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THE BLACK CARGO

BY

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TO MY MOTHER

THE BLACK CARGO

I

Though forty years have gone, they still say I was one of Eliphalet Greer's men. They still look at me and whisper when I walk down the street, and they've got a right to whisper. There was only one man like Eliphalet, and there's still his shadow.

Somehow it's got around that he sent me to a South Pacific island. The crew of the *Felicity* must have told it. The men in the long boat must have seen me take a pistol from my pocket when I went ashore alone. I should never have gone if I had been older or if I had any prospects to boast of, and I had to pay for going. I am paying for it still, which is why I am going to tell the whole story, right down to the time when I drew a weapon on Eliphalet himself.

You may say I should have guessed why Eliphalet sent me to that island; that I should have known he would have a hold on me like the Old Man of the Sea when I got back. Perhaps I should, but I did not know Eliphalet then as well as I knew him later. I suspected something was wrong, but not as wrong as that. I never knew that he wanted me to do what he was afraid to do himself—not until it was all too late. Only when the *Felicity* got back did I begin to know for certain that something was wrong.

I am setting down what I know about a disgraceful business, not from any love of reminiscence, but because my name is mixed up in it. There will be something of Eliphalet's past in it, but only what I know. There is no need of conjecturing what he did off the Guinea coast. Yet after all it is his story I am writing more than mine. It cannot help but be his story, for he was the strongest of us all. In all his weakness he was the strongest, even when the end of everything came.

They still say I was one of Eliphalet Greer's men. I could not help myself if I was. He was far too strong. When he touched me I grew still. I would grow still if he touched me now. He was strong when he fought against himself, strong in his remorse. I think sometimes that his strength pulled him above everything he did, although he was a bad old man. Sometimes I do not care what he did in the Indian ocean, or what they say of him at Lloyds. And why should I, when even the man who hated him worst of all ceased to care, when all the scores were settled?

Only yesterday I saw the brig *Felicity* drifting in on the fullness of the tide. I could make her out even without her masts and spars which used to cut the sky above her. It was she, even though she was stripped of masts and bulwarks, stripped as ruthlessly as all things are which are made by man for one use and abandoned to another. Yes, it was the *Felicity*, even though her ports were boarded up, though their frames of black and white were gone along with the scroll work of the stern windows, though her sides were bleached like driftwood, and though they ran green from copper. There was still the old uncompromising turn of her bow, and the unforgettable steadying breadth of beam. It was hard to remember she was beautiful once, as she scraped against the piling of the coal wharf. It was hard to look upon her at all, for age has a hideous humor, surpassing in its cruelty, with which inanimate things can never cope, and live things only seldom.

Indeed not only the *Felicity*, but almost everything, I think, moves on towards a farcical decline, and an ending not unmixed with sardonic mirth, and even these few papers are like the rest. They should by rights be tragic enough, for they deal with an old man's weakness. There should be a silent sadness about them, such as surrounds our empty warehouses which lie rotting in the sun. There should be something in them unnatural and repellent, for they concern the bitterest and deepest of all human emotions. But somehow, as I contemplate what it is I mean to say, and grope back among the shadows to the time when those events had their beginning, out of the silence which surrounds me I seem to catch the ring of ghostly laughter. Like the brig *Felicity*, I sometimes think that age has given all the roles we played a similar distorted aspect.

She was one of Eliphalet Greer's ships, one of the six he had built in the old Morrill yards. You can still see the warped timbers of the ways a half a mile up the river. My father took me with him in his phaeton when she was launched, with a man behind and a hamper full of Burgundy, but that was very long ago. It is odd to look back on it when I think of the relation Eliphalet Greer and I stood in at a later time. The *Felicity* was one of the best of old Morrill's ships. He picked the timbers himself the year before they laid him away in the West Hill burying ground, and people have told me he would walk around the hull long after dark, smoking his pipe and running his hand along the ribs and sheathing. I have often heard them wonder what old Morrill would have done if he had been there to see Eliphalet Greer break a bottle of sweet cider on her bow the day she took the water.

Eliphalet Greer never made a better investment. Even in the days when he took over our wharves and lofts in lieu of my father's note, and when my father shot himself just as the sheriff came to attach his house, the *Felicity* was as good as anything in Eliphalet's fleet—never fast, but staunch and a close sailer. It was later when Eliphalet Greer and I came to know each other, but the *Felicity* was still carrying her cargo. In those days almost anyone was glad to know him. He had grown as rich as any of our ship owners in Boston or to the north. In 1830 he was said to have the fastest carrying vessels along the coast, which was doing very well for a man who once owned and sailed a single sloop. It seems strange of all his houses, his wharves, his vessels, each as trim as any model in a marine underwriter's office, only the *Felicity* is left.

And now she lies at the coal wharf, a poor, slatternly servitor of an age which has driven her from the sea—a coal barge drawn along the shore. She makes a strange final decoration for Eliphalet Greer's story, like a single bit of wreckage drifting back to the lee shore of home. Black dust is over her, and there is a grating of hand-barrows on her decks, and her bow points up an empty stream. The gulls are sitting on the harbor buoy, whose echoes roll uselessly on a land breeze out toward an empty sea. They are never quiet for long, those gulls. They keep circling about, edging upward until they seem like bits of cloud drift, and then dropping back to the buoy again. I wonder—are they watching for a ship as they used to watch?

They will never see one again. There are still clouds on the horizon, but never a ship comes out of them, a live thing, the tangible shape of a score of aspirations, the embodiment of a score of concerted wills. It is an effort to remember that the *Felicity* was once alive.

Yet the sight of her brings back what I have to tell. For it was on board the *Felicity* that I sailed on a certain errand which it still does my conscience little good to think about, and aboard the *Felicity* that I knew once and for all that Eliphalet Greer was not a simple Puritan walking with soul at rest along the rocky road. Yes, shadows are still about her, lurking in the work that dead hands have left behind, and in the water at her side I seem to see vague shapes. Even with the coal dust she bears her freight of memories.

I sometimes think it's strange when everything else has gone, that the spring of 1832, when the *Felicity* made port from West Africa, was no different from the weather we are having now. As the days lengthen and the water begins coursing down our gutters, it seems incredible that nothing should remain of the life we once led, and that the river ice should go to sea past a deserted waterfront with hardly anyone to watch. There was a lingering fringe of ice about the wharves that spring, and a half-melted coating of snow on the marshes which gave an added clearness to the sky. They were busy at the shipyards. They were moving consignments of goods along the shore. We could hear their voices, and the rumble of carts on the cobbles, and as we drew nearer, we could smell the paint, new wood and tar.

Above the waterfront our town was standing, newly washed by the rains. Again and again I had pictured it while in many strange roadsteads—the warm brick of its dwellings with their white wood trimmings, its broad streets, its squares, its rows of elms. On many a night when I had closed my eyes, I could seem to see its cupolas and its steeples, for our lives were strongly blended with religion, and in the lapping of the water on our bows I had often seemed to hear the notes of their bells. I could hear those bells ringing then, striking out the hour of four. I know that there is a sad irony in our longings, for I have been disappointed by the sight of many things I have most longed to see, but never by our town. It has always been as I have looked for it, quiet in the sunlight, and solid in the storm.

I can recall the inflection of Captain Murdock's soft whistle, as he examined the network of rigging by the shore after the anchor was down. After a while he ceased whistling and listened to the noisy wrangling of the crew, who already were busy with their sea-chests.

"Well," he said at length, "we're home."

Save when taking the name of the Lord in vain, I had found Captain Murdock a silent man, niggardly of the voice he gave his thoughts. But perhaps the prospect of an early termination of his responsibilities made him unduly communicative.

"Tonight," continued Captain Murdock, cocking his eye up at me and squaring his shoulders, "I'm going to get drunk."

Not infrequently in our conversations I had heard him make a similar statement, but I noticed that he said it sadly.

"You don't appear to be looking forward to it," I remarked.

"Look forward to it!" he repeated. "Why in hell should I look forward to it? Mebbe you won't look forward to it when you get as old as me. What is it, anyway, but just licker—licker—licker?"

"Why not think," I suggested ironically, "of your wife and little ones?"

His answer was cordially frank.

"I ain't got a wife."

"But see here, Captain," I interrupted, "everyone says you've got a daughter, living away somewhere. Now why don't you get her to come home——"

Captain Murdock's voice became sweet with Christian patience.

"Ain't I trying to tell you," he began. "That's why I'm going to get drunk. She is home! Oh—you ain't got a hell cat for a daughter. What do you know about wimmen? By Crickey—she'll kill me yet. She is home—and she wouldn't be if I could help it!"

His voice was growing plaintively loud from the weight of his worldly woes.

"What is there left but licker? I always have got drunk when I come ashore—first it was my wife and now my daughter! Why should she put on airs with me? Ain't I good enough for anyone? Why should I have to bear it? Wimmen—wimmen—wimmen! What else is there for a gentleman to do but get in his licker!"

He was lost in his own misfortunes.

A boat had drawn alongside, but when I endeavored to call it to his attention, he only nodded absently and continued to speak the louder.

"What else was there to do, settin' under a piece of sail with the sweat a-runnin' off you while the niggers ran in and out of the hold, and the planks were swelling and cracking with the heat. There was rum and tea and lemon—that's what there was. Young man, there's a kind of licker for every occasion, and ought to be used on every occasion, and no Bible-hopping hayseed is going to tell me any different. Here—stop your pulling at my sleeve! What's more, I say if it ain't licker a man lives on, it's something else. Everybody's got to have something to carry them through. It may be love or hate. I don't love anyone. I don't hate anyone, and there's only licker left."

Captain Murdock had drawn closer to me and had thrust his arm through mine, and not only his words, but his nearness acquainted me with the unsettling truth that he had already begun on his ritual, and that in the cabin chest there was less liquor left than a few hours previous. I seized his arm and tried to pull him aft, but his legs were strong and his weight was close to the ground.

"Get below," I whispered. "You're drunk!"

"Young man," said Captain Murdock, louder still, "I've seen life. I've seen hell breaking loose time an' again, and

when anybody tells you to stop drinking, just tell them this: There's only three things that make up living."

Before I could check him, his voice had assumed a nasal, clerical intonation.

"Love, hate and licker, all three, and the greatest of these is licker!"

In the very midst of his sentence, however, his words began to die away, and his heavy red face had assumed an expression as near to consternation as I had ever seen. He began pulling at his, muffler and clearing his throat, and he had a very good reason. When it was too late, he perceived that old Eliphalet Greer was standing beside us, tapping his ivory-headed cane softly on the deck, and moving his long bony fingers restlessly over the handle.

He was a man to remember, and one to think about on an early morning watch. He had been standing in the bow of his cutter the last time I had seen him like some Calvinist portrait as we got under way. The water had been rough, so that the cutter tossed restively, but he had stood easily erect, for he was used to the sea. He had removed his tall beaver hat, and his hair, which he wore quite long, had been disarranged by the wind. Now that I saw him again I had the curious fancy that we had not been gone at all, for he was just the same. Not even his dress had altered. Though his hat was stamped hard on his head, the wind had been at his hair again, and the lines about his mouth had the same grim curves. He was still dressed as though he expected the church bell at any moment to ring its summons, and cause him to leave his occupation and hasten to his pew. He had on the same black clothes and the same freshly starched linen about his wrists. The great choker which he wore twisted high on his neck, had a familiar clerical look about it, like a surplice misappropriated.

Yet in spite of his simplicity there was an air of wealth about him. The cloak of black broadcloth which he wrapped around him in a way which was reminiscent of some foreign land, was so finely woven that it had a texture almost like silk. Though his attire was simple and venerable, befitting a man the fire of whose life was dying down, neither his years nor his dress gave him a wholly sober aspect. Though his face was lined like weathered wood, not a wrinkle or a crow's foot of it indicated repose or humor. His eyes had an unnatural intensity, all the brightness of youth set in an ancient mask. I think it was their restiveness, their very contrast, which gave one a feeling that his heavily welded body had an unabated power.

For a little while he stood without speaking, still tapping his cane softly on the deck, but there was nothing reassuring in his silence. In spite of myself, my heart was beating faster and my breath was coming more quickly than before.

"Charles," he said, and his words were quiet and almost toneless, "stand away from Mr. Murdock."

And again he tapped his cane on the planking.

"Mr. Murdock," he continued, "when I employed you as master of this vessel, you told me that you believed in God and that you were a God-fearing man."

I had seen Captain Murdock on a number of trying occasions, and I knew he was a solid man, but I never felt the admiration for him which I experienced then. There was a restraint in the old man's words which made me wish to draw away, but Captain Murdock only tilted his chin higher.

"Yes," said Captain Murdock, "and what if I did?"

Suddenly Eliphalet's voice altered in a manner that silenced the voices of the men forward.

"Then," he said, "get down on your knees!"

I saw Captain Murdock give a start. I saw a rush of blood turn his cheeks half purple.

"Damn you——" he began hoarsely.

There was a crash from Eliphalet's cane. For a second I thought he had brought it on the Captain's back, but instead

he had hit the rail beside him.

"I've been damned by better men than you, Mr. Murdock," he said evenly, "so I am probably damned already. Did you hear what I said? Get down on your knees and ask forgiveness for blaspheming the Holy Scriptures. Get down on your knees before I knock you there."

I could not—though I tried—I could not look away. Captain Murdock was a small man, but he had not moved.

"Damn you!" he cried. "Get down on your knees yourself!"

I heard a slight stir forward. Eliphalet Greer had dropped his cane. Swiftly and dexterously he had slid his hand inside his broadcloth cloak, but Captain Murdock only grinned.

"Slack yer line," he said. "We ain't standing to off Guinea."

I thought that Eliphalet was going to strike him, but he did not. Only, looking at him then, it was hard to remember that he was an old man. His lips writhed in an effort at self-control, which went strangely with a religious, methodical life, but when he spoke, his voice, though husky, was gentler than before.

"What do you mean by that?" he asked.

Captain Murdock bit his lip.

"Well?" Eliphalet demanded.

"You know what I mean," said Captain Murdock indistinctly.

Eliphalet Greer had grown quite calm, even tolerant, as Captain Murdock ended. Some hidden balance, something other than speech had exerted a tranquil influence.

"Murdock," he said in a quieter tone, "I am strong enough to forgive you. I have forgiven angry words before, and I am a humble man."

As he spoke, the *Felicity* swayed at her mooring, and a ray of the afternoon sun struck clear on Eliphalet's face. It dazzled him, and caused him to wrinkle his forehead in a grimace almost like pain.

"All of us here below," he continued more gently still, "have sinned in the eyes of the Lord. All of us should ask Divine forgiveness."

It was more than the sunlight which altered the set of his face as he spoke. Before our eyes a curious phenomenon was taking place, incomprehensible to the two of us who had sailed under his orders. Before he could check himself, or was probably wholly aware what he did, Eliphalet Greer had given way to an emotion, and had knelt bareheaded on the deck. Yes, he had knelt with his gray head bowed, and the land breeze playing about it. I wonder what it was that seized him then. I wonder what it was that he was praying for. It was not dramatically intended, nor could it have been fear that made his lips move slowly. Perhaps the uselessness of worldly wealth, the worthlessness of material possessions was forcibly brought upon him. If so, the world still pulled tenaciously at his coat-tails, for suddenly, still kneeling, he snapped back his head, and his right hand, which had been resting beneath his beaver hat, darted back beneath his cloak. At the sight of Captain Murdock, standing stupid and dazed, Eliphalet Greer ripped forth an oath so unexpected and impious that even the Captain jumped.

"Get down on your knees!" roared Eliphalet.

And Captain Murdock plumped down beside him with a haste so indecorous that he spilled forward on his hands. There they knelt—old Eliphalet, swayed by some ungovernable instinct, a gaunt, ascetic Puritan, who was not a Puritan at all; and Captain Murdock, round and squat, breathing through his nose with a melodious sound which savored of a pitch pipe in a country church. There they knelt in a furious parody of devotion, each casting furtive sidelong glances at

the other.

It was common in those days for men to give way to prayer, but never was there a more impious intercession. It might be a humorous anecdote over a tumbler of rum, but though I can see the humor of it now, it is never of a genial or palatable sort. Through it all I can always see Eliphalet's face with its disarrayed gray hair, the face of an old man to whom the years had brought no peace. There is the same violence and passion, a curious malignancy about his very attitude, and something not to be described, which merits not laughter but pity.

He got to his feet at length, and picked up his hat and cane, and Captain Murdock scrambled up also. Now that Captain Murdock was standing again, any elation he may have labored under previously appeared to have worn away, leaving him quite white and ill at ease.

"Murdock," said Greer—and of a sudden he seemed as I had always known him, humorless and precise—"we'll go below now and see your papers, and you, Charles——"

Instinctively I drew a little backward, for he had laid a hand on my shoulder. His hand was heavy and I could feel the firm pressure of his long fingers.

"We can go over our business at my house in an hour."

