breakfast worthy of a foreman shunter. She then examined carefully the boy's hands and feet.

"I never did see such a hobject," said she. And then with an imperious air, "I'll give him a wash, that's what I'll do."

In order to carry out this resolve, she went into the scullery, filled the copper, and lit the fire.

Presently the members of the family, three small boys and a smaller girl, came down to breakfast *en route* to school. They looked wonderingly at the creature on the sofa, with great curiosity in their half frightened eyes. Their father told them sternly to keep away from it, to get on with their breakfasts, not to make a noise, and to clear off to school.

"Is it a boy or a girl?" Alfie asked Johnnie, in a thrilling whisper as soon as father had retired to help Mother in the scullery.

"A girl, o' course."

There was some excuse for Johnnie: there was something that looked exactly like a girl in the sleeping face. The rest was hidden by the coat.

The family was soon packed off to school, Johnnie "with a flea in his ear" for having cleaned his boots imperfectly the night before. Mother then cleared away the remains of breakfast, and the Foreman Shunter fetched a fair-sized zinc bath out of the washhouse, pushed back the table, and set it down before the fire. He filled it with warm water from the copper, and then gave the sleeper a shake and said,

"Now, then, boy."

The boy roused himself with a little whimper of protest. He had not been very fast asleep; the police in varying forms of their activity were still hovering round the outskirts of his mind. He began to cry miserably at the sight of the zinc bath, which supplied a forgotten link in an awful chain of memories. Yes, this was the police station after all. He remembered now quite well how they gave him a bath before they …

"What are you crying for?" asked Mother. "I'm not going to hurt you, my boy. Nice warm bath. Bind up your feet. Then you can go to sleep again."

Perhaps it wasn't the police station, after all. Certainly that institution as he knew it had no Mother and no warm tea and no fried bacon, and no sofa and no old coat.

Mother removed the filthy shirt and the tattered knickerbockers with uncompromising but not indelicate hands.

"Them had better be burnt, Job," she said sharply, as she gave them to the Foreman Shunter to throw into the back yard.

"Better ha' done this job in the scullery, Mother," said he.

"Too cold…" She took the temperature of the bath with an expert's finger… "I never did see anything like this poor child. There's nothing to him. Look at his ribs. You can count 'em. Ugh!" The eye of Mother had been arrested by a broad red mark across both thighs.

"That's been done with a whip," said the Foreman Shunter, grimly.

"Just look at those feet … they are beginning to bleed again. And these pore hands. I'll get some rags and some Friar's Balsam. And his hair! Goodness gracious me! I'll have to go to the chemist's for that, I'm thinking."

It was perfectly true that Mother had to pay a visit to the chemist for the boy's hair. Nothing less than the chemist could meet the case.

In the meantime, the Foreman Shunter soaped and washed the boy thoroughly, dried him with a coarse towel, rubbed the Friar's Balsam on the mutilated hands and feet, which made them smart horribly, and bound them in clean rags. Mother then returned to perform wonders with the chemist's lotion. Afterwards she fetched a nightgown of Alfie's, put it on the boy, wrapped him up in a couple of blankets, and made him comfortable on the sofa, and the Foreman Shunter drew it a bit nearer the fire. Then the boy was told he could sleep as long as he liked. Presently he began to doze, his mind still running on the police; but certainly this was not a bit like the station.

VII

"What'll you do with him, Mother?"

It was tea time, the kitchen blind was down, the gas was lit; and mother was toasting a muffin for the Foreman Shunter, who was about to go on duty.

"He can't stay here, you know. We've as many as we can manage already."

"I know that," snapped Mother.

Like most mothers who are worth their salt, she had rather a habit of snapping at the Foreman Shunter.

The boy was feeling wonderfully comfortable. In fact, he had never felt so comfortable in his life. And he was just sufficiently awake to know that his fate was being decided upon.

"What'll you do with him, anyhow?"

"I don't know," snapped Mother.

"I don't neither. Seems to me there's nothing for it but to hand him over to the police."

The boy was fully awake now. His heart stood still. It seemed an age before mother spoke in answer to this terrible suggestion.

"Yes, of course, there's always that," she said, at last.

The boy's heart died within him.

"He can't stay here, that's a moral," said the Foreman Shunter.

"I never said he could," snapped Mother. "But I don't hold with the police myself. It means the Work'us, and you'd better not be born at all, Job Lorimer, than go to the Work'us."

"You are right there," said the Foreman Shunter.

"He wants a honest occipation," said Mother, buttering the muffin.

"He wants eddicatin' first," said the Foreman Shunter, beginning to eat the muffin. "What can you do with a kid like that? Don't know A from a bull's foot. Not fit for any decent society."

"You are right there," said Mother. "But I'm all against the Work'us, and it's no use purtending I ain't."

"Same here," said the Foreman Shunter. "But he can't stay at No. 12, Gladstone Villas, and you can lay to that."

"Did I say he could?" snapped Mother yet again.

"Very well, then."

And the Foreman Shunter went on duty.

It took five days for the *famille* Lorimer to decide the fate of Henry Harper. Five wonderful days in which he lay most of the time wrapped in warm blankets on a most comfortable sofa in a warm room. Everybody was remarkably good to him. He had the nicest things to eat and drink that had ever come his way; he was spoken to in the only kind tones that had ever been used to him in all his thirteen years of life. He was given a clean shirt of Alfie's without a single hole in it; he was given a pair of Johnnie's socks; a pair of the Foreman Shunter's trousers were cut down for him; he was given boots (Alfie's), a waistcoat (Alfie's), a jacket (Alfie's), a necktie (Johnnie's), a clean linen collar (Alfie's), a red-spotted handkerchief (Percy's – by Percy's own request). In fact, in those five days he was by way of being taken to the bosom of the family.

He was really a very decent sort of boy – at least, Father said so to Mother in Johnnie's hearing. That is, he had the makings of a decent boy. And Johnnie knew that if Father said so it must be so, because Johnnie also knew that Father was an extremely acute and searching critic of boys in general. They were all very sorry for him, and Alfie and Percy were also inclined to be sorry for Johnnie, who had made a regular mug of himself by declaring that this poor street arab was a girl. It would take Johnnie at least a year to live it down, but in the meantime they were full of pity for this miserable waif out of the gutter who could neither write nor read, who tore at his food, who

called Mother "lady" and Father "mister," and said "dunno" and used strange terms of the streets in a way they could hardly understand. This poor gutter-snipe, who had been so badly knocked about, who had never had a father or a mother, or a brother or a sister, was whole worlds away from the fine assurance, the complete freedom and security of Selborne Street Higher Grade Schools. He was more like a dumb animal than a boy; and sometimes as they watched his white, hunted face and heard his strange mumblings – the nearest he got, as a rule, to human speech – it would have taken very little to convince them that such was the case, could they only have forgotten that his like was to be found at every street corner selling matches and evening papers and begging for coppers when the police were not about.

During those five days the boy's future was a sore problem for the Foreman Shunter and his wife. And it was only solved at last by a god out of a machine. Mr. Elijah Hendren was the deity in question.

That gentleman happened to look in upon the evening of the fatal fifth day. A benign, cultivated man of the world, he came regularly once a week to engage the Foreman Shunter in a game of draughts. It was also Mr. Hendren's custom on these occasions to smoke a pipe of bacca and to give expression to his views upon things in general, of which from early youth he had been an accomplished critic.

Mr. Hendren, it seemed, had a relation by marriage who followed the sea. He was a rough sort of man, in Mr. Hendren's opinion not exactly what you might call polished. Still, he followed a rough sort of trade, and this was a rough sort of boy, and Mr. Hendren didn't mind having a word with Alec – the name of the relation – and see what could be done in the matter.

"I don't know about that," said Mother. "They might ill-use him, and he's been ill-used more than enough already."

"Quite so," said Mr. Hendren politely, "huffing" the Foreman Shunter. "Quite so, M'ria" – Mr. Hendren was a very old friend of the family – "I quite agree with you there. The sea's a rough trade – rough an' no mistake – Alec can tell you tales that would make your hair rise – but as I say, he's a rough boy – and even the 'igh seas is better than the Work'us."

"Anything is better than that," said Mother. "All the same, I wouldn't like the poor child to be knocked about. You see, he's not very strong; he wants building up, and he's been used that crool by somebody that he's frit of his own shadow."

"Ah," said Mr. Hendren impressively. Impressiveness was Mr. Hendren's long suit. At that time, he was perhaps the most impressive man under sixty in Kentish Town. "Ah," said Mr. Hendren, "I quite understand, M'ria. I'll speak to Alec the first thing tomorrer and see what he can do. Not to be knocked about – but the sea's the sea, you quite understand?"

"My great-uncle Dexter sailed twelve times round the Horn," said Mother with modesty.

"Did he so?" said Mr. Hendren. "Twelve times. Before the mast?"

"Before the mast?" was a little too much for Mother, as Mr. Hendren intended it to be, having no doubt a reputation to keep up.

"I don't know about afore the mast," said Mother stoutly. "I only know that great-uncle Dexter was terrible rough … terrible rough."

"All sailors is terrible rough," said Mr. Hendren, politely "huffing" the Foreman Shunter again. "Still, M'ria, I'll see what I can do with Alec … although, mind you, as I say, Alec's not as much polish as some people."

"Great-uncle Dexter hadn't neither," said Mother. "Foulest-mouthed man I ever heard in my life … and that's saying a good deal." And Mother looked volumes at the Foreman Shunter.

"That so?" said Mr. Hendren, tactfully, crowning his second king. "However … I'll see Alec … first thing tomorrer…"

"Thank you, 'Lijah," said the Foreman Shunter.

VIII

"Alec's" real name was Mr. Thompson. He was a very hirsute man, with whiskers all over him, and at first sight he seemed to bear a very striking resemblance to his arboreal ancestors of the largest and most terrifying species. His distinguished relation, upon introducing him in the course of the next evening to the family circle of No. 12, Gladstone Villas, seemed not in the least proud of him, and to tell the truth about Mr. Thompson, he did appear to be lacking in the graces of the town. His rough pea-jacket and huge, ungainly limbs, his gruff voice and gibbon-like aspect might all have been forgiven on the ground of his calling, but unfortunately he began by expectorating with really extraordinary freedom and vehemence into the kitchen fire, and from that moment it was quite impossible for Mother or any other responsible person to render Mr. Thompson in terms of the higher humanity. This was a pity, because Mr. Thompson had evidently a range of private qualities.

Truth to tell, Mother did not take to Mr. Thompson as kindly as she might have done, and it needed all Mr. Hendren's tact, which was very remarkable even for one who was "wholesale," to enable her to have any truck with "Alec" at all.

"You must be reasonable, M'ria," said Mr. Hendren, urbanely. "It's either the Work'us for this boy or it's the 'igh seas. If it's the latter, you couldn't have a better man than Alec to look after him; if it's the former, of course I wash my hands of the matter."

This flawless logic was strongly approved by the Foreman Shunter.

"'Lijah speaks to the p'int," he affirmed, with a rather doubtful glance in the direction of Mr. Thompson, who was again expectorating into the fire with a display of virtuosity that was almost uncanny.

In the meantime, the boy stood white and trembling in the midst of Johnnie and Alfie and Percy while his fate hung in the balance. Not one of these had taken kindly to Mr. Thompson, in spite of the fact that at frequent intervals the admired Mr. Hendren assured their father and mother that "he was a first-rate seaman."

"Now, this is the crux of the matter," said Mr. Elijah Hendren, bringing in the word "crux" as though he well knew it was only "wholesale" people who were allowed to use such a word at all. "Either the boy goes to sea with Alec, and he couldn't have no better to take charge of him – Alec's a first-rate seaman – else he goes to the Work'us. Now, my boy, which is it to be?" And Mr. Hendren fairly hypnotized the poor waif in father's trousers cut down with the large and rolling eye of an accepted candidate for the honorary treasurership of the Ancient Order of Hedgehogs.

"Now, me lad, which is it to be?" Mr. Hendren's forefinger wagged so sternly that the boy began to weep softly. "Alec'll not eat you, you know. If he says he'll see you through, he'll see you through. Am I right, Alec?"

"Yep," growled Alec, beginning to threaten a further assault upon the kitchen fire.

"Very well, then," said Mr. Hendren. "There you are. What can you ask fairer? You can either go with Alec – Mr. Thompson to you, my boy – else you can be handed over to the police, and they'll send you to the Work'us. Now, boy, which is it to be?" Mr. Hendren put the question with awful impressiveness. "It's a free country, you know. You can take your choice: Alec – Mr. Thompson – or the Work'us?"

If Henry Harper had had a doubt in his mind as to which was the less grim of these alternatives, the casual mention of the police undoubtedly laid it at rest. Mr. Thompson looked capable of eating a boy of his age, but after all that was very little compared with what the police, as Henry Harper knew them, took a pride in doing in the ordinary discharge of their functions.

"I'll go wiv 'im, mister," said Henry Harper, in sudden desperation.

He then hid himself behind his friend Johnnie.

"With Mr. Thompson?"

"Yes, mister."

Henry Harper began to sob, and Alfie and Percy at least didn't blame him. Mr. Thompson was the nearest thing to the wicked ogre in "Jack and the Beanstalk" they had ever seen in their lives.

However, their mother who had the heart of a lion, who was afraid of nothing so long as it was human – and even Mr. Thompson was apparently that – took upon herself to have a little serious discourse with the man of the sea.

"I suppose, Mr. Thompson, this is a decent ship to which you will be taking the poor child?" said she.

It was necessary for Mr. Thompson to roll his eyes fearfully before he could do justice to such a leading question. He was then understood to say in his queer, guttural voice, which seemed to come out of his boots, that the ship was right enough, although a bit hungry at times as all ships were.

"Is the captain of the vessel a gentleman?" demanded Mother at point-blank range.

Mr. Thompson was understood to say that when the Old Man was all right he was all right, but when in drink he was a devil.

"All men are," said Mother, succinctly. "That's the worst of it. But I understand you to say that at ordinary times the captain's a gentleman."

"Yep," said Mr. Thompson, comprehensively.

In spite, however, of this valuable testimonial to the captain's character and status, Mother seemed very loath to put her trust in him or in Mr. Thompson either. For one thing that admirable seaman expectorated again into the kitchen fire, but that apart, the note of primeval extravagance in his outward aspect hardly commended itself to Mother.

"The child is very young," she said, "to be going to sea. And you sailors has rough ways – my great-uncle Dexter always said so. And he was a rough man if you like – not as rough as you are, Mr. Thompson, but still he was rough. And as I say, the boy is not grown yet, there's nothing to him, as you might say; still, as it's you, Mr. Thompson, or the Work'us, I suppose it'll have to be you."

"Quite so, M'ria," interposed Mr. Hendren with marked urbanity.

"Now you quite understand," said Mother. "Mr. Thompson, I hold you responsible for this boy. You'll be good to him, and stand his friend, and teach him seafaring ways, and you'll see that nobody ill-uses him. You'll promise that now, Mr. Thompson. This boy's delicate, and as I say, he's already been knocked about so crool, he's frit of his own shadow."

Mr. Thompson promised with becoming solemnity that he would see no harm came to the boy. Thereupon he seemed to go up a little in Mother's estimation. Moreover, he suddenly took an odd fancy to Johnnie. He produced a foreign penny from his pea-jacket, offered it to Johnnie and asked him what he thought of it, and he seemed so gratified that Johnnie – who had about as much imagination as the leg of a chair – was not in the least afraid of him, that he told Johnnie to keep the penny, and then he fairly took away the breath of everybody, Mother included, by promising magnificently to bring Johnnie a parrot from the West Indies.

Even Mr. Elijah Hendren was impressed by this princely offer on the part of his kinsman by marriage.

"He's rough, o' course," whispered Mr. Elijah Hendren to the Foreman Shunter, "but he means it about the parrot. That's the kind o' man he is, although, mind you, I don't say he's polished."

Whatever doubts might have been entertained for the future of Henry Harper, the parrot somehow seemed to soften them. Even Mother felt that to express misgiving after that would be in bad taste. Mr. Thompson promised that he would see the old man in the course of the morrow, as the *Margaret Carey* had to sail on Friday, but he had no doubt it would be all right as they never minded a boy or two. And then the Foreman Shunter sent Johnnie to the end of the street for a quartern of rum, as there was only beer in the house, and that mild beverage was not the slightest use to a sailor.