He moved away with a step which was singularly quiet for one of his height, winding past the obstructions on the deck as though he had been always used to sail. Indeed, in spite of his sedentary life—for years he had never sailed—he had a surpassing knowledge of the sea. He could gauge the capabilities of a sailing vessel as accurately as a stable owner might estimate a running horse. He could read the weather by a fractional change of the wind, and do both with half an eye while concerned with other matters. As he entered the cabin I saw him pause to glance at the upper rigging. Then he was gone, with Captain Murdock following close behind him.

A crowd had collected on the shore by now as crowds will always gather in any port when a new ship sails in. Already they were shouting questions across the water, and our crew, or those of them who could understand our language, were shouting back and crowding to the bulwarks. I felt sorry now that I was to see the last of them, though I have seldom seen men who could lay a smaller claim to one's affection. Eliphalet Greer's crews were always an outlandish spectacle, pieced together from anything which might cut down sailing costs, patched like the seats of their sea-breeches from blacks, whites, yellows and browns. I wonder where they have gone, those forsaken men who would flutter for a week or so along our waterfront. I still can seem to hear their voices, guttural, hissing, liquid sounds which our Sailors' Mission with its free tracts could never understand, and their laughter while they spun for themselves a chrysalis of drunken slumber, to wake again on a new deck, bound for another land.

The bells were ringing the half hour, and the sun's rays had become soft and genial. A loose halyard was slapping at the mast. The blocks kept creaking. The tide was running faster, and the *Felicity* swayed uneasily.

As I stood by the rail, waiting to go ashore, I felt cold, even in my sea clothes. I still seemed to feel the weight of Eliphalet Greer's hand where it had rested on my shoulder. I almost wished I was not at home again that afternoon, and I had my reasons, for I knew only too well why Eliphalet Greer wished to see me, and the business we had together was far from a pleasant business.

It was eighteen months since we had spoken of it, but now that I was back with the land breeze about me again, it seemed like yesterday.

II

It has always seemed a marvelous thing how a man becomes rich. When I consider the tribulations that most have

merely to get themselves food and to keep their clothes intact, the accumulation of wealth becomes a mystery, and the man who accumulates it a Titan. I cannot help but admire them for it. I cannot help but admire my grandfather, nor can I help but admire Eliphalet Greer. He was not always rich. You can still see the little farm by the marshes where he was born. In 1808 he left home with his clothes in a bundle. He too must have earned his pittance before he learned the secret of King Midas. During that hiatus of years when he was away from home, he too must have lain like the rest of us, covered by the deep loam of mediocrity, before he suddenly blossomed forth, inspiring in his golden splendor. Had he learned the happy formula by some magic of his own? Or had he been born, destined by the stars for the path he had taken?

It was eighteen months before this that Eliphalet Greer and I had last been face to face. I was at my room at the Anchor House when he summoned me to that interview. I stayed at the Anchor House when I was off the sea, because it was cheap, and a good walk from the center of the town. Old Jim Lowes himself brought Eliphalet's note to my door. He was out of breath, because his stairs were steep, and his clothes were still covered with the feathers of a fowl which he had been plucking for supper.

"Boy," he said, "you better dress up handsome. I always knew anyone who has taken things like you would get on in the world."

My best coat was tight on the shoulders, and painful beneath the armpits, but it still had a smart appearance when I put it on, and I knotted my best cravat. It was frayed, but it had come from London. The feeling of it gave me a sense of defiance as I walked down Water Street under the elm trees. The day's work had ended, and there were few people about, but I knew Eliphalet Greer would be busy in his counting-room after the clerks had left. On my right, rising from their shaded lawns and gardens, were the houses of other rich men. I passed them hurriedly, for they always made me bitter. It was tea time, and I could picture the thin china and the glasses and the decanters on the sideboard. I could almost feel the coolness of the hallways and the softness of the Turkey carpets.

When I opened the door of the counting-room Eliphalet Greer was alone. He was bending over a ledger and tapping his long fingers on the page, but at the sound of my footstep he turned the page over rapidly.

"You're on time, Charles," he said. He had a grave and kindly way with men in his employ.

I did not answer, and he began stroking his chin and looking at me as a shipwright might who judges the soundness of a piece of timber. I should have been ill at ease, if I had known him better, but I only knew then that he was a sharp but honest trader, and he and I had nothing to trade.

"How old are you?" he asked at length.

"Twenty-four," I answered.

Eliphalet Greer pursed his lips.

"You look strong," he said. "How long have you been at sea?"

Though he knew well enough, I answered without hesitation.

"Since I was sixteen," I said.

"Look at me when you speak," said Eliphalet Greer.

I looked at him. We both eyed each other for a while in silence.

"For the last four years," he said at length, "you have been sailing on vessels that I own."

I nodded, and he smoothed his heavy gold watch-chain. I continued to look at him, and thought that he was an eccentric old gentleman.

"I employed you first," he said, "for Christian reasons, because I take a pleasure in helping my fellow men, and it seemed to me you were unfortunate."

He spoke in a smooth, deliberate way, which implied a direct contradiction to what he said. Something of our snow and winds seemed always with him, some sombre trait of Puritanism of another generation.

"I am not always hard," he added. "You are still an object of charity. It was no fault of yours that your father was not a man of business, no fault at all."

I cleared my throat, but Eliphalet Greer continued before I could interrupt.

"Yes, yes," he said; "you are the under dog. I have seen what your old friends do because you have no money. I am glad to be kind in such a case."

"Damn your kindness," I said, still looking at him.

"Ah!" said Eliphalet Greer, without moving, without altering his voice. "I thought you had a thin skin. Everyone has a thin skin who is not used to being poor."

"And a thick skin when they are used to being rich," I said, eyeing him squarely.

"Be careful how you talk," said Eliphalet Greer, rubbing his chin. "Do you know I can manage so you won't get a berth on any ship out of here or New York or Boston or Philadelphia! I am not the man to use such a tone to."

"Manage and be damned!" I answered. "Do you think I'm afraid of you?"

"Charles," said Eliphalet Greer, "sit down, and we both can manage better. Do you know why I asked you here?"

"No," I answered, and I felt that I had done very well.

"Because," he went on, "you're young. You have a chest like a bull, and you're not afraid of anything, except of being poor."

There was a momentary pause. He was watching me expectantly, as though he believed that I would answer. For the first time in our interview I found myself restless under his steady gaze. I began remembering stories about him, vague bits of gossip, such as once floated in the backwaters of every seaport town, for even then there were stories about Eliphalet Greer. Was there a hidden intention, a careful plan in every aimless thing he said? A curious restive alertness was in his glance. His lips were puckered as though he was testing some wine of a doubtful vintage,—not that he ever indulged in liquors.

"Yes," he said, "I've watched your face. You don't enjoy being poor. I know the look."

"Perhaps," I said, "you wouldn't enjoy it so much yourself."

Eliphalet Greer rubbed his palms together, and they made a dry sound, almost like ruffled paper.

"No," he replied, "I did not enjoy it either. I know the way you feel."

He paused again, and though his face was wrinkled and expressionless, his eyes were very bright, and clear as the polished glass sewn to some crumbling vestment.

"Twenty years ago," he said, "I left this town, a poor boy with no prospects; but I found them. I was not afraid to look, and take opportunities when they were offered. And it seems to me—yes, it seems to me that you are the same way, not afraid to take an opportunity."

"Not afraid at all," I said.

"Twenty years ago," said Eliphalet Greer, seemingly loath to leave the subject, "I left with my clothes in a handkerchief, and when I came back——"

"I know what you did when you came back," I interrupted, for somehow it hurt me to have him say.

"You don't hold it against me?" he inquired.

"No," I said, "if it had not been you, it would have been someone else."

"I thought you would say so," and again he rubbed his hands. "Sit where you are. It does me good to look at you. It makes me wish that I was young again, and going out to sea."

There was an unexpected, unfeigned pathos in his voice. I felt almost sorry for him at that moment. His glance had shifted, and he was looking at the river mouth through the dusty window. I felt sorry, although no one who is young can understand the regrets of age. But in another moment He was looking at me again in his former restive fashion.

"There's another reason I asked you here," he said. "Do you know what it is?"

"No," I answered.

"Because you're quiet."

Again he seemed anxious for me to make some rejoinder, but I remained silent.

"I'm not as young as I used to be," said Eliphalet Greer, but still I did not answer.

"I've been watching you," he continued. "You're not afraid. You can keep quiet. You want to get on in the world. How would you like to be living again across the street?"

He stopped and looked at me so sharply that, involuntarily, I moved back my chair.

"Are you offering to take me into partnership!" I inquired. I did my best to speak ironically, but somehow in the silence of his counting-room my effort fell quite flat.

Back through my mind again there flashed a dozen bits of gossip. Something in my question had changed him. I had often seen him walking down our streets, a benign and prosperous man, although with a grimly righteous visage. I recalled how, only a week before, he had left a perpetual fund to buy stoves for the poor, and another to supply Bibles to outgoing vessels, but just then I do not think he would have given away a Bible. Just then he had a look which made me half rise from my chair. Yet it was the barest loss of self-control. An instant later he was slowly playing with his watch-chain.

"No, not that," he answered. "I am offering you three thousand dollars and your regular pay as first mate, but I might offer you the other, if you stand by. I need someone I can trust."

"And what is the three thousand dollars for?" I asked.

"For doing what I tell you—and being still."

"If what I do is worth three thousand dollars," I told him, "I should have to be still to save my skin."

"Charles," said Eliphalet Greer, "if you and I were younger, we might go far together. You have a trader's eye."

"Well," I said, "what am I to do to earn three thousand dollars'?"

Eliphalet Greer pointed out of the window toward the river. A brig was being warped into midstream. The riggers were still busy on her yards. Against the sky I could see a web of ropes, stays, shrouds, halyards and braces ready for bending of sail.

"In three days," he said, "the *Felicity* is sailing for Java."

"I heard she was," I answered.

"You are going aboard her as first mate. She is a steady vessel. It will be a pleasant voyage—ports in Java, days ashore—a cruise along the West African coast and home. I always loved the sea there best. It will be a pleasant voyage."

"But not worth an extra three thousand dollars," I answered.

Eliphalet Greer paused, and looked at me fixedly before replying.

"When I was younger," he said, "and had fewer responsibilities, I traded through the island groups once, down to the south of the Indian Ocean. Some of them are very lonely. Some of them are pearl islands. I want to see one of those islands again."

I nodded. He gave a latitude and longitude. I nodded again, but I was not new to the East Indian trade. There were no shells or fisheries in the region which he mentioned. I could not help wondering if he knew that I knew it. If he did, he gave no sign.

"Charles," said Eliphalet Greer, "there may be a fortune on that island. I am going to send you ashore there alone. Murdock has the bearing and my orders to anchor, but I do not want to send Murdock. He has orders to lower a boat with you and a crew, and them to stand by. You are to leave the crew on the beach, and go over the island alone. It is a small island. It will not take you long."

He was speaking very slowly, as though he was making a deliberate choice of his words. Something in his attitude made me lean forward, and listen very carefully.

"And you want me to look for shells?" I asked.

"I know about the shells," said Eliphalet Greer. "I saw them when I was there. I wish to know if anyone else has seen them since—if any white man is on that island."

And quite suddenly I knew that he was not interested in shells at all.

"Charles," he said, "I want to send a man there who will tell me exactly what he sees, and who knows how to keep quiet. I cannot afford to have him talk, because I am interested in that island. That is why you and not Murdock are going ashore. Do you understand? I have been talking to you long enough to see that you have common sense and a penetrating mind. Do you understand?"

"Yes," I answered.

"Will you go?" he asked with an unexpected sharpness.

"I will," I said, "if you advance me a thousand dollars, give me a master's pay, and your note for three thousand payable when I return."

"And what makes you think I shall do anything of the sort?" he asked quickly.

"Because," I replied, "it seems to me like a very confidential matter. I wouldn't look at any pearl island unless I was poor, Mr. Greer."

"Charles," he said more quietly, "it's a pity your father never had your sense. He would have done better investing in pearl islands than buying town sites in Maine. You shall have what you ask. I shall send you a draft tomorrow."

I rose and walked toward the door. The air about us seemed close, and I was tired of feeling the steady, impalpable weight of his glance. He raised his hand as a signal that he was not entirely finished.

"Charles," he said, "you have been to sea long enough to know that violent things may happen, especially out there."

"You don't have to be at sea long to learn that," I answered.

"Then of course," said Eliphalet Greer in a gentler tone, "you will understand it will be much wiser to be armed when you go ashore—in case you should meet a white man."

The measured gentleness of his voice must have stirred my curiosity, his voice more than anything he said.

"And what if any white man is there?" I asked.

Eliphalet Greer cleared his throat.

"In that case," he replied very quietly, "you must use your own judgment. All I can say is this——"

And he spoke so softly that I had to lean forward to catch his words.

"You must use your own judgment, and if you judge properly, and convince me of it, your father's backwoods town sections will be an excellent investment. Life is a very different thing out there than it is back here."

My head swam, and his face half blurred before my eyes, but I knew he was staring straight at me. I did not move a muscle. I did not even catch my breath.

"Of course," Eliphalet Greer continued, "you'll remember this is very confidential. If you should happen to speak of it, Charles, it will be unpleasant for us both."

"I have no doubt of that at all," I answered quite steadily.

"Ah," said Eliphalet Greer, "I thought we should understand each other. Good afternoon, Charles."

I closed the door of the counting-house behind me. The sun, I remember, had warmed the clapboarding of the wall, for it was hot on my hand as I steadied myself. I was dizzy and my knees felt weak. What I had heard in the dusty little room must have been a Satanic interpolation of my own. Yet his words had been quite clear, and ready for me to take or leave as I might choose. They were still with me binding us together. Because I had listened to them without an objection, I felt contaminated and uncleanly. It was not conceivable that he could have implied that I suspected. It was like looking at a picture and seeing in some unforseen blending of shadows some sinister and ugly form one's own imagination painted.

A sudden impulse made me turn back to the counting-house door, a sudden desire to be freed from what was on my conscience. I opened it without knocking, and took a step over the threshold. Eliphalet Greer had not heard me. He was seated before his table where he did his reckonings, staring straight down at its scarred pine surface, although there was nothing in front of him to look at. His face had gone white, and his lips were contracted like a man's in pain. His hands, which were grasping the arms of his chair, kept closing and unclosing. The counting-room no longer seemed like a counting-room. The clerks' stools and the ledgers with their columns of figures seemed like alien pieces of property. Without speaking as I intended, without a sound I tiptoed out again. Perhaps, after all, Eliphalet Greer and I had understood each other. And it was not the way the minister of the Prince Street Church understood him, nor its deacons, nor the Marine Society, nor his bankers.

There is, however, one thing that I swear to. I meant no evil then, nor guessed where my action would lead me. I needed the money, and I was willing to earn it by going on a confidential errand. He had given definite reasons for sending me. It is true he hinted at something more, but, though it disturbed me, many things made it easy for me to set my mind at rest.

By the next morning I knew I had misunderstood him. A man of his standing could never have meant what I thought. Surely he had only intended to tell me to be cautious, and to be armed in my own defense. Half the night I argued it with my conscience, and perhaps I blinded myself deliberately, yet I swear I never knew I was doing a wrong. I believed, or

perhaps I hoped, no wrong was intended, but I swear I never meant a wrong and never intended to commit one.

Nevertheless, as I waited for the shore boat that spring afternoon, a weight of dread was on my shoulders. In an hour, in less than an hour, Eliphalet Greer and I would be face to face again. Again I would see the lines on his face and the glitter in his eyes, and the unceasing motion of his fingers. Nor was that all. I was to see him in the house he had received as my father's debtor, among our chairs; in the rooms that had been built for us we were to speak of something unhallowed, unfit to be mentioned in the daylight beneath the open sky.

I could still see his face as he knelt on the deck while his lips moved in a silent supplication of his own. The echo of his cane as he brought it down on the quarter rail had hardly died away. I had been to the island and there was no doubt any longer of why he sent me.

III

These are few works by the hand of man as receptive of impression as a house. I have seen statues dug from the ground of Italy with dismembered limbs and rust-stained torsos, older than the most venerable vault in all of Rome. I have seen paintings in the sepulchres of Egyptian kings whose richest provinces have been hid for a thousand years beneath the desert sand. They are venerable remnants, but, broken as they are, dismembered, scratched, and discolored, they have a way of defying the scythe and the hour-glass. They still wear the guise of eternal novelty, reminiscent of when the marble was fresh chiseled, and of when the paint was new, for the idea which brought them into being is as clear and unalterable as the elements. But a house is a humbler matter. Give it a generation or two of existence, and it is older than the oldest masterpiece of art. It bears the trace of all the tragedy and the comedy of the human span. It has impalpable, unspoken memories which will never go until its rafters drop and its walls are levelled.

When Eliphalet Greer first brought his vessels into our harbor, and opened his counting-room, my father was safe beneath a slab of slate that bore a verse of Horace. It was not the epitaph he wished. For several years before his demise he had amused himself with constructing fitting couplets to be cut upon his tomb. The one which pleased him most I still have in an old letter, but it lacked the solemnity we associate with a final resting place.

DEAR FRIENDS HERE IS WHERE I LIE
BUT I LIVED FAST AND I LIVED HIGH.

It had been a pleasant house built at a time when they loved carved cornices and Grecian pillars. Its windows were wide and generous. Its shutters and doors were green. It was square, built of English brick, with a picket fence in front of it, and a garden. There was ivy on the wall, which rippled in the wind and gave shelter to the sparrows. Its hall, running from front to back, as was the custom then, always had the faint but refreshing odor of tobacco smoke and rum. Across the street, visible from the front door, were warehouses, and sail and rigging lofts, now painted a trim slate gray with Eliphalet's name in white above the lower windows. It was a comfortable house for business, convenient to the shipping.

When Eliphalet Greer purchased the estate, he had the ivy removed, the garden planted to grass, and the doors and shutters painted the same shade as the business houses he had first acquired. In a single week he had altered it from a hospitable dwelling to a house that knew no vanity, and it was what he wished, for it satisfied his distaste for external show and unprofitable refinement. He had done what he could, but there were some things he could not accomplish. There was a silence in the hall since he had been there, brooding vacancy of sound, which only old houses have; not the silence of open places, but rather the stillness which comes in the wake of a voice or a footstep—a reminiscent, unnatural silence. Nor was it wholly a lack of sound. Everywhere there was expectant, vacant space, empty rooms, empty chairs, and unused passages, built for the rapid and high living of which my father wrote. It was never made for solitude nor intended to be lighted by half a dozen candles.

Eliphalet Greer had evidently been waiting, for he let me in himself.

"The parlor, Charles," he said. "You know the way."

And as I walked forward I heard him bolt the door behind me.

"It still grows dark early," he added, and the reason for his statement was plain, for the folding shutters of the parlor had been drawn and the whale-oil lamps were lighted. Though he might have added it still continued cold, he did not, nor did he seem to notice how chill it was, for not a stick was burning in the fireplace. Its gaping blackness against the chimney panelling was almost the first thing I noticed.

It was a room for firelight. In its best days it needed the warmth and the gentle illumination of wooden embers. Without them the sooted emptiness of the chimney gave forth a chilling emanation which transcended physical discomfort. It was rather the lack of heat one felt than actual cold, and perhaps it was something more subtle and difficult of normal explanation. Our old parlor where my father had sat so often at an evening of cards, like the fireplace and like the hall, had the same emptiness and chilling vacuity. Against the low wainscot with their backs projecting over the lower strip of gray figured wall-paper a row of carved mahogany chairs with shining horsehair seats stood in a precise and dustless line, awaiting a company which would never come. Their reflections on the polished floor gave them an unwavering permanence. The round table in the center of the room was bare. There was not a picture on the walls. There was not an ornament on the mantel, except the two oil lamps with their wicks pulled low.

I was suspicious as I stood there and looked about me. His parlor was too bare and spotless for an ordinary purpose. Each article of furniture was far too accurately placed. I turned uneasily toward him, and as our eyes met I knew he had been watching me all the while, half curiously, half nervously, from under his frosted eyebrows. We were both constrained and quiet. If there had been no other reason that room would have made us so. He had moved toward the table, and was standing in the shadow, so that the gray of his hair began to blend with the wall's dark coloring, but his eyes were still on me. Sometimes when I lie awake on a dark night I can remember them even now.

I had a restless desire for him to speak, but instead, according to his habit, he began playing with the heavy gold watch-chain which still festooned his black waistcoat. It reminded me of an Arab rug merchant I had seen once at Algeria who ceaselessly drew through his hands a string of polished amber. Grasping the chain with his thumb and forefinger, Eliphalet Greer moved his hand back and forth, back and forth, so that his nails made a clicking sound as they passed the heavy links. Even his breathing was audible, the deliberate, heavy breathing which comes of age.

"Sit down, Charles," he said. "No—over there, where the light plays on your face."

He had glanced toward a chair as he spoke, but almost at once his eyes were back on me again. I sat down, and moved my feet nervously. He still stood up, seemingly lost in some mental calculation, still running his hand back and forth over his watch-chain, moving it faster and faster. I began to perceive a suppressed nervousness in that gesture. Little as I knew him, it was not hard to tell he was not wholly himself that evening. His voice was as even as ever, but his lips had a way of twitching as though they were busy framing words forbidden by his will. Now and then he would throw his head up nervously, seemingly listening for some expected sound. Yet there was nothing to listen to, except the wind outside, which had veered to the northwest and was blowing steadily through the bare branches of the elms.

A curious thought had come over me. I have said his eyes were a young man's eyes, incongruous in a face like his, yet now they were not. In the half light where he stood, they had a depth and lustre, as if the sights of years were stored behind the curtains of each iris. They were like some porcelain tile of the kingdom of the Mings, as bright as new, shining and unabraided, and yet somehow within itself, the richer for the passage of time.

"You can move now, if you wish," he said. "It makes no difference any longer."

I was quite myself when he spoke that second time.

"What makes no difference?" I asked.

There was a slight change in his expression, but it was hardly a smile, scarcely a relaxing of his perennial

solemnity.

"It makes no difference," he said, "because your face tells everything. You will never be good at lying."

"I have no intention of lying to you," I replied.

Eliphalet Greer drew a chair opposite mine, and seated himself, a stiff, forbidding figure.

"And I have no intention of having you," he retorted quietly. "Sit down! Do I look young enough to discuss a point of honor? Sit down!"

Imperceptibly the quality of his voice had changed, but only enough to make me conscious of the power that lay behind it. It was as though the embers of old passions within him brightened, glowed fitfully and relapsed among their ashes.

"When you get as old as I am," he said more evenly, "you will take these matters more quietly. Everyone is a liar according to his limits."

The sound of his own voice in that quiet house appeared to arouse in him a spirit of restiveness. I could almost fancy that he disliked the silence and that the weight of words made reassuring company. I know if I were he, I should not have cared to be in a silent place.

"Yes," he went on almost hurriedly, "that is one of the things I've learned. If you could gain by it, you, anyone, would lie to me—only you are not the man to do it. You're not a man like Murdock. You could never lie and keep your face stupid, and only a woman can lie with an honest look. Keep away from women, Charles; any one of them could lead you by the nose."

"What have women got to do with you and me?" I asked.

Where was the Eliphalet Greer who carried his Bible through the streets each Sunday morning? Surely it was not he sitting opposite in the half light. The lamp flames flickered. Little shadows were dancing across his face.

"Nothing," he said. "Perhaps you have not had time to tell your story to one of them. Remember, if you do, Charles, I shall know it by your face."

For a second or so he was silent, watching me, and tapping his forefinger softly on the table, so that it made a regular sound like water dripping from a tap.

"Oh, yes," he continued. "I know about lying and deceit. Perhaps you would too if you had a father who used a whip. It's fifty years since he last struck me, but the welts are still on my back. Fifty years since I have first seen a household of hypocrites, but I've seen a world of them since then. I've seen men smile with dirks beneath their cloaks. I've seen them swear friendship while venom was reeking in their souls. Oh, I know a lie when I see it now. Remember, I know a lie when I see it, and God help the man who lies to me!"

Startled by his outburst of words, I could not frame an adequate reply. We both fell silent, listening to the wind as it whistled in the trees outside, and I could hear his breathing again, louder and sharper than it had been before. His voice had a way of sticking to the memory. Although we both were silent, its sound was with us still. Even a burst of rain tossed sharp against the windows like a handful of sand did not wholly dispel it. When he continued to speak, its cadence only rose again. It had never wholly gone.

"Remember, Charles," he said, "I have sent you on an errand, and now it's the truth I want. I hope you understand."

"You'll get the truth," I answered. "You paid me enough for it."

Eliphalet Greer leaned back in his chair, but I think it was only by an effort of will that he did so. He could be cold as a church bell when he wished, but he could not wholly conceal the thing which was surging within him.

"Well," he said, clearing his throat, "Captain Murdock told me he anchored off the island."

"He anchored in fifteen fathoms," I answered, "a clean coral bottom."

"Ah!" said Eliphalet Greer. "It's a long while since I put to sea, but I only have to close my eyes to see that island, as it comes out of the water."

But he did not close his eyes. He only half closed them, and I still could see the glimmer beneath their drooping lids.

"It's like a mirage at first, when the sea is calm. It comes up quickly unless you are in the rigging. You stand on deck and there is nothing but the waste of sea as our Maker left it, until all at once—there it is, the white beach, the palm trees, like the first faint green of spring. What a place to go and forget the world! But why should I describe it when you have seen it all?"

I wonder if it was dread of what I had to say that made his tongue run free. I do not think it was, for his face lighted as he spoke, as it always did when he mentioned ships and the water, as though the clear air was fresh in his nostrils again and the hissing of the waves playing to his ears.

"There's no need to trouble yourself describing it," I answered. "We were there. It was the place you meant."

"And you went ashore alone?" he asked, and the beauties of the island vanished forever in the clouds of our horizon.

"Yes," I said, "I went ashore as you told me to."

"Then," said Eliphalet Greer, still with his eyes half closed, "tell me about it yourself. You can do it better than I."

"Very well," I answered. "I left the crew at the oars. The tide was low. I walked along the beach, looking for shells, but I did not see one, not anywhere."

Eliphalet Greer opened his eyes slowly.

"Never mind the shells," he said; "the beds were far off-shore. What else did you look for?"

"As I walked along the beach," I said, "I kept my eye out on the bushes and vines that grew among the trees. I must have walked about a half a mile when I saw an opening in those bushes, as though it had been cleared by hand. I walked toward it, and saw it was a path."

Eliphalet Greer had ceased to lean back in his chair. I heard him catch his breath sharply. His lips twitched upward and remained immovable.

"As you advised me," I said, "I had brought a pistol with me. When I reached the path, and saw it was a path, I took the pistol from my pocket."

I paused again, curious to see the effect of my words, but he had bent his head so that his face was half in the shadow.

"I took it from my pocket," I went on, "cocked it, and put on a new cap. Then I walked up the path."

Eliphalet Greer drew a rasping breath, and his eyes left mine. He was looking over my shoulder, so strangely that I turned and looked also into the vacant space behind me. I was not used to shadows then. Even though the room was bare, I could feel a presence that my words had conjured up, as if we two were no longer quite alone.

"Charles," he said very gently, "you did well to draw your pistol. I knew you would use your judgment."

"I walked up the path," I continued. "It was quite open, not a vine was across it. Hardly a leaf had fallen. At the end of a hundred yards I saw the bushes and the trees had been cleared ahead of me. There was an open space. On the

opposite side of that space was a shelter made of woven twigs and thatched with palm leaves. It was not like a native house. It was squarely built, and there was a row of trees in front of it. I watched it very carefully from the path. Then I walked across the clearing."

Again Eliphalet Greer had leaned forward. "Yes," he said, "I might have known. I might have known someone would be there. Squarely built, it was, you said? It would be. But go on—where was he? Was he waiting for you?"

I had thought my account was simple and prosaic, but it must have held some magic of its own. He was rearing his own imaginary edifice out of my words. Did he too feel the silence, and hear the faint rustling of the palm leaves?

And then the thing that I had thought and had put away from me was back at me again. What if I had met a man? Why was Eliphalet Greer leaning forward as though his life depended on what I answered? His very anxiety made me instinctively cautious. I found myself holding back almost timidly before replying. I wanted to be sure. Before I did anything I wanted to be sure that what I thought was true. If it was—it never occurred to me that if it was there was nothing for me to do.

"Was he there?" he asked again, and I would not have known his voice.

"No," I answered, "he wasn't there."

"No," said Eliphalet Greer, "he wouldn't be. It'd be like him to be hiding in the trees."

I do not believe he ever knew he had forgotten himself.

"He wasn't in the trees," I said.

"Then where was he?" he asked sharply. "D'you hear me? Where was he?"

The embers within him were bright again, glowing through the thin veil of his reserve. Of a sudden he was an old man shaken by the hot gust of a passion with which he could no longer cope. It swayed him, like wind rushing through a half dead branch whose hardened fibres creaked and groaned against it. It was like some potent drug that stirs life's waning faculties. His face had grown a dull red. His body trembled like a slackened rope suddenly pulled taut. He spoke again, but a thickening in his throat made his words scarcely distinguishable.

"Where was he?" he repeated.

"How should I know where he was?" I answered shortly. "He wasn't anywhere."

Slowly Eliphalet Greer raised his hand to his chin.

"Nowhere?" he said. "Now that is very sad."

"Sad?" I echoed. "I don't think I understand you."

"Charles," said Eliphalet Greer with an intonation almost clerical, "you may not understand, but I have grasped your meaning. If he was not there, where would he be unless his soul had gone to a better place where you and I must follow when our time comes?"

I grew uncomfortable. Eliphalet Greer was quite placid, and his eyes were turned upward toward the ceiling.

"I don't know where his soul was——" I began.

"And no more do I," said Eliphalet Greer melodiously, "but there never was harm in a friendly wish."

I have never seen pleasure portrayed in a more horrible form. He could not conceal it. I doubt if he even tried to. It had crept into every phrase he uttered, laughing through its cloak of piety.

"I'm sure I wish, as you do, Charles, that his soul is quite at rest."

"But I tell you," I persisted, "I don't know whether it's at rest or not. All I know——"

"Is all any of us know," said Eliphalet Greer with startling geniality. "There are sad limitations of the flesh. Whether we pass to the other shore from a deserted isle or from a pillow smoothed by loving hands, all we can do is hope."

He paused and sighed in a manner that was far from melancholy, and I was enabled to say what was on my mind.

"Mr. Greer," I said, "you may think you understand, but you don't. I said he wasn't anywhere, and that's exactly what I mean. He wasn't anywhere on the island, his soul or his body either."

Until I spoke you could not have told what energy lay within him. He sprang up with such alacrity that the lamps flickered, and his voice had a snap to it like rending wood.

"What?" he shouted. "Not on the island? Where could he be if he wasn't on the island?"

"You know as much as I do," I replied steadily.

"You fool!" snapped Eliphalet Greer, bringing his fist down on the bare table. "Why didn't you hunt him out? He was hiding. I tell you he was hiding. He did as soon as he saw the ship."

There was an odd contagion in his excitement. Before I was aware of it I was answering with words as acrid as his own.

"Nonsense," I said, "you know well enough there's no place where a man could hide on that pocket-handkerchief of land. There isn't a rock. There isn't a hole. I tell you I went over every foot of it. I looked at every stick and pebble. I tell you whoever was ashore there, whoever built that shelter and planted those trees, was gone."

Eliphalet Greer started to interrupt me, but I raised my voice.

"Yes, gone! There was nothing left—nothing in the shelter, nothing anywhere, not a knife, not a shred of clothing. Whoever had been there had gone quietly. He had even thrown dirt over the fire by the door. The whole place, the whole island was bare as a bone, and there wasn't a bone in that God-forsaken place except fish-bones. He had gone and taken everything with him."

Eliphalet Greer had been standing by the table. Now he placed his hand against it. He was no longer looking at me. His eyes no longer had their glint of intelligence. The light had gone out in them, leaving them dull and cold. The blood had ebbed away from his cheeks till they were as gray as his hair.

"Gone," he repeated in the monotonous tone of someone who walks in his sleep. "How long was he gone?"

"Not so very long," I replied. "I should say not more than six weeks before we anchored there. The clearing was quite open. So was the path, and vegetation grows quickly after the rains."

For a moment he stood motionless with a glazed eye and livid face. There was a vague terror in his look, in the tense muscular effort of his very stillness.

"Damn him!" he cried. "May God eternally damn him!"

Then I found myself swept away also, trembling and sick with a sudden revulsion. I might have closed my eyes before, but the truth was before me now, bold and indubitable in every line of his face.

"So that's what your money was for!" I cried. "I know what you wanted now!"

But he never heard me. He never moved. He was still staring vacantly into space. Already a change had come over him. The hollows of his cheeks and eyes had grown deeper, and a wisp of his long hair had fallen across his forehead,

but he was no longer pale. Already there was a concentration in his glance of rapid, orderly thought. He raised his hand with fingers distended to the white choker at his throat.

"Damn him!" he cried again, and his voice was no longer wild. It was low and vibrant with another passion.

IV

Had he been afraid, or had his blood merely been chilled by the somber coldness of a stormy evening? I wonder what thoughts were coursing through his mind just then. They must have been strange fancies. I could nearly believe I saw them, pressing hard upon him, rending him with thin wild fingers, catching at his very breath. He seemed to be struggling against them almost with physical violence, alone in the world which his life had fashioned. What was it, I wonder, that brought the blood back to his cheeks again and set the light dancing in his eye?