Johnnie walked on air. At every shop window he came to he stopped to examine his foreign penny. But what was that in comparison with a real live parrot all the way from the West Indies?

That night, Johnnie was the happiest boy in Kentish Town. He slept with the foreign penny under his pillow, and his dreams were of unparalleled magnificence.

And on the sofa in the kitchen below, tossed and dozed the unhappiest boy in Kentish Town. He had escaped the police by a miracle, he was quit of Auntie, he was free of the selling of matches, but tomorrow or the day after he was leaving the only friends he had ever known. As for the sea and Mr. Thompson and the *Margaret Carey*, there was some subtle but deadly instinct in him that had warned him already. There would be no Mother to wash him and bind his wounds, or to give him fried bacon and see that he came to no harm.

Twice he woke in the middle of the night, sweating with fear, and wildly calling her name.

IX

The next day it rained incessantly from morning till night, and there was just a faint hope in the boy's mind that it might prevent Mr. Thompson coming to fetch him. He clung desperately to this feeble straw, because it was the only one he had, but he was not such a fool as to think that Mr. Thompson was the kind of man who stays at home for the weather. Therefore it did not surprise him at all when he was solemnly told that evening about six o'clock, just after he had had his tea, that Mr. Thompson had come for him.

Sure enough Mr. Thompson had. Moreover, he had come in a cab. All the same, he managed to enter the kitchen with the water running off his pea-jacket on mother's spotless floor, and as he stood blinking fiercely in the gas light, he looked bigger and hairier and less like a human being than ever.

Henry Harper's one instinct was to take a tight hold of Mother's apron. And this he did in spite of the fact that Johnnie and Alfie and Percy were sitting round the table, drinking tea and eating bread and jam. Mother told Henry Harper very gently he must be a man, whereupon he did his best to meet Mr. Thompson boldly. But he made a very poor job of it indeed.

Mr. Thompson, whose speech could only be followed with certainty by specialists, was understood to ask whether the boy's sea chest was ready.

"He has only the clothes he stands in," said Mother, tartly.

Mr. Thompson said that was a pity.

The boy hadn't even an overcoat, and Mother decided to give him quite a good one of Johnnie's – Johnnie bravely saying he didn't mind, although he minded a goodish bit, as he was rather proud of that particular garment.

"Your father will buy you another," said Mother. "I couldn't think of sending any boy to sea without an overcoat."

She also made up a bundle of odds and ends for the boy: a flannel shirt, two much-darned pairs of drawers, a rather broken pair of boots, a knitted comforter, and a pot of marmalade. She then gave him a kiss and put an apple into his hand and told him to be a good boy, and then he was gone.

X

Henry Harper followed Mr. Thompson into the cab that was waiting at the street door. He sat all alone opposite that ogre in the darkness, holding on desperately to the bundle and the apple that Mother had given him. He didn't venture to speak; he hardly ventured to breathe while the cab rumbled and tumbled through the rain. He didn't know where he was going. He only knew that he was going to sea, and he didn't even know what the sea was like, except that it was water and people got drowned in it. There was no sea at Blackhampton.

Mr. Thompson had not much conversation. This may have been due to his superior rank, or because he was one of those strong, silent men who prefer actions to words after the manner of the heroes in the best modern romances. Not that the boy was acquainted with any of these; he could neither read nor write; indeed, it was quite true what the Foreman Shunter had said, "that he didn't know A from a bull's foot," although, of course, that was speaking figuratively.

Mr. Thompson sat grim and silent as the tomb. But suddenly, by the light of a passing lamp, the boy saw his right hand enter his pocket and come out with a large clasp knife in it. This he opened at his leisure. And then all at once a wave of terror swept over Henry Harper. This man was Jack the Ripper.

That famous person was then at his zenith. He had lately committed his fourth horrible murder in Whitechapel. The boy knew that as an undoubted fact, because he had cried the crime in the streets of Blackhampton, and had sold out twice in an hour. Moreover, he knew as a fact – extremely well informed contemporaries had told him – that Jack the Ripper was a sailor.

It was no use attempting to struggle or cry out. Besides, he was now paralyzed with terror. The only thing there was to hope for was that the Ripper would kill him before he started to mutilate.

They passed another street lamp, and the boy saw that Mr. Thompson had something else in his hand. It was a fantastically shaped metal case. The murderer opened it coolly and took out a queer, dark looking substance. He cut a piece off with his knife, put it in his mouth, then closed the blade and returned it to his pocket. The boy began to breathe again. It was a plug of tobacco.

All the same, Henry Harper knew he was not yet out of the wood. He was as sure as he was sitting in a four-wheeler – a thing he had never done before in his life – that this large and hairy sailor with the clasp knife was the murderer. Moreover, as he cast terrified glances through the wet windows into the sodden streets, he was certain this was Whitechapel itself. Everything looked so dark and mean and sullen, with noisome alleys on every hand and hardly any lamps to see them by, that full-grown women, let alone boys of thirteen, could be done to death in them without attracting the police.

It was not a bit of use trying to escape. Jack the Ripper would cut his throat if he moved hand or foot. The best thing he could do was to keep still. That was all very well, but he was sick with fear. He was being taken into the heart of Whitechapel to be done to death as Mary Ann Nichols and Catherine Morton – he was always very good at remembering names – and the other victims had been. He was familiar with all the details; they had been enormously discussed; there wasn't a newsboy in Blackhampton who hadn't his own private theory of these thrilling crimes. For instance, Henry Harper himself had always maintained that the sailor was a big sailor, and that he had a black beard. He had little thought a week ago when he had presented this startling theory to young Arris with a certain amount of intellectual pride that he would so soon be in a position to prove it.

They came to some iron gates. The cab stopped under a lamp. Mr. Thompson put his head out of the window. If the boy had not been petrified with terror now would have been his chance. But he couldn't move.

The Ripper began to roar like a bull at some unseen presence, and soon the gates moved back and the cab moved on. And then about a minute later, for the first time in his life, the boy saw the mast of a ship. He knew it was a ship. He had seen pictures in shop windows. There was one shop

window in particular he frequented every Friday evening, which always displayed the new number of the *'Lustrated London News* and the *'Lustrated London News* was great on ships. This was a kind of glorified canal boat with masts, but according to the *'Lustrated London News*, and there could be no higher authority, it was undoubtedly a ship.

In his excitement at seeing it, he nearly forgot who was sitting opposite. Perhaps he wasn't going to be mutilated in Whitechapel after all. There might be yet a chance; the murderer had not again taken his knife out of his pocket. But suddenly another special edition flashed through his memory: "'Orrible crime on the 'Igh Seas. Revolting Details." And then he knew that he was being decoyed to the high seas, in order that this man could work his will upon him at his leisure in circumstances of unspeakable ferocity.

The cab stopped again. Mr. Thompson opened the door and got out. It was still raining very hard. There was a lamp close by, and the boy could see the water falling in long, stealthy, narrow rods. The murderer told him roughly to come out. He came out at once. Had he had the pluck of a mouse, he would have run for it. But he was quaking and trembling, his knees were letting him down.

The driver of the cab, a grotesque in an oilskin cape with a hat to match it, dragged a large wooden box tied round with cord off the roof of his machine and with the help of its owner lowered it to the ground. By the time this was done there came out of the darkness three or four strange men, who moved with the stealth of those used to the night. They gathered round the box and its owner with humble offers of their assistance.

The boy's first thought was that these scarecrows were confederates of the eminent murderer. But this theory was soon shattered. At any rate, if confederates they were, Mr. Thompson seemed to have little use for them at the moment. Without a word of warning he suddenly ran boot first at one of these wretches and sent him spinning into the mud. The man fell with a howl and rose with a curse, and then made off into the darkness muttering imprecations, in the wake of his companions who had disappeared already.

The boy could only feel that murderers of Mr. Thompson's class act according to their tastes in these little matters; but the cabman was rather impressed. He had made up his mind to stand out for "eight and a kick," but he now took what was given him without a word. As a matter of fact, he was given five shillings, which was considerably under his legal fare, but he did not venture to question Mr. Thompson's arithmetic. He moved off at once, but proceeded to take it out of his wretched horse as soon as he got through the dock gates.

In the meantime, Mr. Thompson was left standing beside his sea chest in the rain, and Henry Harper stood beside it also, convulsively clutching in one hand the bundle Mother had made up for him and in the other the apple she had given him.

Should he run for it? What was the use? All at once Mr. Thompson shouldered his sea chest with an air of quiet ferocity, and growled something that sounded like, "Git forrard, bye."

XI

Expecting to be kicked into the sea if he didn't do as he was told, the boy got forrard at once. Mr. Thompson and his sea chest followed close upon his heels. Henry Harper crossed a couple of crazy planks with water lying far down underneath them, Mr. Thompson and his sea chest always just behind him, and then to his wonder and dismay he suddenly realized that he was on the deck of a ship.

He hadn't time to take his bearings, or to make out at all clearly what the deck of a ship was like, before he was descending a ladder into total darkness which smelled like a sewer. A nigger with rings in his ears came forward with a light, and Mr. Thompson asked if the Old Man was in the cabin, and the nigger said, "Yessah."

Mr. Thompson led Henry Harper to the cabin, which was a kind of room, about twelve feet by ten, miserably lit by a single dirty oil lamp. Here the smell of sewage that pervaded the vessel was rather genteelly mingled with an odor of rum. The Old Man was in the cabin right enough. He was not a very prepossessing old man to look at; to begin with, he hardly looked old at all. He was just a rough, middle-aged seaman, with a sodden, half-savage face, with a peculiar light in it that somehow reminded the boy of Auntie when she had been to the public. It might almost have been taken for humor, had not humor some little reputation as a Christian quality.

"Bye, sir," said Mr. Thompson, briefly.

"Bye," said the Old Man, with equal brevity. He then passed half a bloodshot eye over the shrinking figure in Johnnie's overcoat and father's trousers cut down, and said, "Git forrard, bye," in a tone that no boy of judgment would ever hesitate for a single moment to obey.

Henry Harper got forrard at once, although he didn't know where. He found his way out of the cabin somehow, and made ahead for a light that was suspended in an iron bracket. Under this he stood a moment trying to collect himself, or as much of himself as he had managed to bring aboard the ship, when Mr. Thompson came along and led him through various queer sorts of passages and up a flight of stairs to a place which he called the cook's galley.

The cook, a fearful looking Chinaman, received Henry Harper with a scowl, which, however, was merged at once in an extreme servility towards Mr. Thompson who was clearly a person of high consequence aboard the *Margaret Carey*. In deference to Mr. Thompson's wishes, the cook, whose name was Sing, showed the boy a sort of small manhole between the copper and the galley stairs where he could put his gear, and also where he could creep in and rest whenever his duties permitted.

"All snuggee," said Sing, with an ingratiating grin for the exclusive benefit of Mr. Thompson. Moreover, still further to impress Mr. Thompson with his humanity, Sing kindly presented the boy with a piece of moldy biscuit and a couple of scraps of broken meat. Mr. Thompson, having formally started Henry Harper on his career, withdrew. Sing resumed his scowl and pointed to an inverted bacon box on which his new assistant could sit and eat his supper.

But Henry Harper found very little in the way of appetite. The biscuit was so hard that it seemed to require a chisel, and the meat so salt and tough that any expenditure of jaw power was unlikely to prove a profitable investment. There still remained the apple that Mother had given him. But not for a moment did he think of eating that. It would have been sacrilege. Mother had her shrine already in his oddly impressionable mind. No matter how long he might live, no matter where his wanderings might take him, he never expected to come across such a being again. He wrapped the apple reverently in Percy's red-spotted handkerchief. He would always keep that apple in order that he might never forget her.

Sing, like Mr. Thompson, was not a great hand at conversation. Nevertheless, he had his share of natural curiosity. His wicked little yellow eyes never left the boy's face. He seemed unable to make up his mind about him, but what sort of a mind it was that he had to make up greatly puzzled and perplexed Henry Harper, who had only once seen a real live Chinaman before, and that was

through the open door of the worst public in Blackhampton. Sing looked capable of anything as he sat scowling and smoking his pipe, but it was a subtler and deeper sort of capability than the sheer Jack-the-Ripperishness of Mr. Thompson. It was reasonably certain that Mr. Thompson would be content with a knife, although he might do very fearful things with it in moments of ecstasy; with Sing there might be every sort of horror known to the annals of crime.

After Sing had gazed in silence at Henry Harper for about an hour, he pointed to the manhole, which meant that the boy had better get to bed. Henry Harper took the hint as quickly as possible, not in the least because he wanted to get to a bed of that kind, but because the Chinaman seemed of a piece with Mr. Thompson and the Old Man. Implicit obedience was still the only course for a boy of judgment. Those wicked little yellow eyes, about the size of a pig's, held a promise he dared not put into words. Henry Harper had still a morbid dread of being hurt, in spite of the fact that he had been hurt so often.

With a heart wildly beating, he crawled into the manhole and he knew at once, oversensitive as he was, that it was full of things that crept. He shuddered and nearly screamed, but fear of the Chinaman restrained him. It was so dark in that chasm between the copper and the galley stairs that he couldn't see his hand when he held it in front of him; also it was so hot, in spite of the cold November rain he had left in the good and great world outside this death trap, that he could hardly breathe at first; yet as soon as he had got used to the temperature he took off Johnnie's overcoat and wrapped his face in it in order to prevent unknown things crawling over it.

He didn't cry himself to sleep. Tonight he was too far gone for tears. If only he had had a bit of pluck he would have chosen the police. The thing they did was awful, but after all it could not compare with a 'orrible crime on the 'igh seas. The police did one thing sure and you knew the worst – but there were a thousand ways of murder, and very likely more for Jack the Ripper and a Chinaman.

He hardly dared to breathe, indeed was scarcely able to do so, with Johnnie's overcoat covering his eyes and mouth. But even as he lay gasping in a sweat of fear, there was just one thing, and the only one he had to which to cling. And he clung to it desperately. It was the sacred apple he had had the luck to wrap in the red-spotted handkerchief which Percy had given him.

Sleep was not to be thought of. Something was racing and hammering upon his brain. After a lapse of time which seemed like hours, but was only twenty minutes in point of fact, he began to understand that this turmoil had a definite meaning. An idea was being born.

When at last it burst upon his mind it was nothing very remarkable. "Henry Harper, you must find your way out of this before it's too late. Never mind the police. You must find your way out of this, Henry Harper."

He took Johnnie's overcoat from his face and sat up and listened. It was absolutely pitch dark. At first there was not a sound. Then he thought he could detect a gentle scratching, a noise made by a rat near his head. But he could hear nothing of the Chinaman. No doubt he had gone to bed. The boy rose with stealthy care, and well it was that he did, otherwise he would have hit his head against the under side of the galley stairs.

It was so dark that he couldn't see the opening from the manhole into the galley itself. But he found it at last and climbed out cautiously. The lamp in the galley had gone out; there was not a glimmer of light anywhere. He had no knowledge of the Chinaman's whereabouts, he could not find the opening which led into the other parts of the ship. He groped about as noiselessly as he could, hoping to avoid the one and to find the other, and then suddenly there came a truly terrible sound. He had put his foot on the Chinaman's face.

He heard the Chinaman get up in his rage; he even knew where he was although it was too dark to see him. His heart stood still; the Chinaman was feeling for him in the darkness; and then he was obliged to feel himself for the Chinaman in order to avoid him.

Suddenly he caught a glimpse of a light. He ran towards it not knowing what else to do. But in almost the same moment the Chinaman had seen it too, and also had seen him go. Near the light was

a ladder which ascended to some unknown region. The boy raced up the ladder with the Chinaman upon his heels. As soon as he got to the top the sharp, wet air caught his face. He was on the deck. He dashed straight ahead; there was no time for any plan. The Chinaman was at the top of the ladder already and trying to catch him by the leg.

Running like mad, the boy gained a yard or two along the deck. But he had no real chance of escape, for he had not the least notion of his bearings or of the hang of the ship. And luck did not favor him at all. Suddenly he tripped over an unseen obstacle and fell heavily, and then the Chinaman came down on him with both knees, fastening fingers upon his throat.