It was not any outside force, for the room was dark and chill. It was some flame within him, leaping up from the dead embers of the years, pouring life into dead tissues. It was warming him, imbuing him with resolution, like some rare and costly stimulant, until his hand no longer trembled, until his breath came and went with the strength and regularity of youth. It was like the fanatic impetus of some old religious time, such as once brought old men to the battle and gave them strength to cross the sea. It was like the fire which still sometimes lights the weather-seared faces of New England, and yet not wholly like it. What was that potent elixir which gave him back his strength? Was it some alembic of the soul? Surely it was not faith or charity, and the light of hope could never have burned with such a wild and untrimmed flame. I wonder after all if that distraught old man may not have received a stab of truth in the blasphemy which Captain Murdock uttered when the *Felicity* came in from the sea. In the years which have gone since then I have often felt that faith and hope and charity have a way of drifting like the wreck above the water, while love and hate, and possibly even liquor, make the waves. I wonder after all whether a philosophic genius did not lurk behind Captain Murdock's red face and round nose and beady eye. There have been other more unlikely phenomena, but surely it was not love that warmed that heart of Eliphalet Greer, and no liquor could have rid his mind of mist.

No, the force which animated him was an unholy, ungodly thing. It dispelled his years and gravity. It changed him to a being of delicate sensibility, and caused a smile to flicker over his withered lips. It softened him to a pliable and palatable good nature.

"Charles," he said, "you have acted like a determined and brave young man."

I wonder why I said nothing then. I wonder why I sat passively by and let him continue. I can never give a satisfactory reason unless it was a morbid curiosity. I only know it was through no desire of personal gain or through no sympathy or liking that I remained quiet.

"Yes," said Eliphalet Greer, "I know a man when I see one. You've always had a reckless look, like a man who gets ahead. And you will get ahead. You are going to be a rich man, Charles. Do you know why?"

"No, I don't," I said, "and what's more, you can't tell me."

Eliphalet Greer leaned toward me and placed his hand gently on my knee.

"You're mistaken, Charles," he said, more gently than before. "I can tell you. Do you think our relations are ended now that we have transacted our piece of business? They've only begun. Don't start so. I was listening when you spoke of that pistol."

"What do you mean by that?" I demanded.

"I mean," he said evenly, "that you would have fired it."

Somehow the world outside seemed very far away. Only twelve paces off was the front door and the stone steps and the horse-block. Only a hundred yards away was the water where the ships were quiet at anchor with their well-trimmed riding-lights. Through the wind I could distinguish the steady footsteps of our fellow townsmen traveling home to supper. Outside the street lamps would be burning. Soft yellow light would be gleaming through the fan shutters of a hundred doorways. Yet it was all very far off. Eliphalet Greer and I might have been anywhere at all except in that bare room—Havana, Cartagena, where the night air stirs the blood—yes, anywhere but there. In spite of myself my pulse was running faster and my thoughts ran impossible courses. Where had he been in other times? What had he touched with his hard old hands and seen with his deep-set eyes? Shadows were dancing behind him on the opposite wall, shifting, changing in shape as unfelt draughts played about the lamps.

"Charles," he asked suddenly, "do I look like a quiet man?"

"No," I replied, "not now."

My answer must have pleased him, for he nodded and rubbed his hands.

"And I'm not," he said. "*He'll* find I'm not."

"Who do you mean?" I demanded.

Eliphalet Greer moved his head from side to side in a playful, knowing fashion.

"You know who," he said. "But if I was only ten years younger, you wouldn't need to know. If I was only ten years younger..."

His voice trailed into half a sigh. He was back among the shadows. For a fleeting second all dullness and weariness had left him. Was he hearing old voices back through the distance of the years?

"But I'm not," he added. "Somehow it gets harder to stand alone and see things through when you get old. I need someone who'll stand by me now, and you're the man who'll do it."

"What makes you think I am?" I asked.

"I don't think," said Eliphalet Greer testily. "I know it. D'you suppose I'd be going on to you like this if I didn't know it?"

To my surprise, he was speaking rapidly and almost pleadingly. I tried to interrupt, but he only went on the faster.

"No family, no friends, not even a woman—the whole world ahead of you and not a thing behind. What wouldn't I have done with the chances you will have!"

"Would you mind telling me," I interjected, "what you are trying to get me to do?"

I noticed he had a way of being deaf at times, and he did not hear me now.

"No, not even a woman. I've seen 'em look at you, but you've never looked at them. Never you mind, they'll look at you all the more when you have your horses and your gardens. I'll see you are a rich man. What won't you be able to do, with an education and expensive tastes? Aha! I can see your face light up! What'll you do when you get out of those sea-clothes, I wonder, and dress like a fine young gentleman? And you will. Say the word and you'll be a gentleman tomorrow. Say it, and you'll be as rich as your grandfather."

"What's the use of telling me this fairy story?" I asked.

"Every word I tell you is the truth," he answered with hot haste. "I'm making enough money out of my cargoes to share with you. I've had letters from the stage tonight. I've got two ships on the way from Guinea."

"From Guinea?" I echoed. I started, for I recalled Captain Murdock's words on the deck of the *Felicity*, and a shiver

ran up and down my spine. "What are you bringing from the coast of Guinea?"

Eliphalet Greer shook his finger at me in mock admonition.

"Never you mind, my boy," he chuckled hoarsely. "I guessed it'd give a thrill to a boy like you. Never you mind what's coming from Guinea, but it's as good as a load of King Elephant tusks, if it gets landed right. Aha! I thought that'd fetch you! We'll go halves, Charles, when it gets ashore."

"Good God!" I cried. "Do you know what you're saying?"

Eliphalet Greer made a gleeful sound, and rubbed his hands.

"Aha!" he cried. "I guess I'm not as quiet as you thought I was!"

And then he lowered his voice to its old staid and even tones.

"I'm a lonely man tonight, Charles. I need a friend tonight, Charles, and you're the man."

"What is it you want me to do?" I asked, and my voice was no longer steady. The shadow which the lamps had cast upon him seemed to be about me also, a thing of weight and dread.

Eliphalet Greer rubbed his chin, and his long white fingers were remarkably steady.

"What I want you to do," he said, "is hardly anything at all. I want you to stay here and be quiet. You have a pistol. I want you to use that pistol when I say the word. That's all."

"You damned old pirate!" I gasped, starting to my feet.

I heard Eliphalet Greer's chair clatter backward to the floor and he was up beside me. He was speaking quickly. Each word was shaking him like a gust of wind, but I did not listen.

"So that's what you thought I was!" I shouted. "You thought you could hire me like a nigger, did you, Mr. Greer? Well, you know more about niggers than you do about white men. Take your hand off me! Do you think you can frighten me? Take away your hand!"

"By God!" snarled Eliphalet Greer, "don't you raise your voice to me."

And I stopped. Yes, in spite of myself I stopped. Something in the repression of his tone constricted my throat. Eliphalet Greer had grown as cold as ice.

"Keep your tongue where it belongs," he said. "I'm a long way from being deaf."

"And I'm a long way from being a hired murderer!" I retorted.

It was wonderful how quickly he brought himself under control. He was quite himself again. If I had not watched him before I could never have told that there was violence within him.

"And would you mind," he asked levelly, "telling me who asked you to be one?"

"There's no use looking at me like that," I returned. "I know what you asked."

"If you think over what I said," he returned calmly, "I asked you nothing except to protect my property, and to help me in a business enterprise. Is that what comes of being generous?"

"No," I replied. "It's what comes of being what you are, and being mistaken in your judgment."

"I wonder," said Eliphalet Greer musingly, "what other gentlemen in this town would say if I told them of this

outbreak? It would be better for you if I did not tell them. It shows you in a peculiar light."

"But you won't tell them," I replied.

Eliphalet Greer's teeth clicked together.

"And neither will you, if you value your skin," he said.

I stepped past the table toward the door.

"Perhaps," I answered, "I don't value it."

"Wait!" he cried, and his speech was harsh and choked. "Do I understand you're not going to do what I ask?"

I placed my hand on the latch, and half opened the parlor door, so that the draft from the black hall blew across my cheek. Eliphalet Greer had moved to the table, and was tugging at the drawer.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you," I said. "We ain't standing to off Guinea."

"Wait!" he cried.

He was leaning half across the table. His shoulders were sagging and his head was bowed. In the draft of the hall the flames of the lamps were flickering, and the fire within him seemed flickering also, fitfully dying down. The light had left his eyes again, leaving them glazed and stupid. Once more he was an old and weary man.

"You're not going to leave me?" he asked—"not leave me here alone? Don't be a fool, Charles. Think what you're doing!"

"I know what I'm doing," I said.

"Wait!" he cried again. "One of Murrell's ships is leaving tomorrow. I'll give you five thousand dollars if you go aboard her as a passenger."

"I thought you'd find you said too much," I answered, and placed my hand back on the latch.

"Charles," cried Eliphalet Greer in a strangled voice, "I'll give you ten thousand dollars if you leave this town."

"I've had enough of your money," I answered, and stepped into the hall.

"Wait!" shouted Eliphalet Greer. "Wait! D'you hear me?"

His last words were lost in the wind as I closed the front door behind me. There was no doubt any longer what Eliphalet Greer had wanted. He had hired me to do murder. He had expected me to do murder—and now he wished to get rid of me because I knew too much.

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I should have known better than to suppose that Eliphalet Greer would have let me pass safely out his door that night. I should have known I was drifting then, turning slowly in strange and hostile currents. I should have known as soon as I stepped outside his door, for it was a night when anything might happen, a night that changes the most staid New England street into a lane of fantasy. You may remember the heavy Ionic pillars by my father's house, and the tall lilacs beside them which sheltered the portico. I did not realize the full force of the wind until I had passed those pillars.

It was a northeast gale, such as sometimes comes from our leaden sky to lay our coast to waste. Old Deacon Jesup used to say those winds have the wrath of the armies of the Lord. Once you are unsheltered by a friendly roof you can understand his meaning.

There is a clatter of horsemen riding wild above the trees. In the rain is the echo of a myriad of footsteps of a cadence that is never heard on earth. There are voices in the wind, each of a different pitch, the same voices which you hear of a night at sea. For the sea itself comes up to land in the arms of a northeast gale. A port by the water's edge is a port no longer. It is in itself a ship whose timbers creak and groan, whose windows are closed ports, and whose walls are bulwarks under the waves of rain.

Before I was down our stone steps I was shivering and gripping for the railing. The street was a river of sound. Its lamps were out. Its gutters roared like torrents. A shutter had torn loose above me and was battering itself to pieces against the bricks. A limb had snapped and had hurtled down to the pavement, and now it was rolling over and over, scraping at the granite curb. It was still light enough to see, for the spring days had grown longer. Through the cloud of rain vague shapes were visible, the trunks of the elms, the heavy mass of house walls, steady among the swaying bushes of the gardens. But all those objects were unsubstantial. It was hard even to perceive what they were with senses deadened by the rush of air.

As I paused at the foot of the steps to catch my breath, I saw another shape different from the rest. It had come from under the elms across the street. It was halfway over before I saw it was a figure of a man. He was moving up against the wind with a sidelong motion, planting one foot carefully in front of the other. I never guessed that it was I who brought him wading through the gutter, until he had halted in front of me, while the rain sprayed off his oilskin coat.

"Hey!" he roared, cupping his hands about his mouth. "You've been a hell of a while!"

There was no mistaking those hoarse bovine tones. His face might be blurred by the rain, but the voice was Captain Murdock's.

"What——" My voice was lost in the wind, so that I had to shout my question. "What are you out here for?"

Captain Murdock laid his stubby fingers on my arm, and raised his face to mine like some fair partner in a waltz. Even with the wind blowing a gale, I could perceive he was well fortified against the rigors of spring weather.

"Ain't you got eyes?" he bellowed jovially. "Do I look like I'm picking pansies?"

Without waiting for me to reply, Captain Murdock locked his arm trustfully through mine, and squeezed my hand in spontaneous, joyous affection, like a gentleman who is a friend of all the world. He was a short man, and I had to lean down so that he could hear me.

"You better go home," I shouted.

I had no desire to see Captain Murdock then. We both had enough of each other after eighteen months at sea.

"Hey?" roared Captain Murdock.

"I said," I shouted back, "that it's a bad night to be out."

Captain Murdock only stared vaguely up at the swaying elms.

"If your belly's warm," he roared, "everything's warm. That's my motter. Always keep warmth in the stummick!"

"Then why don't you stay at home?" I called.

"Hey?" roared Captain Murdock.

"I said," I shouted desperately, "that you'd better go home!"

My lungs were like leather in those days, but all their power went for nothing.

"You never said a truer thing," roared back Captain Murdock. "Always keep warmth in the stummick!"

"What do you want?" I shouted impatiently. "Do you think I'm going to stand out here all night?"

"Right you be!" he roared back amiably. "What do I want? Lemme see ... Oh, yes, that's what."

The rain was beating through my woolen coat and coursing down my neck. I began to lose my patience as I grew wetter, and to remember that Captain Murdock was not my captain once we were ashore.

"Damnation!" I shouted. "Have you lost your wits?"

At the best of times I had observed he was a stupid man, but I had never seen him so unutterably dull as he was then.

"Yep," he bellowed placidly, "seems like I do recollect. Wasn't—wasn't there somethin' he told you to tell me?"

He made a sweeping, confidential gesture to the bare walls and unlighted windows of the house behind us.

"When you're in your right mind," I replied, "you'll know he'd send for you at home if he wanted to tell you anything."

"I dunno," returned Captain Murdock in a voice of undiminished power. "Seems—like—I was expectin'—he'd tell you—to tell me somethin'. Didn't he—didn't he tell—you—nothin'?"

I attempted to withdraw my arm from Captain Murdock's grasp.

"No—nothing!" I shouted.

"Now ain't that hell?" roared Captain Murdock plaintively. "An' you such a handsome young gent!"

I started down the street, but he clung to me, so that I half dragged him off his feet, and tears of self-pity cracked his voice.

"You ain't going to leave me?" he cried. "Now don'tcher leave me! My stummick's gettin' cold!"

He took a new and tighter grip on my arm.

"You ain't going to leave your old skipper on his first night ashore when he has a cold stummick?"

Captain Murdock must have been very drunk. For over a year we had sat at the same table, each across from the other, while we ate in stolid silence. If I had any respect for Captain Murdock it was not from his social attainments, and I know he had none for mine. He had reached a curious pass, for now he was pleading with me, weeping on my shoulder, begging me to take him home.

"What you want is something for your stummick!" he roared. "Your stummick must be getting cold too."

I tried again to pull my arm away, but Captain Murdock clung to it like a bulldog. I pulled again, but not with so much violence. No matter how uncongenial one may find another, months of proximity form ties which are hard to break.

"Go home yourself," I objected. "I haven't had my supper."

Captain Murdock made a gesture of righteous indignation.

"Hey!" he roared. "Do I look like a man who wouldn't feed a shipmate? Like hell I look like that!"

And in the agony of being misunderstood he again burst into tears, and I made the best of it. Without the most violent

measures, there was only one way of getting rid of Captain Murdock.

"All right," I said hastily, "I'll take you home."

We must have made an odd sight walking down the streets in that howling gale. Now that we were headed home together, Captain Murdock was in unaccountable high spirits. He walked along beside me bouncing from one foot to another like a ball of India rubber, caroling snatches of sea songs of a doubtful though jovial tenor. I wonder what they thought in the dwellings of King Street as we shouldered our way against the wind. Did they hear the Captain's voice? It must have pulled them from their wing chairs if they did, and many a lady must have pushed her curls against her ears. For we were a righteous people in those days. Already we had begun draping the legs of our chairs with concealing flounces, and draping our thoughts with similar genteel and effective coverings. Captain Murdock, however, was in open revolt against prejudice and convention. Though his words may have lacked the grace, they were as undraped as the statues of the age of Pericles. They made shivers of apprehension run up and down my spine. What would old Mr. Brown do if he heard him, or old Robert Green who used to own the corner house? I half expected to see them come bounding down their steps, but they did not. If they heard at all, they must have thought it was original sin making the most of a violent night.

Captain Murdock lived in the old Dean house on the point. You can still see it with its back roof sloping within two feet of the ground, and its great square chimney breaking through the low ridge pole, and the weeds growing about its picket fence. You can even see the stake by the river where he tied his dory. There was not a hundred yards of water from his front door to where they moored the shipping. The Dean house looked like Captain Murdock. It had the same low, squat build and the same uninteresting exterior. It was dripping with water, like his oilskin, and seemed to exude a similar convivial odor. As we headed for the door we could see a single light burning in the kitchen window. Captain Murdock fumbled for the latch.

"Damn it!" he roared. "Ain't it never in the same place?"

He found the latch. The door only creaked, and Captain Murdock kicked it.

"There, b'gad!" he cried with child-like triumph, and we were in the kitchen.

I had never been inside his house before, and I found it as unimposing as himself. The kitchen was lighted by a sea-lantern which hung from a rafter. It was low-studded and filled with an intense genial heat. The smells of a generation were stored within its dingy walls, but I remember they were grateful smells that evening, wood-smoke, burned bacon, tea and lemon peel, drying sea-boots and tarred rope. There was an open fire in the broad chimney, red with embers, and cupboards stood open on either side of the fireplace, with iron pots and china on their shelves. It was a one-story house, and to the left of the cupboards was the door to the back stairs which led to the attic. Rope and sailcloth made up most of the furniture, but there was a table in front of the fire, covered with dirty cups and plates, and there were two chairs, one of which had fallen to its side. Yes, it was a dull enough room, but for many reasons it is stamped deep on my memory, so deep that I could enter it now and mark the very spot where the table stood and the very angle of the tongs and fire-irons. Captain Murdock ambled over the rough, splintered floor and picked up the fallen chair.