He was not able to cry out, the Chinaman saw to that. But if Sing was going to kill him, he could only hope it would be soon. This, however, was not the cook's intention. He merely led Henry Harper back to the galley by the ear, gave his arm a ferocious twist which made the boy gasp, and then sent him flying head-first into the stifling darkness of the manhole with the help of a well-timed boot. The boy pitched in such a way that he was half stunned, and when at last he came fully to himself light was creeping through a tiny chink in the manhole, and he knew that it was morning. Also he knew by the curious lapping sound made by the waves under the galley stairs that the ship was already at sea.

XII

Yes, it was true, the ship was already at sea. He was lost. And hardly was there time for his mind to seize this terrible thought when the Chinaman looked into the manhole. As soon as he saw the boy was sitting up, a broad grin came on his face and he beckoned him out with a finger.

The boy obeyed at once, and tumbled unsteadily into the galley. But as soon as he tried to stand on his legs he fell down. The Chinaman with a deep smile pointed to the bacon box, and the boy sat on it, and then tried as well as he could to prevent his head from going round.

Luckily, for the time being, the Chinaman took no further notice of Henry Harper, but set about the duties of the day. It was nearly six bells of the morning watch, and he had to serve breakfast for the crew. This consisted partly of a curious mixture that was boiling in the copper, which was called wet hash, and was esteemed as a luxury, and partly of an indescribable liquid called coffee, which was brewed out of firewood or anything that came handy, and was not esteemed as anything in particular by the most catholic taste.

Long before the boy's head had done spinning six bells was struck, and the members of the crew came into the galley with their pannikins. There were sixteen all told, excluding the Old Man and the superior officers, of whom Mr. Thompson was the chief. Henry Harper's breath was taken away by the sight of this wolfish looking lot. He had seen distinguished members of the criminal classes massed around the Judge's carriage at the Assizes at Blackhampton, just for old sake's sake as it were, and to show that they still took a friendly interest in the Old Cock; but these were tame and rather amateurish sort of people compared with the crew of the *Margaret Carey*.

As a body of seamen the crew of the *Margaret Carey* was undoubtedly "tough." Dagoes, Yanks, Dutchmen and a couple of not very "white" Britishers; they came into the galley, one after another, took up their pannikins of wet hash, and as soon as they saw and smelled it, told Mr. Sing what they thought of him in terms of the sea. Henry Harper was chilled to the marrow. He was still seated on the bacon box, his head was still humming; but he seemed to remember that Auntie, even on Saturday nights, when she came home from the public, was not as these.

At the end of a fortnight the boy was still alive. At first he was so dreadfully ill that his mind was distracted from other things. And as he did not lack food as soon as he could eat it, body and soul kept together in a surprising way.

He was still in great dread of the Chinaman and of the nights of torment in the crawling darkness of the manhole under the galley stairs. But he kept on doing his job as well as he could; he took care to be alert and obliging to whomever crossed his path; he tried his honest best to please the Chinaman by saving him as much trouble as possible, thus at the end of a fortnight not only his life was intact, but also his skin.

The truth was he was not a bad sort of boy at all. For one thing he was as sharp as a needle: the gutter, Dame Nature's own academy, had taught him to be that. He never had to be told a thing twice. Also he was uncommonly shrewd and observant, and he very soon came to the conclusion that the business of his life must be to please the Chinaman.

In this task he began to succeed better than he could have hoped. Sing, for all his look of unplumbed wickedness, did not treat him so badly as soon as he began to make himself of use. For one thing he got a share of the best food that was going, the scraps from the cabin table, and this was a very important matter for one of the hungriest boys aboard one of the hungriest ships athwart the seas.

In the course of the third week, Henry Harper began to buck up a bit. His first experience of the motions of a ship at sea had made him horribly unwell. As night after night he lay tossing and moaning as loudly as he dared in the stifling darkness between the boiler and the galley stairs, without a friend in the world and only an unspeakable fate to look forward to, he felt many times that he was going to die and could only hope the end would be easy.

However, he had learned already that the act of death is not a simple matter if you have to compass it for yourself. Every morning found him limp as a rag, but always and ever alive. And then gradually he got the turn. Each day he grew a little stronger, a little bolder, so that by the end of the third week he had even begun to feel less afraid of the Chinaman.

In the middle of the fourth week, he had a bit of real luck. And it came to him in the guise of an inspiration. It was merely that one night when the time came for turning into that stifling inferno which he still dreaded with all his soul, he literally took his courage in his hands. He spread Johnnie's overcoat in the farthest corner of the galley itself, made a pillow of the bundle that Mother had given him, and then without venturing a look in the direction of the Chinaman very quietly lay down and waited, with beating heart, for the worst.

Strange to say, the worst never happened. For a long time he expected a boot in his ribs. Every nerve was braced to receive it. But the slow minutes passed and no boot came. All this time Sing sat on the bacon box, smoking solemnly, and taking an occasional sip of grog from his pannikin. And then suddenly Henry Harper went quite deliciously to sleep, and dreamed that he was in the West Indies, and had caught a real live parrot for Johnnie.

It was a really wonderful sleep that he had. He did not wake once till four bells struck in the morning watch, the proper time for starting the duties of the day. These began with lighting the fire and filling the copper. He rose from his corner a new boy, and there was Sing lying peacefully in the middle of the floor, not taking notice of anyone. And the odd thing was that during the day Sing showed him no disfavor; and when night came and it was time once more to turn in, Henry Harper lay down again in the corner of the galley. There was now no need to await the arrival of the Chinaman's boot.

XIII

The floor of the galley gave Henry Harper his first start on the road to manhood. He got so far along it as to be only a little afraid of the Chinaman. But that was his limit for some little time to come. Meanwhile he continued in the punctual discharge of his duties, and for some months things seemed to go fairly well with him. But at last there came a fatal day when the sinister figure of Mr. Thompson appeared once more upon the scene. The boy was told briefly and roughly that the ship was short-handed, that he was wanted aft at once, and that he had better take his truck along with him.

From that hour the current of his life was changed. For many a day after that he was to know neither peace nor security. He had been called to bear a part in the terrific fight that went on all day and all night, between this crazy windjammer and the forces of nature.

For days and weeks the brain of Henry Harper was a confused horror of raging seas, tearing winds, impossible tasks, brutal and savage commands. He did his best, he kept on doing it even when he didn't know what he was doing, but what a best it was! He was buffeted about the slippery decks by the hand of man or the hand of nature; he understood less than half of what was said to him, and even that he didn't know how to set about doing. The *Margaret Carey* was so ill found that she seemed at the mercy of the great gales and the mighty seas of the Atlantic. She was flung and tossed to all points of the compass; her decks were always awash; her furious and at times half demented Old Man was always having to heave her to, but Henry Harper was never a hand's turn of use on the deck of that hell ship.

He was so unhandy that in the port watch they christened him "Sailor." There wasn't a blame thing he could do. He was so sick and sorry, he was so scared out of his life that the Old Man used to get furious at the mere sight of him.

For weeks the boy hardly knew what it was to have a whole skin or a dry shirt. The terrible seas got higher and higher as they came nearer the Horn, the wind got icier, the Old Man's temper got worse, the ship got crazier, the crew got smaller and smaller by accidents and disease; long before Cape Stiff was reached in mid-Atlantic the *Margaret Carey* was no habitation for a human soul.

Sailor's new berth in the half-deck was always awash. Every time he turned into it he stood a good chance of being drowned like a rat in a hole. The cold was severe. He had no oilskins or any proper seaman's gear, except a pair of makeshift leggings from the slop chest. Day after day he was soaked to the skin, and in spite of Johnnie's overcoat and all the clothes in the bundle Mother had given him, he could seldom keep dry.

Every man aboard the *Margaret Carey*, except the Old Man and Mr. Thompson, and perhaps the second mate, Mr. MacFarlane, in his rare moments of optimism, was convinced she would never see Frisco. The crew was a bad one. Dagoes are not reckoned much as seamen, the Dutchmen were sullen and stupid, none of the Yankees and English was really quite white. The seas were like mountains; often during the day and night all available hands had to be literally fighting them for their lives.

All through this time Henry Harper found only one thing to do, and that was to keep on keeping on. But the wonder was he was able even to do that. Often he felt so weak and miserable that he could hardly drag himself along the deck. He had had more than one miraculous escape from being washed overboard. His time must come soon enough, but he could take no step to bring it nearer, because he felt that never again would he be able to arrange the matter for himself. Something must have snapped that night he had waited on the wrong rail for the engine. Bowery Joe, the toughest member of the crew, a regular down-east Yankee, who liked to threaten him with a knife because of the look on his face, had told him that he ought to have been born a muddy dago, and that he was "short of sand."

There seemed to be something missing that others of his kind possessed. But he had many things to worry about just then. He just kept on keeping on – out of the way of the Old Man as well as he could – out of the way of the fist of the second mate – out of the way of the boots and the

knives of all and sundry – out of the way of the raging, murderous sea that, after all, was his only friend. The time came when sheer physical misery forced him to be always hiding from the other members of the crew.

One morning the Old Man caught him skulking below after all hands had been piped on deck to get the canvas off her. The Old Man said not a word, but carried him up the companion by the nape of the neck as if he had been a kitten, brought him on the main deck, and fetched him up in the midst of his mates at the foot of the mast. He then ordered him aloft with the rest of them.

In absolute desperation Sailor began to climb. He knew that if he disobeyed he would be flung into the sea. Clinging, feet and claws, like a cat, for the sake of the life he hadn't the courage to lose, he fought his way up somehow through the icy wind and the icier spray that was ever leaping up and hitting him, no matter how high he went. He fought his way as far as the lower yardarm. Here he clung helpless, dazed with terror, faint with exhaustion. Commands were screamed from below, which he could not understand, which he could not have obeyed had he understood them, since he now lacked the power to stir from his perch. His hands were frozen stiff; there was neither use nor breath in his body; the motions of the ship were such that if he tried to shift a finger he would be flung to the deck he could no longer see, and be pulped like an apple. So he clung frantically to the shrouds, trying to keep his balance, although he had merely to let go an instant in order to end his troubles. But this he could not do; and in the meantime commands and threats were howled at him in vain.

"Come down, then," bawled the Old Man at last, beside himself with fury.

But the boy couldn't move one way or the other. At that moment it was no more possible to come down than it was to go up higher.

They had to roll up the sails without his aid. After that the fury of the wind and the sea seemed to abate a bit. Perhaps this was more Henry Harper's fancy than anything else; but at least it enabled him to gather the strength to move from his perch and slide down the futtock shrouds to the deck.

The Old Man was waiting for him at the foot of the mast. He took him by the throat.

"One o' you fetch me a bight o' cord," he roared quietly. He had to roar to make himself heard at all, but it was a quiet sort of roar that meant more than it could express.

He was promptly obeyed by two or three. There was going to be a bit of fun with Sailor.

Frank, an Arab and reckoned nothing as a seaman, was the first with the cord, but Louis, a Peruvian, was hard on his heels. The boy wondered dimly what was going to happen.

The Old Man took hold of his wrists and tied them so tightly behind him that the double twist of cord cut into his thin flesh. But he didn't feel it very much just then. The next thing the boy knew was that he was being dragged along the deck. Then he realized that he was being lashed to the mizzen fife-rail while several of the crew stood around grinning approvingly. And when this was done they left him there. They left him unable to sit or to lie down, or even to stand, because the seas continually washed his feet from under him. There was nothing to protect him from the pitiless wind of the Atlantic that cut through his wretched body like a knife, or the yet more pitiless waves that broke over it, soaking him to the skin and half dashing out his life. Mercifully the third sea that came, towering like a mountain and then seeming to burst right over him, although such was not the case, left him insensible.

He didn't know exactly how or when it was that he came to. He had a dim idea that he was very slowly dying a worse death than he had ever imagined it was possible for anything to die. It was a process that went on and on; and then there came a blank; and then it started again, and he remembered he was still alive and that he was still dying; and then another blank; and then there was something alive quite near him; and then he remembered Mother and tried to gasp her name.

When at last Henry Harper came to himself he found he was in the arms of Mr. Thompson. The Old Man with the devil in his eyes was standing by; all around the Horn he had been drinking heavily. Mr. MacFarlane, Mr. Petersen the third mate, and some of the others were also standing by.

The boy heard the Old Man threaten to put Mr. Thompson in irons, and heard him call him a mutinous dog. Mr. Thompson made no reply, but no dog could have looked more mutinous than he did as he held the boy in his arms. There was a terrible look on his face, and Mr. MacFarlane and the others held back a bit.

It chanced, however, that there was just one thought at the back of the Old Man's mind, and it was this that saved Mr. Thompson, also the boy and perhaps the ship. He feared no man, he had no God when he was in drink, and he didn't set much store by the devil as a working institution; but drunk or sober he was always a first-rate seaman and he cared a great deal about his ship. And he knew very well that except himself Mr. Thompson was the only first-rate seaman aboard the *Margaret Carey*, and that without his aid there was little chance of the vessel reaching Frisco. It was this thought at the back of the Old Man's mind that prevented his putting Mr. Thompson in irons.

The boy lay longer than he knew, hovering much nearer to death than he guessed, in Mr. Thompson's bunk, with Mr. Thompson's spare oilskins over him, his dry blankets under him, and Mr. Thompson moistening his lips with grog every few minutes for several hours. It was a pretty near go; had Henry Harper known how near it was he might have taken his chance. But he didn't know, and in the course of two or three days nature and Mr. Thompson and perhaps a change in the weather pulled him through.

All the way out from London until the third day past the Horn the weather had been as dirty as it knew how to be; and it knows how to be very dirty indeed aboard a windjammer on the fifty-sixth degree of latitude in the month of December, which is not the worst time of the year. But it suddenly took quite a miraculous turn for the better. The wind allowed Mr. Thompson to shift the course of the *Margaret Carey* a couple of points in two hours, so that before that day was out the old tub, which could not have been so crazy as she seemed to Henry Harper, was running before it in gala order with all her canvas spread.

During the following morning the sun was seen for the first time for some weeks, and the port watch gave it a cheer of encouragement. By nightfall the wind and the sea were behaving very well, all things considered, and they shared the credit with Mr. Thompson of having saved the life of Henry Harper.

The Old Man's temper began to mend with the weather. He was not all bad – very few men are – it was merely as Mr. Thompson had said, that when drink was in him he was a devil. The dirtier the weather the more drink there was in him, as a rule. When the sun shone again and things began to look more hopeful, the Old Man's temper improved out of all knowledge.

The Old Man set such store by seamanship that it was the one quality he respected in others. His world was divided into those who were good seamen and those who were not good seamen. If you were a good seaman he would never forget it in his dealings with you; if you were not a good seaman, whatever else you might be, you could go to hell for all that he cared. And of all the seamen he had shipped in the course of a pretty long experience as a master mariner, he had never, in his own judgment, come across the equal of Mr. Thompson. This was his fifth time round the Horn with that gentleman as mate, and each voyage increased the Old Man's respect for his remarkable ability. He had never seen anything better than the style in which the mate got the old ship before the wind; nothing could be more perfect than the way she was moving now under all her canvas; and that evening in the cabin, after supper, the Old Man broached a bottle of his "pertickler" and decided upon some little *amende* to the mate for having threatened to put him in irons.

"That bye is no use on deck," he said. "He had better come here and make himself useful until he gets stronger."

The Old Man meant this for a great concession, and Mr. Thompson accepted it in the spirit in which it was offered. The Old Man now regarded the boy as part and parcel of Mr. Thompson's property, and it was by no means certain, such is the subtle psychology of active benevolence, that Mr. Thompson did not regard the boy in that light also. At any rate the boy looked on the mate

as his natural protector. Henry Harper craved for someone to whom he could render homage and obedience. He would have reverenced the Old Man had he been worthy of such an emotion; as it was he had to fall back on the mate, a rough man to look at, and a very bad one to cross, but one to whom he owed his life, and the only friend he had.

It took Henry Harper a fortnight to get fairly on his legs again. Then he was able to come on deck as far as the break of the poop. Much seemed to have happened to the world since he had been below. He found the sun shining gloriously; there was hardly a puff of wind; the crew in high good humor were cheerfully mending sails. It was not the same ship, it was not the same sea, it was not the same world he had left a long fortnight ago. He was amazed and thrilled. The slum-bred waif had no idea that any world could be like this. Moreover, the convalescent stage of a dangerous illness was cleansing and renewing him. For the first time since he had been born he forgot the burden of his inheritance. He was suddenly intoxicated by the extraordinary majesty and beauty of the universe.

The sea, what an indescribably glorious thing! The sky without a cloud in it! He had never seen any sky at Blackhampton to compare with this. The air, how clean and bright it was! The mollymawks with their beautiful white breasts were skimming the green water. It was a glorious world. He heard a dago singing at his work. He almost wanted to sing as well.

He got a needle and some packthread and sat down on the afterhatch and suddenly made up his mind to do his best. He could make nothing of his life, or of his circumstances. His wretched body was all sore and bruised and broken; his head was still going round and round; he didn't know what he was, or why he was, or where he was; but a very glorious earth had been made by Somebody, just as a very miserable thing had been made by Somebody. However, let him keep on keeping on.

He had gone too far, thus early in life, for self-pity. Besides there was too much happening around him, too much to look at, too much to do to think very deeply about himself. Yes, it was a very wonderful world. The sun began to warm his veins as he sat plying his needle, such a sun as he had never known. The colors all around were simply marvelous; blues and yellows, greens and purples! There was nothing at Blackhampton to compare with them. The dago seated near had set down his needle, had dabbled his hand in the water, had begun to sing louder than ever. Yes, Blackhampton was not to be compared with such a world as this.

For the next three weeks things began to go a bit kinder for Henry Harper. Each day grew warmer, more gorgeous; there was no wind to speak of; the sea became so smooth that it might have been the West Norton and Bagsworth canal. And as it was clearly realized by the rest of the crew that for some mysterious reason Sailor was now under the extremely powerful protection of Mr. Thompson, they were careful to keep their hands off him, and also their boots. This made life a little duller for them, but a bit easier for Henry Harper.

XIV

Three weeks or so this good life went on. Horror unspeakable was at the back of the boy's mind. There were things he could never forget as long as life lasted. At any moment they might return upon him; but during those days of sun and calm Henry Harper was in an enchanted world. It was so warm and fair that he retrieved Johnny's overcoat and Mother's bundle from his bunk where they had been a long time soaking, spread them on the deck to dry, and had them for a pillow when he slept that night underneath the stars.

But the good days were soon at an end. Each one after the twenty-second got hotter and hotter; the twenty-fourth was quite unpleasant; the heat on the twenty-seventh became almost unbearable. They were now in the doldrums in a dead calm.

"Shouldn't wonder if we find trouble before we get to the China seas." Thus Mr. MacFarlane, the second mate, a prophetic Scotsman, in Henry Harper's hearing.

Mr. MacFarlane was right, as he generally was in these matters – more so perhaps than he had reckoned, for they managed to find a good deal of trouble before they got to the China seas.

For several days there was no stir in the air. The heat grew worse; and then one afternoon it suddenly became very dark, without any apparent reason. Mr. Thompson went about with a face uglier than usual, and Mr. MacFarlane said they were cutting straight into the tail of a typhoon; and then there was an anxious consultation with the Old Man on deck.

Mr. Thompson's face got uglier as the sky got darker, and the sea became like a mixture of oil and lead. It was almost impossible to breathe even on deck; there wasn't a capful of air in the sails or out of them; all the crew had their tongues out; and instead of eating his supper that evening the Old Man opened a bottle of his "pertickler."

The boy turned in that night, in the new berth that had been found for him by Mr. Thompson's orders, with a feeling that something was going to happen. For one thing the Old Man looked like having the devil in him again before the morning. Moreover, the heat was so intense that sleep seemed out of the question.

However, the boy fell asleep unexpectedly, and was presently awakened in a stifling darkness by a sudden awful and incredible sound of rushing and tearing. He sat up gasping for air and wondering what it was that had happened.

Afraid to stay where he was, for it was certain that something terrible had occurred, he got out of his bunk and groped his way as well as he could through the darkness, and at last made his way on deck. Here it was as black as it was below; all the lights were out; the sky was like pitch; the sea could not be seen; but he knew at once the cause of the tearing and rushing. It was the wind.

The wind was blowing in a manner he would not have thought to be possible. Its fury was stupendous. It was impossible to stand up in it, therefore he did the only thing that he could: he lay down.

Some time he lay on the deck, unable to move forward a yard, or even to return whence he came, such was the pressure that held him down. Then it was he felt a new kind of terror. This was more than physical, it seemed beyond the mind of man. They had had high winds and fierce storms at Blackhampton, but never had he known or guessed that there could be a thing of this kind. Such a wind was outside nature altogether. It seemed to be tearing the ship into little bits.

Several times he tried to rise to his feet in the darkness and find his way below, but it was no use. Flesh and blood could not stand an instant against such a rage as that. And then as he lay down again full length, clutching the hot deck itself for safety, he began to wonder why no one else was about. Slowly the truth came to him, but not at first in a form in which he could recognize or understand it. It seemed to creep upon him like a nightmare. All the crew and Mr. Thompson and

the Old Man had been blown overboard, and he was drifting about the world, a strange unbelievable world, alone on the ship.

He began to shriek with terror. Yet he didn't know that. It was not possible to hear the sound of his own voice. He lay writhing on the deck in a state of dementia. A caveman caught and soused by his first thunderstorm could not have been more pitiable. He was alone, in this unknown sea, in this endless night, with all eternity around him.

Again he tried to rise from the deck, but he was still held down, gasping and choking, by a crushing weight of wind. It would be a merciful thing if the ship went to the bottom. But even if it did his case might be no better. Then came the thought that this was what had happened. The ship had foundered, and this tempest and this appalling darkness were what he had heard the Reverend Rogers speak of, at a very nice tea party at the Brookfield Street Mission Hall to which he had once been invited, as "the life to come."

Henry Harper remembered that "the life to come" was to be a very terrifying business for "those who had done evil," and according to the Reverend Rogers all men had done evil; moreover, he had dwelt at great length on the Wrath of the Supreme Being who was called God.

Henry Harper was in the presence of God. This terrific wind in which it was impossible for any created thing to exist was the Wrath of the Supreme Being. Such a thought went beyond reason. It was a key which unlocked secret chambers in the inherited memory of Henry Harper. Many were the half remembered things of which he had had experience through former eons of time. The idea of God was the chief of these.

Half mad with subconscious recollection, he began to crawl like a snake on his belly along the deck. The key was unlocking one chamber after another in his soul. Now he was a fire worshiper in a primeval forest; now he was cleansing his spirit in the blood of sacrifice; now he was kneeling and praying; now he was dancing round a pile of stones. He was flooded with a subconscious memory of world-old worship of the Unseen, a propitiation of the thing called God.

He was a caveman in the presence of deity. Shuddering in every pulse of his being he pressed his face to the hot boards of the deck. The secret chambers of his mind were assailing him with things unspeakable. Even the Reverend Rogers could not have imagined them.

All at once he rolled up against something soft in the darkness. With a thrill of hope he knew it was a living thing. It was a dago bereft like himself. Lying with his sweating face pressed to the deck, he also was in the presence of deity.

The noise was too great for their voices to be heard, but each knew that the other was alive, and they lay side by side for two hours, contriving to save their reason by the sense of each other's nearness.

After that time had passed they were able to crawl into shelter. Here they found others of the crew in varying states of terror and stupefaction. But it was now getting lighter, and the wind was blowing less. The worst was over. It seemed very remarkable that the *Margaret Carey* was still afloat.

In two hours more the wind had died. An hour after that they saw the sun again and the ship kept her course as if nothing had occurred. Indeed, nothing had occurred to speak of, in Mr. Thompson's opinion, except that two members of the crew had fetched away and gone overboard, and they could ill afford to lose them, being undermanned already.

It was now the boy's duty to wait on the Old Man in the cabin. This was more to his taste than having to lend a hand in the port watch. He was not the least use on deck, and was assured by everybody that he never would be, but in the cabin he was very alert and diligent, and less inefficient than might have been expected. He was really very quick in some ways, and he laid himself out to please the Old Man with his cheerful willingness, not that he felt particularly willing or cheerful either, but he knew that was the only way to save his skin. At any rate, Sailor was not going back into the port watch if he could possibly help it.

For such a boy as he, with an eager, imaginative brain always asking questions of its profoundly ignorant owner, the cabin was a far more interesting place than the half-deck or the forecastle. There was a measure of society in the cabin; Mr. Thompson and Mr. MacFarlane sometimes fraternized with the Old Man, after supper, and their discourse when they turned to and smoked their pipes and discussed a noggin of the Old Man's "pertickler," of which they were great connoisseurs, was very well worth hearing.

Henry Harper found that when the Old Man was not upset by the weather – which generally brought on a drinking attack – he was human more or less. Although prone to outbursts of fury, in which anything might occur, he was by no means all bad. In fact, he was rather by way of being religious when the elements were in his favor. When at a loose end he would read a chapter of the Bible, which was of the large family order, adorned the cabin sideboard, and had apparently been handed down from father to son. If the weather was good there was often an instructive theological discussion with Mr. MacFarlane after supper. The second mate was very full of Biblical lore. His interpretation of Holy Writ was not always identical with that of his superior officer, and being a Scotsman and a man of great parts and character, he never temporized or waived a point. Sometimes he flatly contradicted the Old Man who, to Henry Harper's intense surprise, would take it lying down, being an earnest seeker after light in these high matters. For all that, some of the Old Man's Biblical theories were quite unshakable, as, for instance, that Jonah could not have been a first-rate seaman.

In spite of being short-handed, things began to go a bit better. There was very little wind, the sea was like glass, the sun was beautifully warm all day, and at night a warm and glowing sky was sown thickly with stars. Rather late one afternoon, while the Old Man was drinking his tea, Mr. MacFarlane appeared in the cabin with a look of importance, and reported land to starboard.

"Nonsense, Mr. MacFarlane," said the Old Man. "We are a good nine days from anywhere."

Mr. MacFarlane, however, maintained with polite firmness – land to starboard not being a theological matter – that land there was on the starboard bow, N. by NE. as well as he could reckon.

"Nonsense, Mr. MacFarlane," said the Old Man.

But he rose from his tea at once, took his binoculars and clambered on deck. A little while afterwards he returned in a state of odd excitement, accompanied by Mr. Thompson, and they spread out a chart on the cabin table.

"By God," said the Old Man, "it's the Island of San Pedro." And he suddenly brought his fist down on the chart. Moreover, he pronounced the name with a curious intensity. "By God," he said, "I haven't seen that island for four and twenty years. We tried to dodge a typhoon, but was caught in her, and went aground on the Island of San Pedro. There was only me and the ship's bye as lived to tell the tale."

The voice of the Old Man had grown hoarse, and in his eyes was a glow of dark excitement. Suddenly they met full and square the startled eyes of the boy who was listening eagerly.

"Only me and the ship's bye," said the Old Man, his voice falling lower. "We lived six weeks on shellfish and the boots and clothes of the dead."

The voice of the Old Man sank to a thrilling whisper. He then said sharply: "Bye, a bottle o' brandy."

When Henry Harper brought the brandy his face was like a piece of white chalk.

"Only me and the ship's bye," repeated the Old Man in a hoarse whisper. "The others went ravin' mad. We knifed 'em one by one; it was the kindest thing to do. The bye didn't go ravin' mad till afterwards. And there weren't no Board of Trade Inquiry."

"No, sir," said Mr. Thompson, nodding his ugly head and speaking in a slow, inhuman voice.

"No Board o' Trade inquiry," said the Old Man. "Nine men and the ship's bye on the Island o' San Pedro, latitude eighteen degrees, longitude one hundred and twenty-four degrees." He placed his finger on the chart on the cabin table. "There y'are, Mr. Thompson. And on'y me to tell the tale. The bye was gibbering like a baboon by the time he was fetched aboard the *Para Wanka*, Chinese barque

out o' Honolulu. I was a bit touched meself. Thirteen weeks in 'orspital. Remarkable recovery. That's the knife on the sideboard in the leather case."

Mr. Thompson took the knife in his hand reverently.

"No Board o' Trade inquiry, sir," he said.

"No Board o' Trade inquiry," said the Old Man, taking a good drink of neat brandy. "Come on deck and let us have another look at the Island of San Pedro."

Overcome by a sense of uncanny fascination the boy followed the Old Man and the mate up the companion and to the deck. Long the Old Man gazed at the island through his glass, but made no further remark. Then, having seen enough of it, he handed the glass to Mr. Thompson, who made no remark either, but gazed with a mask of steel at the Island of San Pedro.

Mr. MacFarlane, who stood by, pointed with his finger suddenly.

"Sharks," he said.

"Aye," said the Old Man with queer eyes, "these roads is full of 'em. Aye, there they are, the pretties!"

The boy followed Mr. MacFarlane's finger over the deck rail, and sure enough, quite near to the ship was a number of creatures whose upturned bellies shone a strange dead white.

"Come every morning to look at us, the pretties, on the Island of San Pedro." The Old Man laughed in a queer way. "The tide brought 'em more than one nice breakfast, but they never had no luck with me and that bye. He! he! he!"

The Old Man went down to the cabin rather unsteadily, but laughing all the way.

XV

"Shouldn't wonder if it's a wet night," said Mr. MacFarlane to the mate in the hearing of the boy.

This was a technicality that Henry Harper didn't understand, but it held no mystery for Mr. Thompson, who smiled as he alone could and growled, "Yep."

After supper, the Old Man sat late and drank deep. He pressed both his officers to share with him. He was always passing the bottle, but though Mr. Thompson and Mr. MacFarlane were able to keep a stout course, they were simply not in it with the Old Man. For one thing both were men of principle who preferred rum to brandy, and very luckily for the *Margaret Carey*, Mr. Thompson in certain aspects of his nature preferred his ship to either.

The Old Man talked much that night of the Island of San Pedro, overmuch perhaps for the refined mind of the second mate. The boy stood listening behind the Old Man's chair, ready to go about as soon as the Old Man should be at the end of the bottle.

"No, we didn't touch human flesh," said the Old Man. "I give you my word of honor as a Christian man. But we caught one o' the Chinamen at it – two of us was Chinamen – an' we drew lots as to who should do him in. There was three white men left at that time, including myself and excluding the bye. Andrews it was, our bosun, who drawed the ticket, and as soon as he drawed it I thought he looked young for the work. He wanted to pass it to me, but I said no – he'd drawed the ticket an' he must do the will o' God."

"'Scuse my interrupting, sir," said Mr. MacFarlane, "but how did ye know it was the will o' God?"

"Because he'd drawed the ticket, you fool," snapped the Old Man. "Didn't I say he'd drawed the ticket?"

"Yep," nodded Mr. Thompson.

"Very well, then," said the Old Man with acerbity. "It was up to Andrews to do the will o' God. He said he'd not do it then, but he'd wait until the morning. I said, 'There's no time like the present,' but he was Scotch, and he was obstinate, an' the mornin' never come for Andrews. He began to rave in the night, as we all lay together on the sand, with the Chinaman in the middle, and at the screech o' dawn when I give him the knife, I see at once he was off his rocker."

"Up the pole, sir?" asked Mr. MacFarlane, politely.

"Yes, blast you," said the Old Man. "Don't you understand plain English? Bye, another bottle."

As the boy's livid face was caught by the lamp on the table while he bent over it with the new bottle, the Old Man suddenly laughed. There was something in the boy's eyes that went straight to his heart.

"By God!" he said, refilling his glass. "That's a good idea. We'll put Sailor here ashore on the Island o' San Pedro first thing in the morning. We will, so help me!" And the Old Man winked solemnly at Mr. Thompson and the second mate.

Mr. Thompson smiled and the second mate laughed. The idea itself was humorous, and the Old Man's method of expressing it seemed to lend it point.

"That's a good idea," said the Old Man, bringing his fist down so sharply that the brandy out of his glass slopped over on the tablecloth. "Sailor here shall be put ashore at sunrise on the Island of San Pedro. We'll never be able to make a man of him aboard the *Margaret Carey*. We'll see what the tigers and the lions and the wolves and hyenas 'll do with him on the Island o' San Pedro."