"Damn her!" he grunted. "Don't she ever do nothing?"

I gathered from his injured tone that he was referring to his daughter.

Our clothes began to steam in the heat-laden air. Captain Murdock removed his oilskins and tossed them in a corner.

"Set down and be easy," he said. "Now we've got here, what you and me need's a drink."

And he rubbed his sleeve over his face and stared up at me with his steady bovine eyes.

"What good's a fire," he demanded cordially, "when a man can't swaller it? It's licker that puts the heat into you, and what I've always said was if your stummick's hot——"

"Yes, yes," I said, interrupting him rather rudely, "that's all very well, but you said you'd give me some supper, and

I'm hungry."

And I was. We had eaten aboard the *Felicity* at noon, and the fly-blown clock on the chimney-piece pointed to seven.

For some reason the mention of food aroused Captain Murdock's ire. He uttered an impatient expletive beneath his breath, and assumed a belligerent attitude.

"Eat!" he snorted. "What's the use in eatin'? You won't want to eat after what I give you. The food will just be wasted."

"I'm not thirsty," I answered pacifically, "just hungry. I'm not particular, but you must have some food somewhere."

Captain Murdock rolled his eyes.

"Now, ain't that just like one of these gents?" he demanded. "He wants to eat, instead of obliging his skipper with a drink. Is that the way for one gentleman to talk to another?"

The clouds of battle were gathering about his brow. He was puffing his cheeks in a way he had when he was angry, and I did not want to quarrel. Now that I look back on it, it was destiny and not myself that made me answer as I did.

"Murdock," I said, "you're not the man to send a friend out in the rain hungry. Give me some food first, and I'll drink with you all night."

Captain Murdock seemed singularly relieved. Some piece of humor which I could not understand made his stomach shake with merriment.

"All night!" he chortled. "Will you, now, by gad? Well, it ain't like me to refuse a hungry man. Where's the food? What's she done with it?"

Now that his mind was made up, he seemed most anxious to have the eating over. He rummaged hastily through the cupboards, but the food was evidently elsewhere. He hastened feverishly from corner to corner, and as he looked a just irritation mounted within him. Long ago I had ceased to wonder at Captain Murdock's powers of profanity, but perhaps from the stimulus of home life, he burst into a surpassing exhibition. Whatever gifts of character a parsimonious heredity and an overworked providence may have withheld, he had been endowed with a dramatic genius, and he had besides a knowledge of holy things that exceeded that of the layman. As he searched for my supper his speech glowed with Biblical allusions. I would not have been surprised if the supper had jumped from its hiding place and hastened out of the door, but it did not. Instead the perspiration rolled in rivulets down Captain Murdock's cheeks, and formed in drops about his nose.

"By the million boils of Egypt!" roared Captain Murdock. "Where did she put it?"

He looked about at the end of his exhortation, as though expecting some benevolent sign from the clouds, but none came. Finally with a last desperate burst of energy he strode to the attic stairs and tore at the door.

"Hey, you!" he bellowed. "Show a leg!"

There was no answer.

"Damn you!" he shouted, "tumble out, there!"

I heard a creaking of boards above me. Captain Murdock reached for the fire-tongs.

"None of your mouth now!" he continued. "Git down here with you!"

There was a footstep on the attic stairs, and Murdock threw the tongs back on the hearth. There was another footstep and another. I turned away, feeling both disgusted and sick. Though the last time I had seen Captain Murdock's daughter

was before his wife had died, and before she had been sent to board in Boston, I knew what she would be like. I could tell from the way Murdock had spoken. Her face would be pinched, her shoulders bent, her hair unkempt and lustreless, and her eyes would be wide with the terror known to women of brutal men. I could hear her come through the doorway, and though my back was turned, I could picture what was going on. Captain Murdock made a puffing sound like a porpoise coming up for air.

"Damn you!" he said, "what did you do with the supper?"

Surely it could not be Captain Murdock's daughter who answered. There was no tremor of fear in her voice. It was clear and musical as a bell.

"Damn you yourself," she said, "the supper's where you put it."

I had been looking fixedly at the marks of mould on the opposite wall, but now I spun about. Captain Murdock's daughter was standing directly under the kitchen lantern. She was in a gingham dress. She had an oddly delicate appearance, as she stood opposite Captain Murdock's squat and burly figure. She was standing straight and motionless, and looking at him in a curious way, half dreamily, half fixedly. I could tell as much from her gesture as anything else, that she was young. Though youth is an attribute which one sees every day, it is too delicate and transient to capture with a word. Perhaps, even if she had resembled Captain Murdock, she might have had a certain charm, but she did not resemble him. Even in her gingham dress she seemed aloof from Captain Murdock and his kitchen. He snorted and shook his fist in her face, but she did not move. Instead, she spoke again, as though his temper were an everyday affair.

"Remember what I told you this afternoon," she said. "I'll pay you back. The first chance I get I'll pay you back."

"None of that now!" thundered Captain Murdock. "How should I know where I put the supper?"

"Because you have enough sense to know it," she answered. "It's in the bean-pot in the ashes."

"Then go get it!" roared Captain Murdock.

Her face went paler, but she did not move.

"Didn't I tell you that I'd never raise a finger for you again?" she inquired. "Go get it yourself."

There was a silence. Captain Murdock's features took on a familiar purple hue and I stepped toward the hearth.

"Never mind," I said. "The supper's for me. I'll get it, and be glad to."

Captain Murdock raised his hand to his close-cropped hair.

"Now," he said, "ain't that a hell of a way to treat your old man in front of company?"

With another snort he turned on his heel and began fumbling under a piece of sail in the corner.

"Go upstairs," I whispered, for she was still staring at him. "He'll be better in the morning."

I hardly think she had noticed me before. Now she looked at me in sudden astonishment.

"Please go," I said. "I don't want to quarrel with him in his own kitchen."

"You mean," she said in a low voice, "you mean you wouldn't let him——"

"Of course not," I answered shortly.

"You can't be much of a friend of his," she said.

"I'm not," I replied. "I'm sorry I ever came."

I must have said a very astonishing thing, for her lips fell half open. Her face flushed and she trembled.

"Sit down by the table," she said, "and I'll get your supper, as long as it's not for him."

Captain Murdock in the meanwhile had pulled a jug from under the sail, and now he was beside the cupboard, fumbling with two crockery cups. He seemed to be having difficulty, I thought, for he was a long while. His back was turned toward me, and I could hear the clink of thick china. His daughter had placed a plate of beans on the table, and was cutting a thick slice of bread.

"If I had known there would be so much trouble——" I began awkwardly.

"Nonsense," she answered shortly. "Who are you?"

"My name is Jervaile," I said. "Charles Jervaile."

She glanced at Captain Murdock. He had reached down for the jug. I could hear a comfortable gurgling sound, as he lowered it over the cups.

"Not——?" she asked, and hesitated.

"Don't be afraid to ask," I answered. "Everybody knows."

Yet involuntarily the blood started to my cheeks and I lowered my eyes.

"I didn't mean to be rude," she said, "but I see why you have good manners now."

It was a strangely courteous reply for a room where a jug of rum was gurgling out its contents. I felt myself sitting straighter in my wooden chair.

"They are all that are left," I said, and to my surprise I found myself smiling, but she did not smile back. Instead she caught her breath, and looked at Captain Murdock's bent shoulders.

"Look!" she said softly, "he has filled the other cup."

Captain Murdock had placed the jug on the floor with a solid thump, and had turned toward us with a cup in either hand.

"Well," he said, "here's to you!"

With a steadiness that his condition rendered surprising he stepped to the table and placed a cup beside my plate. Then he drew the other chair opposite and seated himself with the other cup raised before him.

"Licker never hurts food," he said suggestively.

Of all the men I might have cared to drink with just then, he was the last, but I knew there was nothing else for it. I was just about to lift up the cup he had given me, when his daughter uttered a low cry.

"Be still—you!" thundered Captain Murdock, half rising from his chair. "Do you want to spoil the gentleman's good time? Git upstairs where you belong!"

But she did not seem to have heard him. Instead she was pointing over his shoulder.

"Listen!" she whispered. "There's someone at the door."

Captain Murdock uttered a low exclamation, and looked sharply at me, though I could not tell why. Muttering something, he set his cup down and walked across the kitchen. He stopped in front of the door, with his head cocked to one side, but except for the wind there was no other sound. Suddenly I heard a sharp indrawn breath. Captain Murdock's

daughter had leaned over the table. The two crockery cups were on it, one at either end. Before I had time to utter a word, or understand what she was doing, she had whisked them around, so that Captain Murdock's cup was at my end of the table and mine at Captain Murdock's.

"Here——" I began, and then a quick, noiseless motion of her lips made me stop.

"There ain't anyone there," grunted Captain Murdock, and slumped back to his chair, and picked up the cup that stood in front of him.

For the first time I noticed that Captain Murdock appeared unnaturally excited for such a trivial performance. He was raising his cup with undue care and solemnity. The light from the kitchen lantern shone darkly on its contents. It was strange how a simple action such as the changing of those two cups altered the appearance of that whole kitchen also. Nothing about it remained commonplace. It was filled instead with an ominous sort of magic lurking in the rattle of the window-sashes and in the hissing of the fire. I could feel my muscles draw taut across my shoulders. Captain Murdock licked his lips expectantly.

"Drink up," he said. "Ain't you going to drink?"

My voice when I answered was wonderfully steady.

"Murdock," I said, "nothing will give me more pleasure."

Captain Murdock's eyelids twitched.

"That's it!" he cried heartily. "Something warm in the stummick! That's how a young gent should act. Do like me now, and take it all in one swaller!"

"Very well," I said. "Is there anything you'd like to drink to?"

Captain Murdock was in high good humor. He shook with bubbling, genial laughter.

"Ain't there someone you love?" he asked. "Nothing helps it like a wish in licker."

Captain Murdock was as blank and guileless as a fair sheet of paper, but he no longer seemed as drunk as he had seemed before.

"Or mebbe there's someone you hate," he continued obligingly. "It'll do just as well. Either way makes the world go round."

But already I had drunk deep of another draught that stands ready to every hand. My faculties were never so alert. I seemed possessed of an ungovernable, unimagined strength. I hardly knew my own voice, it rang so clear and bitter.

"So it's just as well, is it?" I heard my voice saying. "Then get up! Get up and drink it on your feet. Here it goes—every drop of it! Every drop to Eliphalet Greer."

Captain Murdock's jaw fell open.

"Drink up!" I cried. "Do you want me to pour it down your throat?"

Captain Murdock broke into a hoarse chuckle.

"B'gad!" he said simply, "here's one to the old man."

Captain Murdock was always adroit with a glass. He contrived to toss down the entire contents of his cup in a single gulp, and the cup itself to the hearth before I placed mine, also empty, back on the table. Then he began to laugh in a way that sounded oddly like the crash of the heavy china.

"Now wasn't that comical?" he inquired, rubbing his eyes. "You drinking to him like that? Many's the time you'll think of it where you're goin'."

Again Captain Murdock burst out laughing with all the side-splitting delight which arises from a pointed jest.

"Ha! Feelin' dizzy, be you? Well, you'll be dizzier in a minute, and mebbe you won't be dizzy as hell when you wake up between decks in the morning."

Captain Murdock's face suddenly became expressive. His jaw shot forward, and he half closed his eyes.

"Keep away, you swab!" he roared. "Unless you want your skin broke. Feelin' weak on your pins, do you? Hold tight, my boy—you're as good as goin' now."

"Going where?" I demanded.

Captain Murdock grinned derisively.

"Where the old man's sendin' you," he said.

"You mean Eliphalet Greer?" I asked, but there was no need for him to answer my question.

"Ain't you got eyes?" Captain Murdock was still grinning. "Didn't you see the *Ruth* waiting when she might have gone on the tide? Now who do you think she was waiting for? She was waiting for you, waitin' for you all afternoon."

"And he told you to do this?" I asked.

Captain Murdock puffed out his cheeks and sank back into his chair.

"That's what," he said huskily. "Down in the cabin he told me—unless he sent out word by you when you came out of his house tonight."

His voice, I noticed, was getting less distinct, but he was still laughing.

"And you drank it down to him. Now isn't that funny?"

"So you were going to crimp me," I said. "So that's what you were going to do."

"Was?" cried Captain Murdock with more animation. "*Am*! What did you think was in that cup—water!"

I heard a voice at my shoulder. Captain Murdock's daughter was speaking.

"Mr. Jervaile is right," she was saying. "You were going to do it, but you're not now."

With an effort Captain Murdock struggled out of his chair.

"Let me hear another peep from you——" he began. "Hey! What are you laughing for?"

"Because I changed the cups," said Captain Murdock's daughter.

Captain Murdock's face grew purple. He clenched his fist and drew back his arm, but his eyesight must have been bad then, for she was far out of reach.

"Damn you!" he roared in his old familiar way, but his voice was vague and slow, and lacking its old power.

She did not move away. She only stood watching him in an interested, impersonal fashion, but her eyes had a curious glitter.

"There are other people who hate," she said. "Have you forgotten that?"

No, Eliphalet Greer and I were not the only ones who had drunk deep of the elixir that night. We were not the only ones who felt its fire run through our veins. Even Murdock, wavering on the fringe of a land of shadows, felt its reviving strength. Mechanically he raised his fist again.

"Put down your hand," said his daughter evenly. "You'll never hit me again. Don't you feel a little shaky? Well, you'll feel shakier in a minute."

Captain Murdock tried to speak, but his voice only rattled in his throat. He staggered, lost his balance, and snatched at the back of his chair. His legs were giving way beneath him. He was sinking to the floor.

"Good God!" I gasped, "he's poisoned!"

"Only drugged," said Captain Murdock's daughter, raising her hand to her hair.

But I hardly heard her. I was staring at Captain Murdock as he settled to the floor in a round, still heap. His face, which had assumed an expression far more vacant than any it had worn in its conscious hours, was turned upward toward the blackened ceiling, and his stubby fingers lay open, groping limply at nothing.

VI

I was used to violence, as everyone was then who followed the sea. More than once I had seen men fall from the royal yards to the deck. On the *Felicity* herself I had seen them spread-eagled in the sun while Captain Murdock stood by and smoked his pipe. I had seen the blood run in half a dozen ports during a night ashore. Nevertheless my brow grew moist in Captain Murdock's kitchen. There was a premeditated swiftness about it which made me faint and sick, but Murdock's daughter was cool enough. First she stepped softly over and gave him a little prod with her toe. Then she looked thoughtfully at the clock on the chimney-piece.

"And now," she said, "you might as well finish your supper."

I gave a startled glance at the table.

"Yes," she said, "I should eat something if I were you. They'll be coming any minute now."

"Coming?" I asked blankly. My mind was still full of what had passed. "Who'll be coming?"

She made an even, impersonal gesture toward Captain Murdock with a hand that was white and delicate.

"They'll be old acquaintances," she said, "from what I could gather this afternoon. He told them he'd have you ready by now."

Without answering, I picked up Captain Murdock's discarded oilskin coat.

"Here," I said, "put this around you."

She only raised her eyebrows.

"Why?" she asked. "It isn't cold."

"It will be outdoors," I replied grimly. "And it will be too warm if we stay here."

Captain Murdock's daughter did not move. Though browbeaten men on a night watch, reveling in their days of freedom, had often told me you never could tell what a woman would do, I never knew how right they were before.

"Do you think I've finished, now that I've changed the cups?" she asked.

She was staring straight at me, and her lips were twisted in a curious crooked smile.

"Do you think I'm going to go without seeing it through?"

"But what are you going to do?" I asked.

Her fingers were straying lightly over her hair, patting it gently into place, in that deft manner which women sometimes have.

"You can stay and see if you like," she said.

"But you don't understand!" I cried. "You—"

My voice died away. She had taken the oilskin coat from my hands and had tossed it back on the floor.

"It's too late for supper now," she said. "Listen!"

For an instant we both stood perfectly silent. Then I took off my own coat and stepped toward the fireplace.

"Yes," I replied. "It's too late for everything."

Dimly but unmistakably I had heard the sound of voices outside, and the splashing of heavy feet. I was strong in those days, and now that it was too late for anything else, I was almost glad for what was going to happen.

"Get upstairs!" I whispered, and strode to the center of the room, with the fire-tongs in my hand. And then, almost before I had finished, the silence of the room was broken. Someone was knocking on the kitchen door.

"Hurry!" I whispered. "Don't let them see you!"

But instead she snatched at my arm.

"Put down those tongs and tie him up in that canvas."

"Not—him?" I stammered.

"Do you think I want him here when he wakes up?" she whispered. "They won't know who he is when you tie him," and before I could answer she had raised her voice.

"Just a minute," she called. "Just a minute and he'll be ready."