"Sirpints, Cap'n?" inquired Mr. Thompson innocently, as he returned the look of his superior officer.

"God bless me, yes, Mr. Thompson!" said the Old Man in a thrilling voice. "That's why you've got to keep out o' the trees. My advice to Sailor is – are ye attendin', young feller? – always sleep on

sand. Sirpints won't face sand, and it's something to know that, Mr. Thompson, when you are all on your lonesome on the Island of San Pedro."

"I've heard that afore, sir," said Mr. Thompson, impressively. "Never knowed the truth o' it, though."

"True enough, Mr. Thompson," said the Old Man. "Sirpints has no use for sand. Worries 'em, as you might say."

"I've always understood, sir," said Mr. MacFarlane, whose humor was apt to take a pragmatical turn, "that it's only one sort o' sirpint what's shy o' sand."

The Old Man eyed the second mate sullenly.

"O' course it is," he said, "and that's the on'y sort they've got on the Island o' San Pedro. The long, round-bellied sort, as don't bite but squeeges."

"And swallers yer?" said Mr. Thompson.

"And swallers yer. Pythons, I think they're called, or am I thinkin' o' boar constrictors?"

"Pythons, sir," said Mr. MacFarlane. "What swallows a bullock as easy as it swallows a baby."

"Yes, that's right." The Old Man turned to grin at the boy, but there was pathos in his voice. "Sailor, my bye, you must keep out o' the trees. Promise me, Sailor, you'll keep out o' the trees."

The boy had to hold on by the table. The laughter that rang in his ears could only have one meaning. He knew that the Old Man with the drink in him would be as good as his word. Suddenly, by a queer trick of the mind, Henry Harper was again a newsboy crying, "'Orrible Crime on the 'Igh Seas," along the streets of Blackhampton.

XVI

Sailor didn't sleep that night in his bunk in the half-deck but lay in the lee of the chart-house looking up at the stars. Now and again, he could hear little plop-plops in the water, and these he knew were sharks. It was a night like heaven itself – not that Sailor had had much experience of heaven so far – wonderfully calm, with the stars so bright that even as he lay he could see the outline of the Island of San Pedro. It was so clear in the starlight that he could see little dark patches here and there rising to the skyline. These were trees he was sure.

He didn't try to sleep, but lay waiting for the dawn, not thinking of what he should do, or what he ought to do. What was the use? He was alone and quite helpless, and he was now in a state altogether beyond mere terror; he was face to face with that which his mind could not meet. But he was as sure as those stars were in the sky, that as soon as it was light the Old Man would put him ashore on the Island of San Pedro, and that even Mr. Thompson would raise no protest.

Once or twice he tried to think, but it was no use. His brain was going. He must lie there and wait. How long he lay he didn't know, but it seemed hours before he heard the morning watch come on deck, and even then it was some while from daylight. For a long, long time he lay stupefied, unable to do anything but listen for the stealthy plop-plop of the sharks in the water. And when the daylight came, at first it was so imperceptible that he did not notice it.

At last the sun got up, and then he saw that right away to starboard the sky was truly wonderful, a mass of delicate color which the eye could not grasp. For a moment, the soul of Henry Harper was entranced. Heaven itself was opening before him. His mind went back to the Reverend Rogers and the Brookfield Street Mission. With a stab of shame for having so long forgotten them, he suddenly recalled the words of the Reverend Rogers upon the subject of the Golden Gates. Flooded by an intolerable rush of memories, he imagined he could see and hear the Choir Invisible. The fowls of the air were heralding a marvelous sunrise in the Pacific.

For a moment he forgot the Island of San Pedro. Another door of memory had been unlocked. He was in a flood of golden light. There straight before him were the gates of paradise. He was looking at the home of God. Suddenly Henry Harper thought he could hear the voices of the angels. He strained his eyes to starboard. Real angels with wings would be a wonderful sight. The fowls of the air were in chorus, the sharks were plopping in the water, the gates of heaven were truly marvelous – orange, crimson, gold, purple, every color he had ever seen or imagined, and he had seen and imagined many, was now filling his eyes with ecstasy. At every pore of being he was sensing light and sound. He was like a harp strung up. And then in the midst of it all, there came the voice of the Old Man as he climbed on deck, with Mr. Thompson at his heels. And then … and then … the heavens opened … and Henry Harper saw … and Henry Harper saw…

There was a great plop in the water, much nearer than that of the sharks. There followed heartrending screams and cries, enough to appall the soul of man. All hands rushed to the side of the ship.

"It's on'y Sailor," said the Old Man, with a drunken growl. "Let him drown."

In the next instant there came another great plop in the water.

"What the hell!" roared the Old Man.

"Please, sir, Mr. Thompson's gone for him."

"Mr. who? … blast you!"

"Mr. Thompson, sir."

"Then lower the gig." The Old Man began to stamp up and down the deck, roaring like a maniac. "Lower the gig, I tell ye." His fingers were the first on the davits. "And all hands pipe up a chantey … louder … louder … blast you! … to keep off those sharks."

The Old Man's voice was hoarse and terrible, as he worked like a demon to launch the boat.

"Louder, louder, blast you!" he kept roaring. The smooth, dead-white bellies lay all around, shining in the sunrise. The Old Man was in a frenzy; it seemed as if the boat would never be got into the water.

At last it was launched and the Old Man was the first to jump into it, still roaring like one possessed. He beat the water furiously with a piece of spar. But Mr. Thompson with the boy in tow seemed to be holding his own very well. Either the sharks had not seen them, or they dare not approach in the midst of that terrific outcry.

They were soon in the boat, Mr. Thompson being a powerful swimmer; and when at last they were back on the deck of the *Margaret Carey*, the boy lay gasping and the mate stood by like some large and savage dog, shaking the water out of his eyes.

"Whatever made you do that, Mr. Thompson?" expostulated the Old Man. He was a good deal sobered by the incident, and his manner showed it.

Mr. Thompson did not answer. He stood glowering at a number of the hands who had gathered round.

"Don't none o' you gennelmen touch that bye," he said with a slow snarl, and he pointed to the heap on the deck.

They took Mr. Thompson's advice. Most people did aboard the *Margaret Carey*. Even the Old Man respected it in the last resort, that was if he was sober enough to respect anything. But with him it was the seamanship rather than the personal force of his chief officer that turned the scale. It was the man himself to whom less exalted people bowed the knee.

It took the boy the best part of two days to recover the use of his wits. And even then he was not quite as he had been. Something seemed to have happened to him; a very subtle, almost imperceptible change had taken place. He had touched bottom. In a dim way he seemed to realize that he had been made free of some high and awful mystery.

The knowledge was reflected in the thin brown face, haunted now with all manner of unimaginable things. But the feeling of defeat and hopelessness had passed; a new Henry Harper had come out of the sea; never again was he quite so feckless after that experience.

For one thing, he was no longer afraid to go aloft. During the warm calm delightful days in the Indian Ocean when things went well with the ship, and there happened to be nothing doing in the cabin, Sailor began to make himself familiar with the yards. All through the good weather he practiced climbing assiduously, so that one day the Old Man remarked upon it to the mate, demanding of that gentleman, "What has happened to Sailor? He goes aloft like a monkey and sleeps in the cross-trees."

Mr. Thompson made no reply, but a look came into his grim face which might be said to express approval.

The Old Man and the mate were the first to recognize that a change had taken place in Sailor, but the knowledge was not confined exclusively to them. It was soon shared by others. One evening, as Sailor sat sunning himself with the ship's cat on his knee, gazing with intensity now at the sky, now at the sea, one of the hands, a rough nigger named Brutus, threw a boot at him in order to amuse the company. There was a roar of laughter when it was seen that the aim was so true that the boy had been hit in the face.

Sailor laid the cat on the deck, got up quietly, and with the blood running down his cheek came over to Brutus.

"Was that you, you – ?" To the astonishment of all he addressed in terms of the sea the biggest bully aboard the ship.

"Yep," said the nigger, showing his fine teeth in a grin at the others.

"There, then, you ugly swine," said Sailor.

In an instant he had whipped out one of the cabin table knives, which he had hidden against the next attack, and struck at the nigger with all his strength. If the point of the knife had not been blunt the nigger would never have thrown another boot at anybody.

There was a fine to-do. The nigger, a thorough coward, began to howl and declared he was done. The second mate was fetched, and he reported the matter at once to the Old Man.

In a great fury the Old Man came in person to investigate. But he very soon had the rights of the matter; the boy's cheek was bleeding freely, and the nigger was more frightened than hurt.

"Get below you," said the Old Man savagely to the nigger. "I'll have you in irons. I'll larn you to throw boots."

That was all the satisfaction the nigger got out of the affair, but from then boots were not thrown lightheartedly at Sailor.

XVII

After many days of ocean tramping with an occasional discharge of cargo at an out of the way port, the ship put in at Frisco. Here, after a clean up, a new cargo was taken aboard, also a new crew. This was a pretty scratch lot; the usual complement of Yankees, Dutchmen, dagoes, and an occasional Britisher.

For a long and trying fifteen months, Sailor continued on the seas, about all the oceans of the world. At the end of that time he was quite a different boy from the one who had left his native city of Blackhampton. Dagoes and niggers no longer did as they liked with him. He still had a strong dislike, it was true, to going aloft in a gale, but he invariably did as he was told to the best of his ability; he no longer skulked or showed the white feather in the presence of his mates. Nevertheless, he was always miserably unhappy. There was something in his nature that could not accept the hateful discomforts of a life before the mast, although from the day of his birth he had never known what it was to lie soft. He was in hell all the time. Moreover, he knew it and felt it to the inmost fiber of his being; the soul of Henry Harper was no longer derelict.

The sense of the miracle which had happened off the Island of San Pedro abided with him through gale and typhoon, through sunshine and darkness, through winter and summer. It didn't matter what the sea was doing, or the wind was saying, or the Old Man was threatening, a miracle had happened to Henry Harper. He had touched bed rock. He had seen things and he had learned things; man and nature, all the terrible and mysterious forces around him could do their worst, but he no longer feared them in the old craven way. Sailor had suffered a sea change. The things in earth and heaven he had looked upon none could share with him, not even Mr. Thompson, that strange and sinister man of the sea, to whom he owed what was called "his life"; nay, not even the Old Man himself who had lived six weeks on shellfish on the Island of San Pedro.

When the *Margaret Carey* had been to Australia and round the larger half of the world, she put in at Frisco again. Here she took another cargo and signed on fresh hands for a voyage round the Pacific Coast. Among the latter was a man called Klondyke. At least, that was the name he went by aboard the *Margaret Carey*, and was never called by any other. At first this individual puzzled Henry Harper considerably. He shared a berth with him in the half-deck, and the boy – now a grown man rising sixteen – armed with a curiosity that was perfectly insatiable, and a faculty of taking lively and particular notice, found a great deal to interest him in this new chum.

He was about twenty-four and a Britisher, although Sailor in common with most of his shipmates thought at first that he was a Yankee. For one thing, he was a new type aboard the *Margaret Carey*. Very obviously he knew little of the sea, but that didn't seem to trouble him. From the moment he set foot aboard, he showed that he could take good care of himself. It was not obtrusive but quietly efficient care that he took of himself, yet it seemed to bear upon the attitude of all with whom he had to do.

Klondyke knew nothing about a windjammer, but soon started in to learn. And it didn't seem to matter what ticklish or unpleasant jobs he was put to – jobs for which Sailor could never overcome a great dislike – he had always a remarkable air of being in this hard and perilous business merely for the good of his health.

Klondyke said he had never been aloft before in his life, and the first time he went up it was blowing hard from the northeast, yet his chief concern before he started was to lay a bet of five dollars with anybody in the starboard watch that he didn't fall out of the rigging. But there were no takers, for there was not a man aboard who would believe that this was the first time he had gone up on a yard.

It was not many weeks before Klondyke was the most efficient ordinary seaman aboard the *Margaret Carey*. And by that time he had become a power among the after gang. As one of the

Yankees, who was about as tough as they made them but with just a streak of the right color in him, expressed it, "Klondyke was a white man from way back."

The fact was, Klondyke was a white man all through, the only one aboard the ship. It was not a rarefied or aggressively shining sort of whiteness. His language on occasion could be quite as salt as that of anybody else, even more so, perhaps, as he had a greater range of tongues, both living and dead, from which to choose. He was very partial to his meals, and growled terribly if the grub went short as it often did; he also set no store by dagoes and "sich," for he was very far from believing that all men were equal. They were, no doubt, in the sight of God, but Klondyke maintained that the English were first, Yankees and Dutchmen divided second place, and the rest of sea-going humanity were not on the chart at all. He was always extremely clear about this.

From the first day of Klondyke's coming aboard, Sailor, who was very sharp in some things, became mightily interested in the new hand in the wonderful fur cap with flaps for the nose and ears, who went about the ship as if he owned it; while after a time the new hand returned the compliment by taking a friendly interest in Sailor. But that was not at first. Klondyke, for all his go-as-you-please air, was not the kind of man who entered easily upon personal relations. Moreover, there was something about him which puzzled Henry Harper. He spoke a kind of lingo the boy had never heard before. It was that as much as anything which had made Sailor think he was a Yank. He had not been used to that sort of talk at Blackhampton, nor was it the kind in vogue on the *Margaret Carey*. If not exactly la-di-da, had it been in the mouth of some people it would have been considered a trifle thick.

Sailor's intimacy with Klondyke, which was to have an important bearing upon his life, began in quite a casual way. One afternoon, with the sea like glass, and not a puff of wind in the sails, they sat together on the deck picking oakum to keep them from idleness, when Klondyke suddenly remarked: "Sailor, don't think me inquisitive, but I'm wondering what brought you to sea."

"Inquisitive" was a word Sailor had not heard before, and he could only guess at its meaning. But he thought Klondyke so little inquisitive that he said at once quite simply and frankly, "Dunno." He then added by way of an afterthought, although Klondyke was a new chum and rated the same as himself, "Mister."

"No, I expect not," said Klondyke, "but I've been wondering a bit lately" – there was something very pleasant in Klondyke's tone – "how you come to be aboard this hell ship. One would have thought you'd have done better ashore."

Sailor was not able to offer an opinion upon that.

"In some kind of a store or an office?"

"Can't read, can't write."

"No?" Klondyke's eyebrows went up for a fraction of an instant, then they came down as if a bit ashamed of themselves for having gone up at all. "But it's quite easy to learn, you know."

Sailor gasped in astonishment. He had always been led to believe that to learn to read and write was a task of superhuman difficulty. Some of his friends at Blackhampton had attended a night school now and again, but none of them had been able to make much of the racket of reading and writing, except one, Nick Price, who had a gift that way and was good for nothing else. Besides, as soon as he really took to the game a change came over him. Finally, he left the town.

"I'd never be able to read an' write," said Sailor.

"Why not?" said Klondyke. "Why not, like anybody else … if you stuck it? Of course, you'd have to stick it, you know. It mightn't come very kind at first."

This idea was so entirely new that Sailor rose with quite a feeling of excitement from the upturned bucket on which he sat.

"Honest, mister," he said, gazing wistfully into the face of Klondyke, "do you *fink* I could?"

"Sure," said Klondyke. "Sure as God made little apples."

Sailor decided that he would think it over. It was a very important step to take.

XVIII

Klondyke's library consisted of two volumes: the Bible and "Don Quixote." Sailor knew a bit about the former work. The Reverend Rogers had read it aloud on a famous occasion when Henry Harper had had the luck to be invited to a real blowout of tea and buns at the Brookfield Street Mission. That was a priceless memory, and Henry Harper always thought that to hear the Reverend Rogers read the Bible was a treat. Klondyke, who was not at all like the Reverend Rogers in word or deed, said it was "a damned good book," and would sometimes read in it when he was at a bit of a loose end.

It was by means of this volume that Sailor learned his alphabet. Presently he got to spelling words of two and three letters, then he got as far as remembering them, and then came the proud day when he could write his name with a stump of pencil on a stray piece of the *Brooklyn Eagle*, in which Klondyke had packed his tooth brush, the only one aboard the *Margaret Carey*.

"What is your name, old friend?" Klondyke asked.

"Enry Arper."

"H-e-n with a Hen, ry – Henry. H-a-r with a Har, p-e-r – Harper."

"There ain't no aitch in Arper," said Sailor.

"Why not?"

Enry Arper was Sailor's own private name, which he had been given at his birth, which he had used all his life. He had always felt that as it was the only thing he owned, it was his to do with as he liked. Therefore he was determined to spell it according to his fancy. He wouldn't admit that there could possibly be an aitch in Arper; and for some little time his faith in Klondyke's competence was a bit shaken, for his mentor was at pains to make out that there could be and was.

Henry Harper stuck to his ground, however.

"It's me own name," he said, "an' I oughter know."

Klondyke was amused. He seemed rather to admire Sailor's attitude. No doubt he felt that no Englishman is worth his salt who doesn't spell his name just as the fancy takes him.

Klondyke's own name was Jack Pridmore, and it was set out with other particulars on the flyleaf of his Bible. In a large and rather crude copperplate was inscribed:

Jack Pridmore is my name,
England is my nation,
Good old Eton College
Gave me a lib'ral education.
Stet domus et
Floreat Etona.

The arms of Eton College with the motto "Floreat Etona" were inscribed on the opposite page, also in tattoo on the left arm of the owner. In Sailor's opinion, Eton College did flourish undoubtedly in the person of Jack Pridmore. He was a white man all through, and long before Sailor could make out that inscription on the flyleaf of Klondyke's Bible, he was convinced that such was the case.

In Sailor's opinion, he was a good one to follow anywhere. Everything in Klondyke seemed in just the right proportion and there was nothing in excess. He was new to the sea, but he was not in the least green or raw in anything. You would have to stay up all night if you meant to get ahead of him. So much had he knocked about the world that he knew men and cities like the back of his hand, and he had the art of shaking down at once in any company.

All the same, in Sailor's opinion, he had odd ideas. For one thing, he set his face against the habit of carrying a knife in your shirt in case the dagoes got above themselves.

"It's not quite white, you know, old friend," said Klondyke.

"Dagoes ain't white," said Sailor.

"No; and that's why we've got to show 'em how white we are if we are going to keep top dog."

This reasoning was too deep for Sailor.

"Don't see it meself. Them dagoes is bigger'n me. If I could lick 'em, I'd lick 'em till they hollered when they started in to fool around. But they are real yaller; none on 'em will face a bit o' sheffle."

"No," said Klondyke, "and they'll not face a straight left with a punch in it either."

Klondyke then made a modest suggestion that Sailor should acquire this part of a white man's equipment. He was firmly convinced that with the rudiments of reading and writing and a straight left with a punch in it, you could go all over the world.

At first Sailor took by no means as kindly to the punching as he did to the other branches of knowledge. He wanted a bit of persuading to face Klondyke in "a little friendly scrapping practice" in the lee of the chart house when no one was by. Klondyke was as hard as a nail; his left was like a horse's kick; and when he stood in his birthday suit, which he did once a day to receive the bucket of water he got Sailor to dash over him – another of his odd ideas – he looked as fine a picture of make and muscle as you could wish to see. Sailor thought "the little friendly scrapping practice" was a very one-sided arrangement. His nose seemed to bleed very easily, his eyes began to swell so that he could hardly see out of them, and his lips and ears thickened with barely any provocation at all, whereas he never seemed to get within a yard of Klondyke's physiognomy unless that warrior put down his hands and allowed him to hit it.

By this time, however, Klondyke had laid such a hold on Henry Harper that he didn't like to turn it up. He'd never make a Slavin or a Corbett – it simply wasn't in him – but all that was "white" in Sailor mustered at this chap's call. The fact was, he had begun to worship Klondyke, and when with the "sand" of a true hero he was able to get over an intense dislike of being knocked about, he began to feel a sort of pride in the process. If he had to take gruel from anybody, it had better be from him. Besides, Sailor was such a queer fish that there seemed something in his nature which almost craved for a licking from the finest chap he had ever known. His affection for this "whitest" of men seemed to grow with the punishment he took from him.

One night, after an easy watch, as they lay talking and smoking in their bunks in the dark, Klondyke remarked:

"Sailor, there's a lot o' guts in you."

Henry Harper, who was very far off that particular discovery, didn't know what Klondyke was getting at.

"You've taken quite a lot of gruel this week. And you've stood up to it well. Mind, I don't think you'll ever make a bruiser, not if you practice until the cows come home. It simply isn't there, old friend. It's almost like hitting a woman, hitting you. It is not your line of country, and it gets me what you are doing aboard this blue-nose outfit. How do you stick it? It must be hell all the time."

Henry Harper made no reply. He was rather out of his depth just now, but he guessed that most of this was true.

"I don't mind taking chances, but it's all the other way with you. Every time you go aloft, you turn white as chalk, and that shows what grit you've got. But your mother ought never to have let you come to sea, my boy."

"Never had no mother," said Sailor.

"No" – Klondyke felt he ought to have known that. "Well, it would have saved mine a deal of disappointment," he said cheerfully, "if she had never had such a son. I'm her great sorrow. But if you had had a mother it would have been another story. You'd have been a regular mother's boy."

Sailor wasn't sure.

XIX

Klondyke was ten months an ordinary seaman aboard the *Margaret Carey*. In that time the old tub, which could not have been so crazy as she seemed to the experts of the forecastle, went around the Pacific as far as Brisbane, thence to Durban, thence again to California. Meanwhile, friendship ripened. It was a great thing for Sailor to have the countenance of such a man as Klondyke. He knew so much more about the world than Sailor did, also he was a real friend and protector; and, when they went ashore together in strange places, as they often did, he had a wonderful knack of making himself respected.

It was not that Klondyke wore frills. In most of the places in which they found themselves a knife in the ribs would have done his business out of hand had that been the case. It was simply that he knew his way and could talk to every man in his own language, and every woman, too, if it came to that. Whether it was a Frisco hash-slinger or a refined bar-lady along the seaboard made no difference to Klondyke. It was true that he always looked as if he had bought the earth at five per cent. discount for cash and carried the title deeds in his pocket, but he had such a way with him that from Vancouver to Sydney and back again nobody seemed to think the worse of him for it.

However, the day came all too soon when a tragic blow fell on Sailor. The ship put in at Honolulu one fine morning, and as soon as Klondyke went ashore he picked up a substitute for himself on the waterfront, whom the Old Man was willing to accept for the rest of his term. Klondyke then broke the news to Sailor that he had just taken a fancy to walk across Asia.

It was a heavy blow. Sailor was very near tears, although he was growing in manhood every week.

"It's no use asking you to come with me," said Klondyke. "We shouldn't have enough brass to go round. Besides, now the *wanderlust* is on me there is no saying where I'll get to. I'm very likely to be sawed up for firewood in the middle of Tibet."

Sailor knew that Klondyke wanted to make the journey alone. Partly to soften the blow and partly as an impulse of friendship, he gave the boy his Bible and also his wonderful fur cap with flaps for the nose and ears.

"Stick to the reading and writing, old friend," were the final words of this immortal. "That's your line of country. It'll pay you in the end. You'll get no good out of the sea. If you are wise, whenever you touch the port of London, you'll give a miss to this old tub. A life on the ocean wave is never going to be the least use to you."

Sailor knew that Klondyke was right. But among the many things he lacked was all power of initiative. As soon as he had lost his prop and stay, he was once more a derelict. For him life before the mast must always be a hell, but he had no power of acting for himself. After Klondyke left the ship there didn't seem anything else to do beyond a mere keeping of body and soul together aboard the *Margaret Carey*. There was nothing else he could do if it came to that. He had only learned to sell papers on land, and he had given the best years of his life to the sea. Besides, every voyage he became a better sailor and was paid a bit more; he even had visions of one day being rated able seaman. Moreover, being saving and careful, his slender store of dollars grew. But his heart was never really in his work, never in the making of money nor in the sailing of the ship.

He was a square peg in a round hole. He didn't know enough about himself or the world or the life he was trying to live to realize fully that this was the case. And for all his weakness of will and complete lack of training, which made his life a burden to him, he had a curious sort of tenacity that enabled him to keep on keeping on long after natures with more balance would have turned the thing up. All the years he was at sea, he never quite overcame the sense of fear the sea aroused in him; he seldom went aloft, even in a dead calm, without changing color, and he never dared look down; he must have lost his hold in many a thrashing northeaster and been broken on the deck like an egg

but for an increasing desire to live that was simple torment. There was a kind of demon in his soul which made him fight for a thing that mocked it.

He had no other friend after Klondyke went. No other was possible; besides, he had a fierce distrust of half his shipmates; he even lost his early reverence for Mr. Thompson, in spite of the fact that he owed him his life, long before the mate left the ship at Liverpool nine months after the departure of Klondyke. Above all, the Old Man in liquor always inspired his terror, a treat to be counted on once a month at least. The years of his seafaring were bitter, yet never once did he change ship. He often thought about it, but unluckily for Henry Harper thought was not action; he "never quite matched up," as Klondyke used to express it. He had a considerable power of reflection; he was a creature of intuitions, with a faculty of observation almost marvelous in an untrained mind, but he never seemed able to act for himself.

Another grave error was that he didn't take Klondyke's advice and stick to reading and writing. No doubt he ought to have done it; but it was such a tough job that he could hardly take it on by himself. The drudgery made him miserable; it brought too vividly to his mind the true friend who had gone out of his life. For the rest of his time aboard the *Margaret Carey* he never got over the loss of Klondyke. The presence and support of that immortal had meant another world for him. For many months he could hardly bear the sight of the Bible his friend had given him, but cherished it as he had once cherished an apple that had also been given him by one who had crossed his orbit in the night of time and had spoken to him in passing.

It is not unlikely that Henry Harper would have sailed the seas aboard the *Margaret Carey* until that miraculous ship went to pieces in mid-ocean or turned turtle round the Horn; it is not unlikely that he would have gone down to his grave without a suspicion that any other kingdom awaited him, had it not been that in the last resort the decision was taken out of his hands.

One day, when he had been rather more than six years at sea, the *Margaret Carey* was within three days of London, whither she was bound with a cargo of wheat, when the Old Man informed him briefly and curtly that she was making her last voyage and that she was going to be broken up. The news was such a blow that at first Sailor could not realize what it meant. He had come to feel that no sort of existence would be possible apart from the *Margaret Carey*. He had lived six crowded and terrible years of worse than discomfort, but he could envisage no future apart from that leaking, crazy, foul old tub.

All too soon the day came, a misty morning of October, when he stepped ashore. A slender bundle was under one arm, Klondyke's fur cap on his head, a weird outfit on his lathlike body, an assortment of clothes as never was on sea or land before; and he had a store of coins of various realms, no less than eighty-five pieces of all sizes and values, from an English farthing to a Mexican five dollars, very carefully disposed about his person.

BOOK II
TRAVAIL

I

The Sailor, shipless and alone, was about to enter the most amazing city in the world.

He was a handsome boy, lean, eager eyed, and very straight in the body in spite of his gear, which consisted mainly of leggings, a tattered jersey, and a wonderful fur cap with flaps for the nose and ears. He was fairly tall, but being as thin as a rail looked much taller than he was. His face and hands were the color of mahogany, his vivid eyes were set with long intercourse with the sea, and in them was a look that was very hard to forget.

He came ashore about ten o'clock in the morning of Tuesday, October the fifth. For a while he stood on the edge of the quay with his bundle under his arm, wondering what he should do. It had not occurred to him to ask advice when he left the ship. Even the bosun had not said, "So long" to him; in spite of six years' service he was a poor seaman with no real heart for his job. He had been a cheap and inefficient hand; aboard a better ship, in the Old Man's opinion, he would have been dear at any price.

His relations with the rest of the crew had never been intimate. Most considered him "soft" or "a bit touched"; from the Old Man to the last joined ship's boy, he was "only Sailor." He never thought of asking what he ought to do; and had he done so his curious intuition told him the answer he would have been likely to receive. They would have told him to go and drown himself.

He had not been ashore a quarter of an hour when he began to feel that it was the best thing he could do. But the queer faculty he had told him at once that it was a thing he would never be able to do now. If he had had any luck it would have been done years ago.

Therefore, instead of jumping over the side of the quay, he suddenly walked through the dock gates into the streets of Wapping. All the morning he drifted aimlessly up one street and down another, his bundle under his arm, but neither plan nor purpose in his mind. At last, he began to feel very hungry, and then he found himself up against the problem of getting something to eat.

Opposite where he stood in the narrow, busy, interminable street was an imposing public house, painted a magnificent yellow. He knew that bread and cheese and a tankard of beer, which he so greatly desired, were there for the asking. But the asking! – that was the rub. He always felt tongue-tied in a public house, and his experience of them in his brief shore-goings in Frisco, Sydney, Liverpool, or Shanghai had never been happy, and had sometimes ended in disaster. But now under the spur of need, he crossed the street and, fixing his will, found his way through the swing doors into the gilded interior of the Admiral Nelson.

Happily, the American bar was at that moment without a customer. This was a great relief to the Sailor. But a truly thrilling bar-lady, replete with earrings, a high bust, and an elaborate false front, gave him an eye of cool disdain as he entered with his bundle, which he laid upon a marble-topped table as far from her as possible; and then, after a long moment's pause, in order to screw his courage to the sticking-point, he came over to the counter.

The sight of the bar-lady brought a surge of previous shore-goings into the Sailor's mind. Quite automatically, he doffed his fur cap as Klondyke would have done in these heroic circumstances, and then all at once she forgot to be magnificent. For one thing, in spite of his grotesque clothes and his thin cheeks and his shock of chestnut hair, he was a decidedly handsome boy. Also he was a genuinely polite and modest one, and the bar-lady, Miss Burton by name, who had the worldly wisdom that owns to thirty-nine and the charm which goes with that period of life, was favorably

impressed. "What can I do for you?" Miss Burton inquired. It was clear that her one desire was to help a shy youth over his embarrassment.

The voice of the fair, so charmingly civilized, at once unlocked a door in the Sailor's memory. With a further slow summoning of will-power which made it the more impressive, he answered precisely as Klondyke had at the Bodega in Frisco: "May I have some bread and cheese, please, and half a pint of beer?"

"Certainly you may," she smiled.

The tone of deference had touched a chord in her. Moreover, he really was handsome, although attired as a very ordinary, not to say a very common, seaman, and evidently far more at home on the deck of a windjammer than in the American bar of an up-to-date public-house.

"Fourpence, please." The bar-lady set before him a pewter flagon of foaming fresh-drawn ale, also a liberal piece of bread and cheese, beautifully white to one accustomed to hard tack aboard the *Margaret Carey*.

In some confusion the Sailor produced a handful of silver coins from his amazing trousers, out of which he solemnly chose a Spanish fourpenny.

"Haven't you got anything English?" she asked, bursting suddenly into a laugh.

Not a little disconcerted, the Sailor began to struggle with a second handful of coins which he took from another pocket. Blushing to the tips of his ears, he finally tendered half a crown.

"Two-and-two change." With an intent smile she marked what he did with it.

Having stowed away the two-and-twopence, he was about to carry his plate of bread and cheese and tankard of beer to the marble-topped table where he had left his bundle, when the lady said, in a royal tone of gracious command, "Why not sit and eat it here?"

The Sailor would have been the last young man in the world to think of disobeying. He felt a little thrill creep down his spine as he climbed up on the high stool exactly opposite her. It was the sort of thrill he had had when under the ægis of Klondyke he had carried out this delicate social maneuver for the benefit of the bar-ladies of Frisco, Liverpool, and Shanghai.

At first, he was too shy to eat.

"Go on. Don't mind me," she encouraged him.

An intensive politeness caused him to cut his bread carefully with his knife. And then before he put it into his mouth he said, in an abrupt, but well modulated Klondyke manner, "'Scuse me, lady, won't yer 'ave a bite yerself?"

The deferential tone belonged to the mentor of his youth, yet the speech itself seemed to owe little to Eton College.

"No, thank you," said Miss Burton. "I'm not hungry." And then, seeing his look of embarrassment, "Now get on with it. Don't mind me."