It was one of those occasions when the weight of humanity is negligible in the scales of circumstance. I had Murdock by the scruff of the neck, and was dragging him over the floor like a bag of oats. It hardly seemed any time before I was standing up and dusting my hands.

"There," I said.

Captain Murdock was a neat canvas bundle, tied about the middle and open at the ends.

"Open up that door," came a voice outside. "We've seen what you're doing!"

Captain Murdock's daughter gave a startled cry which was almost like a sob.

"Oh!" she moaned, "it's no use. Why didn't I think?"

It was the first time I had seen her frightened, and she was badly frightened then. I know how she must have felt now that her plan had crumbled like a pillar of sand. The kitchen was reverberating with a renewed pounding on the door.

"Why didn't I think?" she sobbed. "They've been watching us through the kitchen window, watching all the time!"

The pounding on the door stopped.

"You can't fool us," came a voice. "Let us in or we'll smash in!"

"I thought they'd think he was you!" sobbed Captain Murdock's daughter.

My thoughts had been whirling in a futile, desperate circle, but now they stopped and fitted together in a pattern of their own.

"Never mind," I said. "We're not through yet," and I pulled open the kitchen door.

There was a rush of wind, and three men stamped into the kitchen and slammed the door behind them. They were standing side by side, breathing loudly and dripping with the rain. There was only one thing to do. I spoke to them with harsh authority.

"Do you want to wake up the town?" I asked. "There he is. Take him away."

Then I stopped. We were staring at each other in silence. I had thought there was something familiar about them. I could see there was now, for the wick of the kitchen lantern, which the wind had blown to a faint blue flame, had kindled again and threw its yellow light on their faces. In front of me, clad in their oilskins, were standing three members of the *Felicity's* port watch. A little pool of water was forming about them, trickling across the floor. There they were, standing with their hands half open and their faces shining with the wet. I might have known that Murdock would choose them. Their faces are before me still, distinct as thought itself, stolid, coarse-grained features of men who live at sea.

Nearest me was Jim Young, a yellow boy from Mobile whose eyes were wide open like a cat's. Next him was Joe Harper, with a mat of red hair covering his forehead, and nearest the door was Tom Stevens, tall and meagre, with a hatchet-like face characteristic to New England. He was chewing rapidly on a quid of tobacco, and I could see his Adam's apple dance nervously up and down his throat.

"It's him," muttered Joe Harper, staring at me. "Yes, it's him, by thunder!"

"And who'd you think it was?" I demanded harshly. "Lay hold of that bundle. You haven't got all night!"

They were still bound hard by habit. When I spoke they all three gave a simultaneous, galvanic start, but a second later they were stock still again, and Tom Stevens was spitting indecisively.

"There's something wrong, somehow," he said. "Yes, sumthin's wrong."

I began to wish I had the fire-tongs in my hand again, but I spoke without hesitation.

"Tom," I said, "you always were a numbskull. Why should I have let you in if anything was wrong?"

Tom Stevens and Joe Harper and Jim Young glanced uneasily at each other.

"But we wasn't going to take him, Mr. Jervaile," replied Tom Stevens. "It was him who gave the orders."

"No," said Joe Harper, moving his left foot forward. "We was going to take you."

I have seldom felt less cheerful than I did then, but I looked at them and contrived to laugh.

"Did you ever hear of Eliphalet Greer? It's his orders you're minding now."

All three of them moved uneasily.

"And I'm here to see you mind them," I added. "Stand quiet now and listen. You all saw what happened between them when we came in today. Well, who do you want to mind now—that roll of canvas there or Eliphalet Greer?"

There was a gulping sound. Tom Stevens had swallowed his tobacco.

"Yes," I said. "He's had enough of Murdock, and he's sent me down to see him off—sent Murdock out to catch himself. You know the way he does."

Without waiting for them to answer, I drew a roll of bills from my pocket and placed them in Tom Stevens' hand.

"Here," I said. "This is for you now, and there's more if you do it right."

Tom Stevens fingered the bills.

"I might of known it," he said. "I might of known. He always was a deep one."

"Lay hold now," I said, "and no noise. He's going out to the *Ruth*. Tell them to keep him tied, and tell them to keep him quiet, and if you do this quick and clean, I'll tell you what I'll do——"

I paused impressively.

"I'll say a good word for you to Mr. Greer himself. Now lay hold of him, men."

Tom Stevens grinned.

"Sort of comical, ain't it?" he said.

"Lay hold," I answered. "We've made enough noise already. Easy with him! I'll close the door."

"Yes, sir," Tom Stevens reiterated. "It is sort of comical."

As I look back on it through the dim glass of years, I can see it is a savage jest. Yet I still think he was right in his observation. Captain Murdock, having finished one journey that day, was going out of the door, feet foremost, on another. He was a heavy man, and they had to bend their backs to hold him.

I held open the door and followed them out. It was so near to the river that in ten seconds they were stumbling and slipping down to the water's edge. A long boat was hauled ashore with two men standing by. Into it went Captain Murdock. I could hear the plopping noise of water as he fell between the thwarts. They were shoving her off. They were in the water beside her, turning her nose toward the dark. The sea was running high and slapping angrily against the bows. There was a thumping of wood on wood, that dull hollow sound which you can hear only by the water. The oars were between the tholepins, and Captain Murdock and his crew were nothing more than a shadow, scarcely darker than the water itself, as they bobbed from wave to wave toward the center of the stream toward a light that curved and jumped about a hidden mast.

In those days when the sea seemed nearer than it ever will again, we used to speak of our ships as we would of people, and gossip of their foibles and eccentricities. We could name a ship in those days from the cut of her sail, or from the way she stood to the wind. I knew the ship beneath those riding-lights. I could tell her from their very motion, for the *Ruth* had an unmistakable way of rolling when the wind was high, even when she was loaded to her water-line. Was Eliphalet Greer watching also? Though his eyes were dimmer than mine, he knew the motion of the lights far better. They were his lights, and the ship was his ship. The wind was already moderating. The tide would be turning by the early morning. Before the town was astir, the *Ruth* would be slipping away, a speck on the horizon curve.

VII

Captain Murdock's kitchen was very still when I entered it again. Its stillness was more than a contrast with the noise of the night outside. When I closed the door, I remember that it seemed to have the same shocked silence of Eliphalet Greer's own dwelling. She was at the window when I came in, looking out at the black, and when she turned to face me, she looked tired and white.

"Is—is he gone?" she asked.

"He's gone. I saw him go," I said.

The excitement which had been with me till then seemed to have blown away with the wind outside. My feet felt heavy. My hands were cold and sodden with the rain.

"I——" Her voice faltered. "I never knew it would be like that."

We stood looking at each other in a strange, impassive way.

"Was it true?" she asked. "Was it true what you told them? Did he really send you here?"

I felt my blood running faster.

"No," I said, "he didn't send me. I was the one he wanted to get rid of—damn him!"

I stood up straighter. My breath was hot between my lips.

"And he hasn't got rid of me," I added. "He'll find out he hasn't!"

"And what are you going to do now?"

She was looking at me curiously, but my thoughts were so black that I scarcely noticed.

"I'm going to stay here," I said.

I was so immersed in myself then that I was surprised when she misunderstood me. She did not move, but she cried out, and the color came back to her cheeks.

"I might have known you'd be like all the rest of them!" she exclaimed hotly. "Do you think that was why I changed the cups?"

"I know you didn't change them on my account," I said more gently. "That is not why I'm staying. I'm only going to wait until——"

"Until when?" she interrupted.

"Until Eliphalet Greer arrives," I answered, and sat down before the fire. There was a moment of silence, and then I heard a soft footstep beside me.

"So you weren't thinking of me at all," she said.

It is curious how we can go through the world, and only give half a glance at the people and things that surround us. I had never more than glanced at Captain Murdock's daughter. I seemed never to have seen her till then. Until then she had been nothing but a part of that indefinable curtain of words and faces which forms the background of our lives, and now, though I can never explain why, she had moved forward, and had assumed a definite and tangible shape. I had never

realized before the striking quality of her beauty, or how oddly it fitted with the thing that she and I had done. Her forehead was high. Her chin and mouth had an even grace and strength of line. Her hands were thin and tapering, like the hands in some fine lady's portrait. Her voice had the modulation of a lady's voice, unlike the heritage of a Murdock strain.

She drew the other chair to the fire, and sat with her chin resting on the palm of her left hand.

"I'm sorry——" I began, and stopped. "I can't leave you here alone," I ended.

"I wish you hadn't said that," said Captain Murdock's daughter. "I was just beginning to hate you, and I can't hate you now."

"Hate me!" I exclaimed.

"You'll understand some day," she said, and her voice had grown soft and low. "Sooner than you think, perhaps. When you have been hating someone, it's lonesome when he goes away. I almost wish he were back, because there's nothing now."

"If that's the way you feel," I said. "You couldn't have hated him at all."

Her eyes flashed, and her lips grew thin and white.

"Only God knows how I hated him!" she cried. "You don't know what it is to hate!"

I stretched my hands toward the fire, and listened to the wind.

"But I'm learning," I said.

I remember thinking then that something was the matter with Murdock's daughter. I wonder why I was so obtuse as not to see the trace of affectation in her indifference, but I never did see it. I never knew how deeply she had been stirred till then. There had been something repellent about her before, an unnatural harshness to her voice, an unyielding, expressionless hardness about her face, but she seemed quite different now. She seemed younger. Her lip was trembling, and a pulse was throbbing in her throat.

"Yes," she said, as though she had only half heard me. "You'll learn. I know you will, if you wait for Eliphalet Greer."

"What makes you so sure?" I asked.

"Don't you think I know?" Her hands were playing nervously with a fold of her dress, and her words were hot and quick, as though they had broken through some barrier.

"Why—oh, why don't you go before it's too late? Don't you see what it does? Don't you see what it's done to me? How it's made me forget everything I should have remembered? You needn't shake your head! You wouldn't be looking at me the way you are now if you didn't know it. Why don't you go? Why can't you go before you change too?"

We are used to hiding our emotions in New England. It was the more surprising to have her speak so.

"Please," I said, "I don't know why you did it, but please don't think I blame you."

"But you do," she went on. "How can you help it? Oh, why don't you go? Why do you sit staring at me like that?"

Then her voice broke, and she buried her face in her hands. Something which I could not understand had sapped the strength of her will.

"I couldn't let him do it!" she sobbed. "It was too hateful a thing to watch. I never hated him so until I saw you standing there."

For a moment I could only stare at her without speaking. Of all the things I had thought, I had never thought of that.

"Good Lord!" I gasped. "Do you mean you did it on account of me?"

She looked up at me. Her face was wet. Her hair was dishevelled, and her eyes were wide and brimming with tears.

"Don't try to feel kindly toward me," she replied. "I never should have done what I did if I hadn't hated him."

"It's been a long while," I said slowly, "since anyone has thought of me at all."

I never thought how long it was, until I began to remember with a surge of bitterness and self-pity. She was sobbing again, and staring wretchedly at the fire.

"Yes," I said, "you're the first one who has thought of me kindly since I came ashore."

She did not answer. A gust of wind blew against the house, so that the timbers creaked and groaned, almost like the timbers of a ship at sea. Though I began to feel how far at sea I was that night, I felt strangely peaceful. I was no longer thinking of Eliphalet Greer. Her glance was friendly, and her voice was very gentle.

"Will you promise me something?" she asked.

I forgot—I quite forgot that she was Murdock's daughter then. It would have been hard to remember, for there was a peculiar dignity in the way she spoke, quite as some fine lady might in the days when I met fine ladies.

"Anything you ask," I answered. "You know I owe you that."

"Then promise me you'll go," she said. "You mustn't meet him when he comes, and make things worse than they are."

"But I can't leave you alone," I objected.

"I'm not afraid," she replied. "I've been alone before. I've been here alone so often that I can tell the way the wind is blowing from the sound of the waves."

"These men may come back," I objected.

"If they were coming," she answered, "they'd have been here before now."

"You'll let me see you in the morning?" I asked. "You know I haven't thanked you yet, and I have a good deal to thank you for."

She turned her head away, and her voice sank almost to a whisper.

"You won't want to see me when you wake up tomorrow, not after what I did tonight."

"I don't forget as quickly as that," I said. "Believe me, I'll be here."

"No," she answered. "It will only be a bad dream tomorrow."

"But still," I replied, "I would rather have dreamed it than not."

I meant what I said. She was standing beside me. A window rattled from the impact of the storm. The sound made her start, and catch her breath.

"Don't be afraid," I said. "It's only the wind."

Suddenly she clutched at my arm.

"No," she said, "it's not the wind," and we both stood still and listened.

"Promise me," she said suddenly, and she spoke in a low voice, as though she was afraid someone might hear. "Promise me you'll leave this town the first thing in the morning."

"And run away?" I shook my head. "Do you really think I'd run away?"

"No," she said, "I might have known you wouldn't. Only women know when it's time to run."

I don't know what I was going to answer then. I only know that I had just begun to speak when I heard something which cut me short. Somewhere outside there was a noise louder than the storm, and then a confusion of noises charging after each other down the wind. First there was a rending of wood, which made me think a tree had snapped until I knew it was not a tree because of a shouting from somewhere on the river. Then there was a snapping, booming sound, which made me start to the door. Faint as it sounded on the wind, it was still clear enough for me to tell it. Only slack canvas could make a noise like that, only the canvas of a vessel in the wind. Outside there was a sudden scurry of footsteps and voices.

"It's on the river," I said, and I opened the door.

The rain was on my face, but the wind was slacking as I thought it would, and the sky was clearer. I stared out toward a black, oddly shaped mass in the center of the stream. The lights of the *Ruth* were there, but the *Ruth* never bore a hull like that, and there were other lights, lanterns dancing here and there about the decks. Not a dozen yards from the house I could make out a knot of men struggling through the mud and water-grass. I ran toward them and seized one by the shoulder.

"What's wrong?" I shouted.

"Wrong?" It was the voice of Stephen Wright, the harbor-master, who answered me. "A ship's bore in clean over the bar and rammed into Greer's *Ruth*. They're afoul of each other now. Is Murdock inside? Bear a hand on this boat."

Without answering, I turned and scrambled up the river bank. Murdock's daughter had followed me to the door, forgetful of the rain as she peered out across the water.

"Is it the *Ruth*?" she asked.

I strode into the kitchen and stamped the mud off my shoes. For the first time I was shaken by a sense of superstition, a feeling of some power beyond ourselves. I had a feeling that it hardly mattered what I said or what I did just then.

"A ship's run afoul of her," I answered. "She won't move out tomorrow."

"A ship?" Her voice sounded strained and unnatural, like the voice of a sleepwalker almost. "What ship? Where did it come from on a night like this?"

I stared out the open door, fascinated somehow by the mystery of the dark.

"She came from God knows where," I said.

Faintly out of the blackness I could hear a dull monotonous sound, a noise which often surges through our streets on a stormy night. It was the noise of the surf beating on the outer beach. I could fancy how it looked, row after row of waves moving out of the black—swift, endless and precise—beating down in a dim white sheet of foam, roaring, hissing against the sand, until another line sped down, another and another, row upon row out of the black. That was where the ship had come from, out of nowhere like the waves, and like all things from the sea. I felt that the tumult of the waves was drawing nearer, nearer, as we all sometimes do who live by the water's edge.

"Then he won't be gone tomorrow?" she asked suddenly. Her voice became alive again, filled with new energy. "He can't be coming back! He can't be coming back!"

"When he wakes up in the morning," I answered, "they'll find out something's wrong. We've cast our bread upon the waters. According to the Scriptures, he will return a thousand-fold."

I can never tell why I spoke so confidently, for I had hardly more than guessed what had happened on the river, but somehow I knew already that it was the beginning and not the end. The ironic order of things was enough to tell me that it was not Murdock's time to go to sea, not while the storm waves were making a rumbling sound like the wheels of fate.

"Yes," I said. "He'll be back again."

"Yes," she whispered. "He'll be back."

Then her voice broke.

"Please—you mustn't leave me now!"

She had seized my hand, and hers was as cold as ice. I had forgotten about Eliphalet Greer when I answered.

"Don't look that way," I said. "I'll stay if a thousand of him breaks through that door."

VIII

Not so long ago my life had seemed cast on simple curves. Since my father's death I had followed the sea, obeying orders on ships which were not my own. It had taken the lustre from my manners and had blunted my speech. Yet there I was in a knightly role, a protector of Captain Murdock's daughter. There I sat at Captain Murdock's table, watching the clock move on. There I sat among Captain Murdock's sea-boots in front of Captain Murdock's fire, eating Captain Murdock's food without a qualm, eating, and talking to Captain Murdock's daughter.