This was a woman of the world. She was a ripe student of human nature, at least of the trousers-wearing section of human nature. Not for many a day had she been so taken by a specimen of an always remarkable genus as by this boy with the deep eyes, whose clothes and speech and behavior were like nothing on earth.

A true amateur of the male sex, she watched this quaint specimen eating bread and cheese. Presently he raised his tankard aloft, said, "Good 'ealth, lady," in a shy manner, and drank half of it at a gulp.

"When are you going to sea again?" asked Miss Burton, conversationally.

"Never going to sea no more," said the young man, with a strange look in his eyes.

"What – never?" She seemed surprised.

"Never no more. I'll never sail agen afore the mast. I'd sooner starve. It's – it's – "

"It's what?"

"It's hell, lady."

Miss Burton was taken aback by the tone of conviction. After all, this grotesque young sea monster was no true amphibian.

"Well, what are you going to do ashore?" she asked after a pause, while she gazed at him in astonishment.

"Dunno."

"No plans?"

The boy shook his head.

"Like another tankard of mild?"

"Yes, please, lady."

The impact of the bar-lady's easy and familiar style had caused a rather sharp relapse from the Klondyke standard of refinement, but not for a moment did the Sailor forget the dignity of her estate. In spite of the hybrid words he used, the note of subtle deference was never out of his voice; and Miss Burton, unconsciously intrigued by it, became even more interested in this strange product of the high seas.

"How long have you been afloat?" She handed him a second tankard of mild.

"Near six year."

"Six years. Gracious goodness! And you didn't like it?"

"No."

For some reason, the look in his eyes caused her to shiver a little.

"Why did you stick it, then?"

"Dunno."

A pause followed. Then he lifted his tankard again, said, "'Ere's lookin', lady," and drank it right off.

"Well, you are a rum one, you are, and no mistake," murmured Miss Burton, not to the Sailor, but to the beer engine at her side.

II

After the young man from the sea had drunk his second tankard of mild, he sat on the high stool silent and embarrassed. He was hoping that the gorgeous creature opposite would continue the conversation, but he didn't seem to know how to encourage her. However, as soon as a powerful feminine intelligence had told her the state of the case, she said abruptly, "Well, and what are you going to do for a living now you've retired from the sea?"

He gave his head a wistful shake.

The gesture, rather pathetic in its hopelessness, touched Miss Burton.

"Well, you can't live on air, you know."

"No, lady."

"Well, what are you going to do?"

Another shake of the head was the only answer, but as he met her sympathetic eyes, an inspiration came to him.

"Lady," he said humbly, "you don't happen to know of a shack?"

"Know of a what!" The touch of acerbity froze him at once. "Shack!" Coming to his assistance, "What on earth's that?"

"Lodgings, clean and decent, for a single man." The phrase was Klondyke's, and it came to him quite oddly at that moment in all its native purity. His mentor had a private collection of such phrases which he used to roll out for his own amusement when he went ashore. This was one. Henry Harper could see him now, pointing to a dingy card in a dingy window in a dingy street, in some miserable seaboard suburb, and he could hear him saying, "There you are, Sailor, lodgings, clean and decent, for a single man."

Miss Burton pondered. And then the slow smile came again.

"Well, if you really want lodgings clean and decent for a single man I suppose I must try and help you," she said graciously. "But I'm afraid I shan't be much use. They are not quite in my line."

"No, lady."

"Still, Fore Street is full of them. That's the second turn to the left and then the first on the right, and then the first on the right again."

"Yes, lady."

"You might try No. 5 – or No. 7 – or No. 9 – but Fore Street's full of them."

Miss Burton was really trying to be helpful, and the young seaman was very grateful to her, but Klondyke would have known at once that "she was talking out of the back of her neck."

Armed with this valuable information, the young man got off his high stool at last, raised his fur cap once more, with a little of the unconscious grace of its original owner, said, "So long, lady," collected his bundle and went out by the side door. And in the meantime, the bar-lady, who had marked every detail of his going, hardly knew whether to laugh or to shed tears. This was the queerest being she had ever seen in her life.

The Sailor managed to find Fore Street after taking several wrong turnings and asking his way three times. And then his difficulties really began.

Fore Street was very narrow, very long, very gloomy, very dirty. In each of these qualities it seemed well able to compare with any street he had seen in Frisco, in Sydney, in Liverpool, or even in Port Said. But it didn't discourage him. After all he had never been used to anything else.

The first house in Fore Street had a grimy card in a grimier window, exactly in the manner to rejoice the heart of Klondyke. Sailor, who had forgotten almost every syllable of "book-learning" he ever possessed – and at no time had he been the possessor of many – leaped at once to the conclusion that the legend on the card was, "Lodgings, clean and decent, for a single man." Unfortunately it was, "Dressmaking done here."

A very modest knock was answered by a large female of truculent aspect, to whom he took off his cap, while she stood looking at him with surprise, wonder and inveterate distrust of mankind in general and of him in particular spreading over her like a pall.

"Lodgings, clean and decent, for a single man!"

The door of No. 1, Fore Street, was slammed violently in the face of the applicant.

The Sailor nearly shed tears. He was absurdly sensitive in dealing with the other sex and prone to be affected by its hazards and vicissitudes. However, Auntie of the long ago surged into his mind, and the recollection seemed to soften the rebuff. All, even of that sex, were not bar-ladies, sympathetic, smiling, and magnificent. Therefore he took courage to knock at the door of the next house which also had a card in the window. But, unfortunately, that again was not to proclaim lodgings, clean and decent, for a single man, but merely, "A horse and cart for hire."

Here the blow, again from the quarter which knows how to deal them, was equally decisive. A creature, blowsy and unkempt, told him, after a single glance at his fur cap and his bundle and his deep-sea-going gear, "that if he didn't take hisself off and look sharp about it she'd set the pleece on him."

At this second rebuff the Sailor stood at the edge of the curb for some little time, trying to pluck up spirit to grapple with the problem of the next card-bearing domicile, which happened to be the third house in the street. He felt he had begun to lose his bearings a bit. It had come upon him all at once with great force that he was a stranger in a strange land whose language he didn't know.

He had just made up his mind to tackle the next card in the window, let the consequences be what they might, when he felt his sleeve plucked by a small urchin of nine with a preternaturally sharp and racial countenance.

This promising product of the world's greatest race, one Moses Gerothwohl by name, had had an eye fixed on the fur cap ever since he had heard its owner ask at the first house in the street for lodgings, clean and decent, for a single man. This was undoubtedly one of those foreign sailors, perhaps a Rooshian – a Rooshian was the very highest flight of which the imagination of Moses Gerothwohl was at present capable – who, even if they were apt to get drunk on queer fluids and sometimes went a bit free with their knives, were yet very good-natured, and as a rule were pretty well off for money.

"Did yer sye, mate, yer wanted a shakedown?" said Moses Gerothwohl, plucking at the sleeve of the Sailor.

The Sailor looked down at the urchin and nodded.

"Come with me, then," said Moses, stoutly. "And I'll take yer to my grandma's."

He led the Sailor through a perfect maze of by-streets, and through a nest of foul courts and alleys, until at last he came to the house of his grandmother, to whom he presented the foreign seaman.

She was not very prepossessing to look at, nor was her abode enticing, but she had a small room to offer which, if not over clean and decidedly airless, contained a bed of which he could have the sole use for the reasonable sum of sixpence a night.

The young man accepted the terms at once and laid his bundle on the bed. But the old woman did not accept him with equal alacrity. There was a little formality to be gone through before the transaction could be looked upon as "firm." It was usual for the sixpence to be paid in advance.

Grandma was one-fifth tact, three-fifths determination, one-fifth truculence, and the whole of her was will power of a very concentrated kind. She was as tough as wire, and in the course of several tense and vital minutes, during which her wolf's eyes never left Henry Harper's face, that fact came home to him.

It took nearly five minutes for the Sailor to realize that Grandma was waiting for something, but as soon as he did, the way in which he bowed to fate impressed her right down to the depths of her soul. He took an immense handful of silver out of his pocket, the hoarded savings of six years

of bitter toil, chose one modest English "tanner" after a search among many values and nationalities, and handed it over with a polite smile.

The old woman was a very hard nut of the true waterside variety, but the sight of such affluence was almost too much for her. Money was her ruling passion. She went downstairs breathing hard, and with a deep conviction that Rothschild himself was in occupation of her first floor front.

In the meantime, the Sailor had seated himself on the bed at the side of his bundle, and had started to think things out a bit. This was a long and tough job. Hours passed. The small, stuffy, evil-smelling bedroom grew as black as pitch; a heavy October darkness had descended upon the strange land of Wapping, but the Sailor was still thinking very hard; also he was wondering what he should do next.

He hadn't a friend on the wide earth. There was nothing to which he could turn his hand. He could neither read nor write. And in his heart he had a subtle fear of these queer longshore people, although he had sense enough to know that it was a Sailor's duty to trample that feeling under foot. One who six long years had sailed before the mast aboard the *Margaret Carey* had nothing to fear in human shape.

As Henry Harper sat on that patched counterpane in the growing October darkness, unloosing that strange and terrible thing, the mind of man, he was not merely lonely, he was afraid. Afraid of what? He didn't know. But as the darkness grew there came an uncanny feeling under his jersey. It seemed to stick him in the pit of the stomach like the icy blade of a knife. He had tasted fear in many forms, but this kind of stealing coldness was something new and something different.

It grew darker and darker in the room. The sense of loneliness was upon him now like a living presence. There was not a soul in the world to whom he could turn, to whom he might speak, unless it was the old woman downstairs. Yet lonely and rather terrified as he was, his odd intuition told him it would be better to converse with no one than to converse with her.

At last, shivering and supperless, although his pockets were heavy with silver untold, he made up his mind to turn in. It was a counsel of desperation. He was sick to nausea with the business of thinking about nothing, a process which began in nothing and ended in nothing; and at last with a groan of misery, he pulled off his boots and leggings, but without removing his clothes stretched himself on the bed.

If he could have had his wish he would have gone to sleep, never to awake again. But he could only lie shivering in the darkness without any hope of rest. Presently a clock struck two. And then he thought he heard a creak on the stairs and shortly afterwards a stealthy footfall outside his door.

He had never been anything but broad awake. But these creeping noises of the night seemed to string up every sense he had to a point that was uncanny. He held his breath in order to listen – to listen like a frightened animal in a primeval forest that has begun to sense the approach of a secret and deadly foe.

The door of the room came very softly open. It was at the side of the bed, and he could not see it; but he felt an almost imperceptible vibration in the airless stuffiness in which he lay. Moreover, a breathing, catlike thing had entered the room; a thing he could neither hear nor see. It was a presence of which he was made aware by the incandescent forces of a living imagination.

It was too dark to see, there was not a sound to hear, but he knew there was a breathing shape within reach of his left hand.

Suddenly his hand shot out and closed upon it.

He caught something electric, quivering, alive. But whatever it was, a deadly silence contained it. There was not a sound, except a gasp, as of one who has made a sudden plunge into icy water. The Sailor lay inert, but now that live thing was in his hand he was not afraid.

He expected a knife. Realizing that he must defend his face or his ribs or whatever part might be open to attack, he knew he must be ready for the blow.

But a queer thing happened. The attack was not made by a knife. It was made by a human will. As he lay grappling in the darkness with his visitor, slowly but surely he felt himself enfolded by an unknown power. Such a force was beyond his experience. His own will was in a vice; there was a deadly struggle, yet neither moved. Not a sound was uttered, but in the end the Sailor nearly screamed with the overmastering tension which seemed to be pressing out his life. And then he realized that his hand was no longer holding the thing upon which it had closed.

The room was empty again. The darkness was too great for his eyes to tell him, but every sense he had, and at this moment he had more than five, seemed to say that whatever his peril, it had now passed.

He sat up and listened tensely through the still open door. He thought he could hear the creak of a foot on the stairs. Then he began to search his pockets for a box of matches, and suddenly remembered that he hadn't one. But the sense of physical danger had given him a new power over his mind. He was now terribly alert.

His instinct was to get out of that house at once. But a very little reflection showed that such a course was not necessary. It was only an old woman after all.

III

Reinforced with the idea that an old woman with wolf's eyes should have no terrors for a sailor, Henry Harper decided to stay where he was, until daylight at least. In the absence of matches and local knowledge it would not be easy to find a way out of the house in the middle of the night. Moreover if he drew the chest of drawers from under the skylight, which was too thickly plastered with generations of grime to dispense light from the sky or anywhere else, and barricaded the door, he could not be taken by surprise and need have fear of none.

He decided to do this. With arms as tough as steel, he lifted up the chest of drawers bodily and dumped it with a crash against the door. Let Grandma get through that if she could. If she did, God help her.

Yes, God help her. The Sailor suddenly took from his pocket a large, bone-hafted clasp knife. There came the friendly click of the opening blade, he felt the well ground edge lightly with the ball of his thumb. He would lie quietly for Grandma in comfort and in simple faith.

What a fool to let her go! … the trusty friend in his hand was speaking to him… Had you forgotten me? I'd have done Grandma's business in a brace of shakes, you know.

The Sailor, aware of that, felt rather sorry.

But in a little while there was another voice in the room. In climbing back on the bed, one hand touched the fur cap which lay at the foot of it. Instantly, a second voice spoke through the darkness.

"No, Sailor, my boy." What a voice it was! "It ain't quite white. Put your knife in your pocket, old friend. And if Grandma calls again and you feel you *must* set your mark on her, what's wrong with your ten commandments, anyway?"

The tones of Klondyke filled the darkness with their music.

Sailor obeyed instinctively, in the way he had always done. He put the knife back in his pocket with a gentle sigh.

The dirty dawn of a wet October day stole on the young man's eyes as he was attempting a doze on the patched counterpane with his sea-going gear around him. The arrival of an honest Wednesday morning, chill and dismal as it was, dispelled with a magic that seemed ironical any lingering trace he might have of his night fear of Grandma. Was he not a sailor who six long years had sailed the seas? Had he not seen, done and suffered things which held him forever from any human thrall?

But Henry Harper knew better than to ask Grandma what she had got for breakfast.

He chose instead to sling his hook. Gathering his truck back into its bundle, and cramming the magic cap over his eyes, he pulled the chest of drawers away from the bedroom door. Then as soon as there was light enough to see the way he crept down the creaking stairs, unlocked, unbolted and unchained the door below, and slipped out into Wednesday morning.

Wednesday morning received him with a chill spatter of rain. He stood a minute on the cobbles of the squalid yard in front of Grandma's abode – wondering where he was, what he should do, which turn he should take. As a fact, there was only one turn he could take, and that lay straight ahead across the yard, through a short arched passageway leading to a maze of courts and alleys which led heaven knew where.

He proceeded to find out. Bundle under arm, fur cap over eyes, a roll in his gait, the Sailor emerged at last upon a main street, at present only half awake. But it contained a thing of vast importance: a policeman.

The Law in its majesty looked at the Sailor. The Sailor in his simplicity looked at the majesty of the Law. There was a time, six long, long years ago, when he would not have ventured such a liberty with the most august of human institutions. But he was through that phase of his career. By comparison with all the stripes that had since been laid upon him even the police were gentle and humane.

There was not a soul in sight except this solemn London bobby, who stood four square in the Sailor's path.

"Mornin', mister." The Sailor lifted his cap, partly from a sense of fraternity, partly from a proud feeling of being no longer afraid to do so.

The bobby surveyed the strange nondescript that had been washed up by the tide of Wapping. He looked gravely at the bundle and at the fur cap, and then decided in quite an impersonal way not to return their owner's salutation.

The Sailor was not hurt by the aloofness of the Law. He had not expected anything else. After all, the police were the police. He knew that a gulf of several hemispheres was fixed between a real three-stripe rozzer of the Metropolitan Force and a thing it had pleased fate to call by the name of Henry Harper.

"A wrong un, I expect," was the reflection of Constable H23, who always expected a wrong un at that hour of the morning. Upon the spur of this thought, the bobby suddenly turned on his heel, and saw the wrong un, bundle, fur cap and all, crossing the road like an early morning fox at the lure of a favorite hencoop. Moreover, he was crossing it for the reason that he was frantically hungry.

Across the road, at a junction it formed with three others as mean and dismal as itself, was a sight supremely blessed in the eyes of the Sailor. It was nothing less than a coffee stall in the panoply of matutinal splendor. Steaming fluids, with flames glowing under them, flanked one half of its counter; rock cakes, ham sandwiches, beef sandwiches, rolls and butter, and pork pies, splendidly honest and genuine pork pies, flanked the other half of it.

The proprietor of the stall, an optimist in white apron and shirt sleeves, being unmistakably of the male sex had no terrors for the Sailor. Besides, he was flushed with the knowledge that he had just said good morning to the police.

"Cup o' coffee, mister, and one o' them."

Nothing less than a pork pie could meet the need of the Sailor. Moreover, he dived in his pocket, took the first coin that came, which happened to be half a crown, and laid it with true Klondyke magnificence on the counter.

The proprietor of the stall, who added a power of clear thinking to his many qualities, appeared to see in the action as well as in the coin itself, a declaration of financial status on the part of the young seaman in the remarkable gear. Also this view was shared by the only one of his early morning customers who happened to be at the stall: to wit, an almost aggressively capable looking and slightly bow-legged young man with flaming red hair and ears set at right angles to his head, who was devouring a pork pie with quiet ferocity.

A single glance passed between Ike, who owned the stall, and the most influential of his patrons, who answered to the name of Ginger; a single glance and that was all.

"Nothing smaller, sonny?" said Ike, smiling and pleasant. "Not used to big money at seven g.m. Penny the corfee and two pence the pie. Three d." The proprietor raised three fingers and beamed like a seraph.

Ginger suspended operations on the pork pie to see what Dr. Nansen would do next.

The Sailor, with memories of Grandma still in his mind, put back the half-crown carefully before he brought out anything else. He was not going to give himself away this time. Thus he went warily in search of the smallest coin he could disentangle from the welter of all shapes and sizes, of all values and countries, which had been disposed in every pocket of his person. At last he produced one and laid it on the oilcloth modestly, as though he merely valued it at threepence. But in that part of the world it was valued at half a sovereign.

"Rich aunt," said the proprietor of the stall, with respectful humor.

The young man with the flaming hair turned half about, pork pie in hand, to get a better view of Dr. Nansen. This close observer proceeded to chew steadily without venturing any remark.

There was nothing left for the Sailor but to give away his wealth in handfuls now. He had to keep diving into his secret hoard, which out of deference to the thought of Grandma he was still determined not to disclose in bulk and sum. Now came up a Spanish fourpenny, now a Yankee nickel, now a Frenchman, now a Dutchman, now a Mexican half-dollar, now a noble British quid. For several crowded and glorious minutes, Ike and the most influential of his patrons had the time of their lives.

"Thank you, Count," said the proprietor of the stall urbanely, when at last the owner of the fur cap had managed to discharge his liability in coin current in the realm of Great Britain. Then, in common with the entranced Ginger, he watched the young man recruit exhausted nature.

The Sailor having made short and clean work of his first pie went on to his second, then to his second cup of coffee, then to a rock cake, then to a ham sandwich, then to a third cup of coffee, then to a third pie, when Ike and Ginger, his patron, watched with ever growing respect. And then came the business of finding ninepence, and with it a second solemn procession of Yankees and Dutchmen and Spaniards and Mexicans, which roused the respect of Ginger and Ike to such a pitch that it became almost unbearable.

"See here, Vanderbilt!" said Ike at last, yielding reluctantly the hope that the young plutocrat would ever hit the exact coin that would meet the case. "Dig up that half dollar. Me and Ginger" – a polite grimace at Ginger – "can make up one-and-nine."

Ginger, divided between the reserve of undoubted social position – he was earning good money down at the docks – and an honest desire to make himself agreeable in such romantic circumstances, warily produced a grimy and war-worn sixpence and handed it across the counter, looking Ike straight in the eyes as he did so.

"Any use?" said Ginger, calm, aloof, and casual.

In the meantime the Sailor had begun the search for his half-crown. Ginger and Ike waited hopefully, and in the end they were rewarded. The Sailor found it at last, but not before he had made an end of all secrecy. In sheer desperation he disclosed handfuls of his hoard.

"Thank yer, Count. One-and-nine change," said Ike.

IV

The Sailor, fortified by one of the best breakfasts of his life, politely said "Mornin'" to the proprietor of the coffee stall with a lift of the cap not ungraceful, adding a slightly modified ritual for the benefit of Ginger, and stepped out again into the world.

Ike and Ginger, his patron, turned to watch the Sailor go. Neither spoke, but with eyes that glowed in the gray light of the morning like those of a couple of healthy basilisks, they marked all that the young man did. The Sailor walked into the middle of the road to the point where four arteries of traffic met, and then hesitation overcame him as to what he should do next. For a little while, he stood looking up one street and down another with an expression of bewilderment upon his face.

"So long," said Ginger to Ike.

The proprietor of the stall had now none to share his thoughts. He saw Ginger, assured but wary, saunter up to the Sailor as he stood at gaze; saw him touch the young man on the shoulder as if by chance rather than design; saw him speak words which, bend across the counter as he might, he was too far away to catch.

"Lookin' for anything?" were the words that Ginger spoke. Moreover, he spoke them blandly, yet with such a subdued air that he might have been talking in his sleep. The Sailor, whose eyes were far away in the gray mists of the morning, was looking for nothing, it seemed.

"Which way you goin'?" asked Ginger, in the same tone of mild somnambulism.

"Dunno," said the Sailor, his eyes farther away than ever.

"Don't know," repeated Ginger.

At this point, he ventured to look very hard and straight into the face of the Sailor. His knowledge of the human race was pretty considerable for one of his years, and there was something about the wearer of the fur cap that interested him. The face under it was fine-drawn, much tanned by the weather, open as the sky. Ginger then flung an expert's eye over the lean length of blue jersey which surmounted a grotesque pair of leggings.

"You don't know," said Ginger. "Well, suppose you walk as far as the docks?"

The Sailor didn't seem to mind.

"Been long at sea?" inquired Ginger, as with intimate local knowledge he piloted the young man through a series of short cuts.

"Six year."

"Have ye so!" Ginger was surprised and impressed. "Like it?"

The eyes of the Sailor looked straight down into those of Ginger. But he didn't say anything.

"You didn't like it?"

"No."

"Why did you stick it, then?"

"Dunno."

The conversation languished a moment, but Ginger's curiosity was increasing.

"Still foller the sea?"

"No."

"What's yer job?"

"Ain't got one."

Ginger stroked a resolute jaw.

"Lookin' for a billet?"

"Yep."

"Ashore?"

The Sailor nodded.

"Better come with me, then," said Ginger, with an air of decision. "Dare say we can fix you at our shop. Fifteen bob a week … fifteen bob and a tizzey … if you leave it ter me."

The heart of the Sailor leaped under his jersey. This was big money as money was understood aboard the *Margaret Carey*.

At the end of a narrow street they came suddenly upon the dock gates. Through these on the left, then to the left again, and then to the right was the private wharf of Antcliff and Jackson, Limited, and also at Hull and Grimsby. Ginger, having told the Sailor tersely to wait outside, entered the decrepit wooden office at the entrance to the wharf, with the air of a partner in the firm. After he had had two minutes' conversation with a melancholy individual with a red nose and a celluloid collar, he beckoned to the Sailor to come inside.

The Sailor entered the office like a man in a dream.

"Name?" said, or rather snapped, the Individual.

"Enry Arper."

The Individual took down the time book from the rack above his head with a vehemence that seemed quite uncalled for, opened it savagely, dipped a pen in a cracked inkpot and dashed down the name ferociously.

"Sign."

The Sailor took up the pen coolly and with a sense of power. The Individual was a mere babe at the breast compared to Mr. Thompson and the Old Man. Moreover, the ability to sign his name was his one literary accomplishment and he was honorably proud of it. Klondyke had taught him that, and he had hung on for all he was worth to such a priceless asset. H-e-n with a Hen, r-y Henry, H-a-r with a Har, p-e-r Harper – the letters were formed very carefully with his tongue sticking out of his mouth.

Ginger, rather impressed by the insouciance of the whole proceeding, then led the Sailor across the yard to his duties. He wasn't quite such a guy as he looked. There was something there it seemed; something that went pretty deep. Ginger noted it not unfavorably. He was all for depth. He was a great believer in depth.

The Sailor was informed by this new and providential friend that he had stood out for the princely emolument of seventeen and a tizzey, and had been able to get it. This was big money for his rank of life, but his occupation was menial. He had to haul sacks, to load and unload cargoes. Still he didn't complain. It was the life of a gentleman in comparison with being afloat on the high seas.

To be sure his money was not as big as it looked. He had to live out of it and to find a berth to sleep in at night. But making every allowance for longshore extravagance there could be no doubt that this new existence was sheer luxury after six years of Sing and wet hash and hard-tack and a bed in the half-deck of the *Margaret Carey*.

Dinner time came at twelve o'clock, and under the ægis of Ginger, the Sailor walked up the main street once more to Ike's coffee stall, and at Ginger's expense had as much as he could eat for sixpence. He wanted to pay his own shot and Ginger's also, but Ginger simply would not hear of such a thing. This was His, he said firmly; and when Ginger spoke firmly it generally had to be His whatever it was or might be. It was nice of Ginger; all the same that paladin was far-sighted, he was clear-headed, he was sure and cool. What Ginger didn't know was not knowledge, and it was no less a person than Ike who said so.

For example, after dinner, which took exactly twelve minutes by the clock of the Booteries across the road and opposite the stall, Ginger remarked almost in the manner of one who communes with his subliminal self, "There's one thing yer wantin'."

The Sailor looked incredulous. At that moment he felt it was not in the power of wide earth or high heaven to offer him anything further.

"You want a belt for your brass." Ginger spoke behind his hand in a whisper. "Mon't carry it loose. Wear it round your waist, next your skin. Money's money."

Ike, absorbed in the polite occupation of brushing stray crumbs of rock cake from the strip of grimy oilcloth which graced the counter, was so much impressed by Ginger's grasp of mind that he had the misfortune to bring down a jubilee mug with his elbow, without breaking it, fortunately.

Ginger laid such emphasis upon the point that the Sailor accompanied him across the street to Grewcock's emporium, where body belts were kept in stock. A careful survey of all to be found on the premises, together with an examination, equally careful, of their prices convinced Ginger that better value for the money could be had elsewhere. Thus they withdrew lower down the street to Tollemache and Pearson's, where unfortunately the scale of charges was even higher.

This was discouraging, but there was a silver lining to the cloud. It appeared that Ginger had a belt, which in his own opinion was far superior to anything they had yet seen; it was Russia leather of the finest quality and he was willing to sell it for less than it cost if the Sailor was open to the deal. The Sailor was not averse from doing business, as Ginger felt sure would be the case, when the material advantages had been pointed out to him. But as Ginger had not the belt upon him he suggested that they should call at his lodgings on their way back to the docks in order that the Sailor might inspect it.

Ginger's lodgings were within a stone's throw of the wharf of Antcliff and Jackson, Limited. Not only were they very clean and comfortable, but also remarkably convenient; in fact, they were most desirable lodgings in every way. Their only drawback was they were not cheap. Otherwise they were first class.

By a coincidence the Sailor, it seemed, was in need of good lodgings as well as a belt for his money. Before he returned to the wharf of Antcliff and Jackson, Limited, at one o'clock, he had been provided with things so necessary to his comfort, well-being, and social status.

V

The Sailor paid six-and-six for the belt of Russia leather, and in Ginger's opinion that was as good as getting it for nothing. Also he agreed to share bed and board with Ginger for the sum of twelve shillings a week. It was top price, Ginger allowed, but then the accommodation was *extra*. Out of the window of the bedroom you could pitch a stone into the wharf of Antcliff and Jackson, Limited.

This arrangement, in Ginger's opinion, was providential for both parties. Such lodgings would have been beyond Ginger's means had he been unable to find a decent chap to share them with him. Then the Sailor was young, in Ginger's opinion, in spite of the fact that he had been six years at sea. It would be a great thing in Ginger's opinion for so young a sailor to be taken in hand by a landsman of experience until he got a bit more used to *terrier firmer*.

So much was the Sailor impressed by Ginger's disinterestedness that at six o'clock that evening, when his first day's work was done, he brought his gear from the wharf to No. 1, Paradise Alley. Ginger superintended its removal in the manner of an uncle deeply concerned for the welfare of a favorite nephew. Indeed this was Ginger's permanent attitude to the Sailor from this time on; all the same, he received twelve shillings in advance for a week's board and lodging. Uncle and nephew then sat down to a high tea of hot sausages, with unlimited toast and dripping, before a good fire, in a front parlor so clean and comfortable that the mind of the Sailor was carried back a long six years to Mother and the Foreman Shunter.

When Henry Harper sat down to this meal with Ginger opposite, and that philanthropist removed the cover from three comely sausages, measured them carefully and helped the Sailor to the larger one-and-a-half, his first thought was that he was now as near heaven as he was ever likely to get. What a change from the food, the company, and the squalor of the *Margaret Carey*! Klondyke himself could not have handed him the larger sausage-and-a-half with an air more genuinely polite. There was a self-possession about Ginger that was almost as wine and music to the torn soul of Henry Harper.

As the Sailor sat eating his sausage-and-a-half and after the manner of a sybarite dipping in abundant gravy the perfectly delicious toast and dripping, he felt he would never be able to repay the debt he already owed to Ginger. That floating hell which had been his home for six long years, that other hell the native haunt of Auntie where all his early childhood had been passed, even that more contiguous hell in the next street but two, the abode of Grandma, were this evening a thousand miles away. Just as the mere presence of Klondyke had once given him courage and self-respect which in his darkest hours since he had never altogether lost, so now, after such a meal, the mere sight of Ginger sitting at the other side of the fire, smoking Log Cabin, put him in new heart, touched him, if not with a sense of joy, with a sense of hope.

As became a man of parts Ginger was not content to sit for the rest of the evening smoking Log Cabin and gazing into the fire. At a quarter past seven, by the cuckoo clock on the chimneypiece, there came a knock at the outer door of the room which opened on the street. This was to herald the arrival of Ginger's own private newspaper, the *Evening Mercury*, which had been brought by a tattered urchin of nine, of whom the Sailor caught a passing glimpse, and as in a glass darkly beheld his former self.

In the eyes of the Sailor hardly anything could have ministered so much to Ginger's social position as that every evening of his life, Sundays excepted, his own newspaper should be delivered at No. 1, Paradise Alley. It was impossible for the Sailor to forget his early days in spite of the fact that fortune had come to him now in a miraculous way. His world was still divided into those who sold papers and those who bought them. Ginger clearly belonged to the latter exclusive and princely caste. He was of the class of Klondyke – of Klondyke who in his shore-goings in the uttermost parts of the earth behaved in an indescribably regal and plutocratic manner. Sometimes it had appeared

to the Sailor, such were the amazing uses to which Klondyke had put his money, that the earth was his and all the lands and the waters thereof.

Ginger's ideas were not as princely as those of Klondyke; that was, in regard to money itself. He did not throw money about in the way that Klondyke did, nor had he Klondyke's air of genial magnificence which vanquished all sorts and conditions of men and women. But in their own way Ginger's ideas were quite as imperial.

As soon as Ginger opened his evening paper he remarked, with a short whistle, "I see Wednesday has beat the Villa."

"No," said the incredulous Sailor.

It was an act of politeness on the part of the Sailor to be incredulous. He might have accepted the fact without any display of emotion. But he felt it was due to his feelings that he should make some kind of comment, for they had been stirred considerably by the victory of Wednesday over the Villa.

"Win by much?" asked the Sailor, his heart suddenly beginning to beat under his seaman's jersey.

"Three two," said Ginger.

"At Brum?"

"No, at Sheffle, in foggy weather, on a holdin' turf."

The Sailor's eyes glowed. And then with his chin in his hands he gazed deep into the fire.

"I once seen the Villa," he said in a dreaming voice. It was the proudest memory of his life.

Ginger withdrew his mind from a consideration of the Police Report and the latest performances of the Government.

"At the Palace?" Ginger's tone was deep as becomes one entering upon an epic subject.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.