I wonder what made me speak of my life as the night passed by. I remember that I was sorry for her, and that I wished to take her mind off the night and the storm. I made her sit by the fire and threw on an armful of driftwood. I spoke as courteously as I could of many things. As I talked the strained, expectant look finally left her face and gave way to candid interest. Once she asked me a question, and then another, and then I remember being glad of someone to talk to who could understand me and who cared to listen. It did not seem strange that I should be saying what I did. I found myself telling her of my father's house, and of the horses and of the garden, and of the guests who came to see him from Boston and New York. As I went on I began to recall many things which I had come near to forgetting, how my father took his wine on the terrace of a spring evening, and would sit until it was dark enough to see the harbor lights, and how he played at his cards with gold pieces on the table. Memories were coming back to me as they always did when I came home, memories made alluring by the time which closed them off. I found myself telling her how he taught me to ride, and to shoot and to sail a boat, until I checked myself at length, in sudden embarrassment, as I became aware how strange a time and place it was to speak of him.

"But what difference does it make?" I said. "Everyone knows what happened, and here I am, and there's no use speaking of it, now that it's all over."

Then I was telling of what we always spoke of then, of the ships and of the sea. I told her of the first time I had sailed before the mast, when the shutters of the house were up, and what clothes I owned were in a wooden chest, of the forecastle and the tobacco smoke, and the clothes hanging out to dry, of the grease of the cook's galley, of the gulls which followed in our wake, like feathers in the air, gliding on motionless wings with never a need to rest, of all the commonplaces of a voyage at sea. I told of a storm in the Indian Ocean, and of the porpoises that leaped before our bows, and the fight between the port and starboard watches one evening at Singapore. It is hard to stop talking when you are talking of the sea. I told her of the coral islands and of the mountain I had seen which rose smoking from the water.

In those days of sail and shifting winds the world was a stranger place than it will ever be again. Yet how near it seemed then, when the ships sailed in and out, when there was a smell of spices on their decks, and we filled our houses with dragon-studded vases and our cups with the best of tea, when there was hardly a man of us but had felt the sun of the line, and had seen the holds loaded by dull-eyed men with yellow skins.

"Was your father fond of the sea?" she asked.

"He would have been," I said, "but he never had to know it as well as I do."

What a little while ago it seemed that the *Felicity* had plunged her way through waters as blue as blue, while the sea air was soft with the land breeze and we had awnings out upon the deck! It was not so far away once you crossed the bar. I had only to close my eyes to see it again.

"Tell me something more," she said. "Tell me about some other fine houses with hedges and lawns. Sometimes when I was in Boston I used to pretend what was inside, the way the stairs looked and the carpets and the chairs and the tables..."

But I only half heard what she was saying. The wind was veering toward the east and the sound of the surf was louder. It made a pleasant, somnolent sound which was pleasing to the fancy. It brings me the same picture as I listen to it now—glimpses of lead-colored water more desolate than any land I know, all necked with changing lines of white. Once over the bar, there was a world of that, and what did it matter what was on land once it lay astern? I seemed to be sailing out again, out and out, sailing with a strange company. Eliphalet Greer was at the helm, holding the wheel steady with his long hands, his face devoid of all expression, while the wind played through his long gray hair, and aft by the rail was Captain Murdock, standing as I had often seen him with his cheeks puffed out like some god of winds, and his face turned toward the sails. There were others aboard whose faces I could not see, and forward in the bows a girl was standing. I thought it was strange a woman should go to sea, until she turned her head, and I saw it was Murdock's daughter....

IX

I thought I had closed my eyes for a second only, yet when I opened them again, the sun was coming through the windows. I was still sitting in my chair, for I had learned to doze away in such a fashion when the night was stormy and we might be called on deck. Murdock's daughter was still sitting looking at the fire. Indeed, only the daylight was there to tell me that I had been asleep at all. There was no confused groping in my mind which so often follows sleep, so that I sometimes think I must have been half awake all the while, according to the habit we learn at sea. I only remember being aware that the time had come for everything I had expected.

"Why didn't you wake me up?" I asked.

"You were very tired," she said. "You were talking about a ship, and then I saw your eyes were shut. There was no reason to wake you."

And then I saw that she was tired also. Her gray eyes were heavy with watching, and her slender shoulders drooped with weariness, but her lips were bent in a smile such as I had seen on the night before, a mirthless, wistful smile which seemed to make her aloof and sufficient unto herself.

"I had so many things to think about," she added. "Yes, a great many."

I rose stiffly, walked over to the window and looked out. The sun was higher than I had thought. I knew he would be coming soon. I remember wondering what would happen when we two met, but I only wondered incuriously, for I was certain of only one thing. I could not leave without seeing him, and though I did not know what I was going to say or do, I was not worried, for somehow it all seemed settled.

The breeze was very light that morning, and the storm was gone like some vision in the night. I hardly need to describe it, for you know the way a seaport town looks after a northeaster in the spring. There is never another time when it seems half so clean and bright. The water is never so blue as it is then, and the sky is never so clear and soft. The sunlight is peculiarly mellow and kindly as it strikes upon the houses, like the sun of some more genial land.

The grass had taken on that first faint green of spring after that stormy night. The branches of the elm trees seemed less bare as they moved with the breeze. There were bits of cloud still in the sky, torn and fragile as down, and as white as sun-bleached linen, and the white-caps on the harbor waves, which kept jumping up and vanishing again, were as white as the clouds themselves, and the water sparkled like tinsel beneath the sun. I could hardly remember that there had been a stormy night until I looked out toward the center of the stream. It was only out there that I could see the aftermath of the evening's gale.

The *Ruth* was lying at anchor, but she had the look of one of her crew after a night's debauch ashore. Two of her yards had gone and still lay tangled in her broken shrouds. Her foretopmast had snapped clean off, and was still lapping against her side, half out of the water in a tangle of ropes and lesser wreckage. Her bowsprit was crushed into yellow splinters, and her paint was scratched and smeared. I could almost think she had been treated to deliberate violence if I had not been acquainted with the vicissitudes of storm.

Then, about a cable length below her, I saw another vessel which I had never noticed cross our bar before. She was a brigantine, painted black with white ports, with sharp-cut bows and narrow in the beam. She was one of a class of light, fast trading vessels such as I had seen building in the Delaware, designed for quick sailing and light cargoes. It did not take more than half a glance to see what had happened, for the paint was clean off her port side and her bulwarks were in slivers. Her mainmast was sprung so that it tipped far to the starboard, and her crew were already at work clearing her decks of wreckage. Yes, she was the ship that came from God knows where. I almost forgot my own thoughts as I watched her. Whoever stood aft that night must have known our bar better than I did to push her through it in the teeth of a northwest gale without a pilot or a chance to take a sounding.

I have found that things often happen when you are least alert, and I have always found it hard to think of other matters when a strange ship comes to port. I was still staring out the window, and was just about to call to Murdock's daughter to come and look also, when I heard a footstep and the click of the latch on the kitchen door. I turned about slowly, and stood very still, but I could feel my hand trembling and my heart beating in my throat. The latch had been raised softly and now the door was opening deliberately and smoothly. I knew before I ever saw who was there that Murdock would never open a door like that. Then the door opened wider. Eliphalet Greer was standing on the threshold.

I cannot tell how I expected him to look, but somehow his appearance surprised me. His clothes were newly brushed. His hair was smoothed back from his forehead. His gold watch-chain seemed more solid than ever as it stretched across his black waistcoat. He was holding his tall hat and his cane in his right hand, and his hat was as smooth and glossy as his broadcloth coat. Something of the early morning sunlight seemed to be reflected from his face. I had never seen him more tranquil, or more like a man who has slept well and who welcomes what the day may bring. The very way his gray hair was parted from his forehead gave him an air of reposeful dignity. All the time I knew him I do not think I ever saw his glance vacillate or waver, and it did not waver then. Even if he had seen me, I do not think he would have looked away, but he did not see me then. He was looking instead at Captain Murdock's daughter, except for a second only when his glance turned to the broken cup on the hearthstone.

"Good morning, Prudence," he said. "What a morning it is to be alive in!"

But she did not reply. She only stood as though turned to stone.

"You look pale, Prudence," he added kindly. "It must have been the night, but after all it was the will of God, and we must bear our burdens."

And still she did not answer, and still he never turned his head toward the window where I was standing. Though my body seemed on fire, though my eyes and head were burning, I continued to stare at him without so much as moving a muscle.

"Come," said Eliphalet Greer, "it is over now and the sun is out again. And your father—is he out too? He cannot have left without waiting for me."

And then she spoke, but before she did so, she darted a glance toward the window where I was standing. She must have read the way I felt, and if she did, she had a reason for what she said.

"Yes," she replied hastily, "he's gone outdoors. He wants you to look for him down at the wharves. He wants you right away. Please go! Oh, please hurry!"

"Prudence," said Eliphalet Greer, "you look very lovely this morning—yes, as beautiful as the virgin that filled her lamp with oil. What makes you so, I wonder? It makes my mind go back a long, long way to see you. So he's gone out! Well, it makes no difference."

"But it does!" she cried.

He knew there was something wrong then. I could see his eyelids flicker, and his lips grow taut. He turned quickly, and then he saw me by the window. It will be a long while before I forget that old man's face. There was no surprise upon it, nor was there fear or anger. Rather it had the look of the face in my dreams as he held the wheel of that phantom ship. He seemed to be staring straight through me, as though I were only a bit of haze obscuring something which lay far beyond. So might some prophet of old have looked who saw a vision in the sky.

For a moment he stood quite rigid, and then there was a clattering sound. For the second time since I had known him, Eliphalet Greer had dropped his cane. It dropped to the floor, and his high hat dropped with it, and rolled toward the table, catching up the dust and in a moment turning old and battered. For a second longer he stood so, clasping and unclasping his hands, and then he spoke. He spoke from somewhere deep within him, so that his words, though they were clear, seemed to come from a great distance.

"God's will be done," he said, and that was all.

There was no hypocrisy about that speech. For the moment I could not answer. It was so different from what I had expected that I only stared at him, for suddenly the lines of his face had deepened, not with anger, not with hate. Instead it was lined with pain, as it had been in his counting-room, as it had been when the sun struck upon him on the deck of the *Felicity*. Something had seized again upon him. Out of the shadows which surrounded him some unseen hand had struck.

"Prudence," he said, "bring me a chair. I seem to be growing very old."

He sat himself down stiffly, and his chin sank into the folds of his neckcloth, but his eyes were still upon me, unwavering, as though he could see somewhere beyond.

"As ye sow, so shall ye reap," he said. "Yes, God's will be done."

He was still clasping and unclasping his hands, and now he moved his right hand uncertainly toward his chest.

"Mr. Greer," I said, "put down your hand."

Eliphalet Greer gave a slight start, as though I had aroused him from some reverie.

My voice had grown louder and had a ring to it which made him look up.

"If you strike at me again, if you set a paid murderer on me, if you attempt to poison my food or drink, I'll know what to do, no matter how old you are. I'd do it now if you were standing on your feet!"

With a quick intake of his breath he pushed himself up from his chair and stood facing me.

"Well," he asked, "what are you going to do?"

There was no bravado in his action, neither a trace of a sneer nor of defiance in his voice. His appearance was

almost venerable, in spite of the restless furrows about his eyes and mouth.

"Strike me if you like," he said. "I have been struck before. Strike me, Charles. I shall turn the other cheek."

His speech had a theatrical, bombastic sound as I write it now, but I know he did not intend it then. I know it, though many people in those days delighted in using Biblical periods. I remember wondering if I could have misjudged him after all, if I had heard him rightly the night before. Yet I was not sure he was wholly without guile. Somehow I knew intuitively that he was thinking and planning all the while.

"Sit down, Mr. Greer," I said. "You know very well I cannot strike you now."

But he only stood looking at me and spoke again very gently.

"Charles," he said, "I am sorry, very sorry."

Then something inside me broke loose.

"Damn your sorrow!" I snapped out. "I know what you're sorry for. Only be careful that you don't grow sorrier still."

I stopped in an effort to control the anger in my voice.

"I've said all I'm going to say to you," I went on. "I know what you are. I know so much that you're afraid to stay here while I stay too, but if this town won't hold us both, Mr. Greer, you're the one who's going to leave."

Eliphalet Greer raised his hand with a peculiarly gentle dignity.

"There's no need to speak so, Charles, at a time like this," he said sadly. "You misunderstand what I was saying. I'm not sorry for what I have done. I'm sorry for what you have done, nothing more. I'm sorry, because I never meant it to end the way it has.

"Mr. Greer," I interrupted, "do you think I believe a word you are saying?"

But Eliphalet Greer disregarded my remark.

"Yes," he went on more loudly, "I know how the shadow will haunt you. I know how the memory will sting, now that your hand is branded. You'll see him in the river mist, you'll see him in the waves. You'll see him in the candle-flame, and on the pages of your book. It makes no difference whether you struck rightly or wrongly. I know. I know."

He turned and looked gravely at Murdock's daughter.

"And you'll see him too, Prudence, you'll see him too," he ended.

"What are you talking about?" I asked uncertainly.

"Charles," said Eliphalet Greer more gravely still, "if you'll only trust me, I'll be your friend through this. You must leave at once. You must get to sea before they find his body."

And then I knew what he thought. All of a sudden his words fitted together and flashed before my eyes in a shape that lent logic to everything which had gone before.

"So you think I killed him?" I asked.

"You and I both killed him, Charles," said Eliphalet Greer very quietly. "His blood is on both our hands."

"And now," I inquired, "as long as I don't leave one way, you think I'd better leave the other?"

"I'll help you," he said. "Of course you can't stay now."

I watched him very carefully as I spoke, because I knew it was hard to tell what he might do when I had finished.

"Mr. Greer," I said, "we always seem to misunderstand each other about death. Captain Murdock only had an accident. He drank his liquor from the wrong cup, and I had him sent aboard the *Ruth*."

X

I don't know what I expected him to do when I sent home that blow, but he did nothing. His eyes were still upon me, but again he was not looking at me but rather at something beyond. His lips tightened for a moment and then relaxed, nothing more. Was it self-control that made him so, I wonder? Or was it something else? I find it hard to tell.

"I'm glad," he said at length. "I have enough upon me without that."

And he sighed deeply like a man who is very tired. Sometimes I think he was tired then and that everything he said was truly spoken.

"Mr. Greer," I continued, "do you know what I'm going to do this morning? I'm going to write down everything I know of you. I'm going to swear it before a Justice of the Peace. I'm going to leave it with him sealed. If you molest me again, or if I disappear, he will open that letter. Though it may not be very definite, it will make interesting reading. I wouldn't try to touch me again."

"You wouldn't, huh?" came a voice behind me. "Now why the hell wouldn't he?"

I sprang hastily backward. I don't believe any of us knew that Murdock was there until he spoke, for we all had been watching each other, and had forgotten the open door. But there he was with his cheeks puffed out and his hands in his pockets.

He was a sickly looking sight. His clothing was wrinkled and creased, and covered with patches of dirt as though he had rolled on an unswept floor. His hair was wet and matted, and his face generally so red was of a whitish, greenish hue.

For a second Eliphalet Greer stared at Captain Murdock without speaking, but any Christian feeling he may have experienced previously seemed to have passed away.

"So there you are, you bungling fool!" he cried. "Haven't you made enough of a mess without coming here and making it worse?"

Eliphalet's speech appeared to jangle discordantly on Captain Murdock's nerves.

"Fool yourself!" he snorted. "Didn't I tell you the best thing was to do it nice and clean, like gentlemen always do it? A good crack on the head—didn't I tell you it was the way?"

The wrinkles around Eliphalet's eyes deepened.

"Be quiet," he whispered, "and close that door. Don't you see I'm talking with Mr. Jervaile?"

But Captain Murdock was engrossed in his own thoughts. He had perceived his daughter, and the sight of her caused him to give way to a burst of righteous indignation.

"You damned Delilah!" he roared. "Don't you look at me like that, or I'll punch in both your eyes!"

"Be quiet!" Eliphalet Greer was striding toward him.

"Like hell I'll be quiet!" retorted Captain Murdock in righteous wrath. "I've had enough of this damned prayer-meeting! Didn't want to hurt the boy, did you! Well, stand to one side, and I'll treat him gentle!"

Just then Prudence seized my arm.

"Murdock," said Eliphalet Greer, "lock that door, and send that girl upstairs!"

His jaw had thrust itself forward and he had half closed his eyes.

"Charles," he began, and then he stopped, for Murdock's daughter had stepped between us.

"Prudence," he said, "I wish to speak to Mr. Jervaile. Murdock, take her out of the room."

Captain Murdock made a gesture of profound irritation.

"Women!" he cried in a terrible voice. "Ain't I always said she'd be crawling over everything? That's what comes of having women around. Gentlemen can't do anything they want to do."

Eliphalet Greer seemed singularly revived.

"Did you hear me, Murdock?" he said more loudly.

"Miss Murdock," I said, "please don't worry on my account."

But Captain Murdock's mind was always slow, and now it was aflame with definite resentment.

"Miss Murdock be damned!" he roared, and his face became purple.

I can never tell why, but I became aware of another force in the confines of that room. Captain Murdock had made the balance shift. Eliphalet had turned away and was towering over Captain Murdock. He had forgotten me then. They had both forgotten me. I could have walked out the door without either of them giving me a thought. Eliphalet's voice had a snap to it which would have carried through a hurricane.

"Will you be quiet!" he thundered. "Have you forgotten that she's listening?"

Eliphalet Greer had seized him by the shoulder, but Captain Murdock wrenched himself away. For an instant they both eyed each other. Eliphalet Greer's hand was still in the air, and I could see it was trembling. His lips were moving back and forth as though they were struggling with half-formed words.

"No, I won't be quiet," returned Captain Murdock. "That's what comes of having women, and I'm finished—d'you hear? D'you think I want to be poisoned again? I don't care what you do to me. I'm gettin' too old to be scared. I got sins enough of my own without bothering about yours. Keep her yourself. I'm through pretending she's my daughter. I'm through worrying about what happened fifteen years ago. I tell you I'm through. Wish her on somebody else. Take her away and keep her away and——"

They had both forgotten all about me.

It is a long while since we four were in Murdock's kitchen, but I can see it still. I can see Murdock rocking on his heels. I can see Prudence as she stared at him with her hand half raised to her throat. In my memory Eliphalet Greer is standing just as he did that morning, a figure that blocks the trail of years down which he had wandered. He had stretched out his hand and was staring at Murdock as though the captain had dealt him a blow.

Then all at once his whole body lurched forward with the speed and accuracy of a new-sprung trap. Eliphalet Greer had seized Captain Murdock by the throat. His arms hardly shook when Captain Murdock tore at his wrists. Only his breathing showed the force of his exertion, for as soon as his hands had closed he had become almost tranquil. There he

stood with his black sleeves wrinkled about his elbows and his watch-chain dangling and beating against his waistcoat, and his gray hair still smooth and neat.

"So you won't be quiet!" he said. "Did you think I'd lost my strength?"

Yet even as he spoke it seemed to me that he had lost it, for suddenly his hands fell away and dropped aimlessly to his side. Suddenly the blood ebbed out of his cheeks, leaving them gray and seamed. Captain Murdock was taken with a fit of coughing, which left him gasping and doubled forward, but Eliphalet Greer did not notice. I thought a fit of illness was on him at first, for his forehead had grown moist, and his jaw had dropped until he looked as grotesque as some gray piece of mediæval sculpture. Captain Murdock had finished his coughing. He was endowed with a remarkable resilience. A second before his eyes had been bulging and his lips half black, but now he seemed none the worse.

He spat sideways on the kitchen floor, like a prize-fighter in the ring, and examined Eliphalet Greer with frank, unfeeling curiosity.

"So you've caught it, have you?" he said hoarsely. "I always knew one of these days your gall-bladder would burst."

Then Eliphalet Greer spoke in a voice that was dim and half audible, like a voice in a dream.

"Murdock," he said, "look at the door."

"None of your tricks now," Captain Murdock replied sourly. "What do I care for the door?"

"Look, Murdock!" cried Eliphalet Greer. "For God's sake, look!"

Surely it could not be Eliphalet Greer who spoke. Surely it could not be his voice. Captain Murdock shot a hasty glance over his right shoulder, but he did not turn back his head. Instead, he turned his whole body awkwardly around until he stood facing the doorway, and his mouth fell so far open that it displayed his tobacco-stained teeth, and he also spoke with difficulty, as though the words stuck in his throat.

"B'gad, it's him!" he said.

XI

A man—a man I had never seen before was leaning against the door frame. There was something peculiarly tranquil in the way he stood there, something elegant and graceful. Yet it was plain to see that he was not wholly elegant or tranquil. He had on a blue coat which might have been fashionable once, but it was badly spotted then. He had on a gray beaver hat which needed brushing, and his nankeen trousers were rubbed and bagging at the knees. It may have been only the suddenness of his appearance which gave him a lightsome air, reminiscent of a French dancing master. He had his left toe pointed forward when I first saw him, and his head was tilted to one side, as if he were waiting for a note of music which would send him skipping across the room. His body was wiry and meagre, like that of a man addicted to graceful exercise. His arms were folded across his chest, but I could see that his hands, though they were chapped and calloused, were slender and sensitive like the hands of a scholar rather than those of a man who follows the sea.

But his face was neither a dancing master's nor a scholar's face. Every muscle of it seemed to stand out, unconcealed by superfluous flesh. The sun had burned it to a deep reddish brown, and his hair, I could see, had also once been red, but now it was a reddish, sandy gray. His eyes were bright blue, surrounded by a thin net of crow's feet which kept expanding and contracting, and the same was true about the wrinkles of his mouth. When all the rest of his face was impassive, those wrinkles still moved, sometimes in the suspicion of a smile, sometimes in the beginning of a frown. It was a keen, intelligent face, but it had no patience in it, just as it had no dullness. In spite of its refinement it was not the face of a man who had spent his days at home. The wind must have blown often on it. It must have twisted often into pain

and anger as well as merriment.

"B'gad!" said Captain Murdock hoarsely, "it's him!"

The stranger leaned against the door frame, but though his arms were folded there was a tenseness in the way he stood which reminded me of bent whalebone, and a concentration in his glance which reminded me of a man looking over a rifle-sight.

"Yes," he answered, "a gift cast up from the sea."

He had spoken in an even, modulated voice, but before he had spoken, even without his speech to guide me, I knew who he was. I could read it in the strained silence. It was a silence reminiscent of many untold things. I could read it in his eyes and on his lips. I could read it in the way Eliphalet Greer stood there staring, and in the color of Murdock's face. Yes, I knew who he was.

Why was it I was trembling? Why was it I was backing away? Before I thought there was an unaccountable panic upon me, but when I thought I knew. It was his voice when he spoke of the sea. The fear I felt of him was not physical fear. It was something deeper and closer to the soul; it was a judgment of myself within myself. He was the man I had been sent to kill. Whether I had known or not that I had been sent to kill him made no difference then. There was guilt upon me because I had not known—because I had touched Greer's money without knowing the full reason. There was no justification for what I had done then, and there he was like retribution, like some fantastic shape conjured up by conscience.

What would he do when he knew? When he looked at me, I could almost guess he knew already—that we both knew each other's thoughts.

I have never seen a meeting such as that. There was nothing kindly in glance or thought. Already Eliphalet's jaw had clamped back into place, and a gray stubble upon it where his razor had passed too lightly bristled up in an ominous way. The stranger seemed pleased by their attention.

"So here we are," he said. "I told you I'd come back, if that damned island didn't sink."

There was something like a knife blade in the way that stranger looked, not worn and dented, but rubbed smooth by use and whetted to a keener edge, hardened and not broken by the fire.

"Yes, here we are," the stranger said again. His voice was changed, almost friendly. "Come, come, Eliphalet, don't look away. It's been a long time since we've met, and you'll only see me for a little while."

Then Eliphalet Greer spoke for the first time.

"Parton," he said, "if you move, I'll kill you!"

Was it Eliphalet Greer who spoke? I could not have told his voice as it died away into the silence which followed, and Mr. Parton had not moved. He was still leaning quietly against the door frame, almost as though he had not heard, but his lips twitched and his face grew redder.

"You fool," he said, "do you think I came here for that? You used to know me better when we walked the deck together. Are you as old and soft as that, Eliphalet? I thought we'd done enough dark things and seen enough men die."

Eliphalet Greer raised his hand and pulled at his neckcloth as though it was tight and constricted his breathing, but even so his breath was stertorous and uneven.

"If you don't want—that," he asked hoarsely, "then what do you want?"

"Do you want me to tell?" he inquired. "Do you want me to tell it here?"

"Damn you!" cried Eliphalet Greer harshly. "Do you think I'm afraid of anything you say? Do you think anyone will believe the lies you tell?"

Mr. Parton shrugged his shoulders, and his voice was cold and level.

"Eliphalet," he said, "you used to say dead men were always bankrupts. I want you to pay, Eliphalet—not go into bankruptcy."

For an instant Eliphalet Greer's eyelids flickered. His shoulders sagged like the shoulders of a weary man. What was it he saw in the other's face? I think it was something that was hidden from the rest of us. Had the dead past come to life? Was the past itself before him in that man with the spotted coat?

"Richard," he said, and his voice had grown uncertain, "you've come a long way for nothing, Richard, because I've paid. I've paid already."

I can never look upon that scene as a wholly mundane thing. Eliphalet Greer was not speaking to that man alone. And that man himself leaning against the door frame, I sometimes think was something more than himself in those few minutes, like some lay figure in a parable.

"You knew I'd come back, Eliphalet," he said. "Nothing could keep us apart when a man hates another as I hate you."

"Yes," said Eliphalet Greer, "it's been a long time, Richard, but I knew you'd come."

And he drew a deep breath like a man who has travelled a weary way.

"Ah," said Mr. Parton, "I knew you'd know it. I wonder if you know how often I've prayed you wouldn't die? You couldn't have known if you thought I'd kill you now."

Eliphalet Greer did not answer. His hand was still fumbling with his neck-cloth.

"I knew you'd be here," said Mr. Parton, "as soon as I crossed the bar and fouled that ship of yours. I knew it was your ship, Eliphalet, ready to leave in the dark. What were you about, Eliphalet—shipping another man away?"

Mr. Parton had been speaking in level tones, but suddenly his voice rose like a gust of storm.

"Don't look at me like that! Do you think I'm afraid of you? Haven't I seen your face night after night? Haven't I heard your voice in the wind?"

Eliphalet Greer's fingers clenched convulsively.

"I should have killed you," he said. "I should have killed you then!"

"It would have been better if you had," said Mr. Parton. "But you didn't, Eliphalet. You were never man enough for that."

Something inside Eliphalet Greer had broken loose, and had flooded his face with an ugly red.

"Don't you try to judge me," he cried. "You've got enough on your own head. I never left a wife and child to starve while I ran away to sea. I never sailed with a friend who trusted me, who—by heaven—who loved me, and then tried to murder him while his back was turned, because we had a falling out over a parcel of money."

Mr. Parton sprang clear of the door frame.

"Money!" he cried. "What do I care about money? You damned old blood-sucker——"

And then Eliphalet Greer's voice drowned out his words.

"You used to care enough about it once. You always got your fair share, piece for piece. I still have the account."

"Do you think I believe any account of yours?" cried Mr. Parton. "Didn't you always try to cheat me right and left?"

I expected Eliphalet to burst into a furious denial, but he did not.

"And what about you?" he demanded. "How many times did I catch you at it? Could I ever trust you with a dollar?"

For a moment I almost believed their animosity lost itself in words, for they both had reached a common level. Could it be that thievery had a place among the vices of Eliphalet Greer? It was hard to doubt it then, for I have never seen two men less like patterns of probity. They stood eyeing each other with uncertain, shifting glances, as though each knew the other's secrets and was anxious to conceal his own. Then Mr. Parton threw up his head.

"At least," he said, "I cheated like a gentleman."

I never learned how such a prodigy could be performed. There was a sting in Mr. Parton's retort that made Eliphalet Greer wince. His anger seemed to have died away, and in its place was an old look which I had seen before, a look almost of pain. Evidently Mr. Parton also was familiar with that expression, for he smiled in a cold, unpleasant way.

"So the devil still prods you, does he?" he remarked. "It's like old times to see you looking so."

"Richard"—Eliphalet's voice was touched with a strange sadness—"why should you and I speak of morals? We both are wicked in the eyes of God and man. We have sinned together and each against the other, and we shall surely pay. There is never a night when it does not sear my soul. We have hated each other for a long time now. It has been running like poison through my blood, and I can see it in your face. Tell me what you want, Richard, and let us part in peace."

He stopped, but Mr. Parton never moved. When Eliphalet had begun to speak, he had leaned back against the door frame. He still leaned there and surveyed Eliphalet coldly.

"You coward!" he said. "You infernal old coward! Stand up and take your medicine, and don't tell lies to me. I'll tell you what I want. I want to see you a broken man. I want to see you hiding with men on your trail. I want to see you a fugitive from justice. I want to see them drag you back with blood on your face. Ah! that makes you jump, does it, you sneaking old hypocrite!"

A change had come over Eliphalet Greer. The furies themselves were upon him.

"By God!" he roared, "you will have it then!" And in a single stride he cleared the space which separated him from Mr. Parton. For a second he was standing motionless. For a second his face was as blank as a man's in a dream.

"Be careful, Greer!" cried Mr. Parton.

"You damned Judas!" roared Eliphalet Greer. "You damned murdering Judas!"

My next recollection was of holding Eliphalet Greer by the shoulders, and of Mr. Parton leaning against the wall, with the color gone from his face, as he wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, and stared at Eliphalet Greer with wide unblinking eyes. I was as tall as Eliphalet Greer. I was younger, but it was all I could do to hold him. Indeed, I could not have managed it if Captain Murdock had not run over to help me.

"Now—now," he was saying. "Slack her off. This ain't the time and place."

"What do I care?" snarled Eliphalet Greer. "I've struck him. Stand off. It's his turn to finish it now."

His coat had ripped at the shoulders. His neckcloth was dangling over his chest, and his hair had fallen over his forehead. Mr. Parton had removed his hand. I could see his lips were bleeding and his mouth was twitching at the corners.

"You can let him go, young man," he said. "He won't strike me again."

"Hey! Hey!" cried Captain Murdock, stepping between them. "Slack her off. You gentlemen can't do it here."

Mr. Parton's face was still very white, but he never raised his voice.

"No, Murdock," he said, "we won't do it here."

And he glanced at Eliphalet over Captain Murdock's shoulder.

"Do you think I came here to soil my hands with a man like you?" he asked. "I told you what I came for."

"Try it!" cried Eliphalet Greer with sudden unlooked-for elation. "Try it and be damned! Do you think I didn't expect you when you blew over the bar? I'm glad you've come. D'you hear me—glad! By thunder it makes me feel better just to see you after rotting in a place like this! Do what you like, I'll be ready for you!"

"Tell it to your niggers," returned Mr. Parton. "Don't tell it to me."

But Eliphalet Greer did not appear to hear him.

"You belonged where I put you," he continued. "I know it now I see you again. I'm glad I did it now."

Mr. Parton endeavored to interrupt, but Eliphalet raised his voice.

"Yes," he said, "if I had to do it all over again, I'd do the same. I don't regret it, now I hear you speak. Do what you like. You can't frighten honest men."

Though he spoke with fervor and conviction, Eliphalet Greer was hardly a picture of probity, nor did Mr. Parton look much better.

"Eliphalet," he said, "do you call yourself an honest man? Oh, I know what you've been doing. I know how you've made your money. Don't you remember we both did it together once? Don't you remember Havanna and the Gulf, and the way they groaned between the decks?"

Eliphalet Greer made a guttural, meaningless sound in his throat. I had never seen him afraid before.

"You can't frighten me," he answered hastily. "You can't frighten me with old tales like that."

Mr. Parton laughed in sudden exulting triumph.

"Yes," he replied, "you're an honest merchant now. Why don't you tell me how you're trading in calico and spices? Not all the spices in Araby could take the smell off of you. If it's an old tale, why are half your ships at Cape de Verde? Why are you loading them at night?"

"You lie!" cried Eliphalet Greer. "They're not my ships."

"They are your ships," said Mr. Parton, "because I've seen them there. Oh, yes, I know their hulls are painted black, and their names are out, and Portugese skippers are aboard. I know they've got on extra spars, but I know where their keels were laid."

"You lie!" repeated Eliphalet Greer. "I've sold them long ago."

"Would you like to have them traced back?" asked Mr. Parton. "I wonder what would happen if one of them was in the channel now with a hull that Merrill built, and the customs officers were opening up the hatches? I wonder whose ship they'd find she was if an admiralty court had the papers and they got Murdock on the stand? Ah, did you ever think of that?"

"Are you trying to blackmail me?" Eliphalet Greer asked hoarsely.

Mr. Parton shook his head. Still looking at Eliphalet Greer, he was backing toward the door.

"No," he said, "you ought to guess what I'm going to do."

And Mr. Parton, nodding pleasantly, backed out the door, closed it and was gone.

"We are both hardly ourselves. I knew it would be too much for one or the other of us, but I'll see you again, Eliphalet. I'll be staying at the tavern."

He paused, looked at us all three and smiled genially.

"Until the blackbirds come home to roost," he said.

XII

He was gone and the room seemed very still. There was no doubt that Eliphalet Greer understood. He was staring at the wall like a man who wakes from a bad dream. And he was not the only one. We were all awaking. I had been standing near to Prudence Murdock, and all that while she had never moved, nor taken her eyes off Mr. Parton. Now she stirred uneasily, and brushed her hand across her forehead in a way that made one think she was brushing aside some memory. As for me, I had only one desire—to escape from some unseen thing that had entered Murdock's kitchen. Of us all the Captain was first to come to himself and to touch on practical affairs.

"B'gad," said Captain Murdock, "we ought to of done him in!"

But Eliphalet Greer made no response, and the Captain began to glare at Prudence.

"That's what comes of having a woman," he said. "You always get to talking with women around. If we hadn't been talking we might of done something. Now he's going to twist our necks."

Eliphalet Greer still stared at the wall and opened and closed his hands. For a little while he said nothing, but stood alone with his thoughts. Strangely enough, he seemed singularly revived, but he did not answer Captain Murdock. Instead he turned toward me, and his mouth was closed as tight as a trap.

"Charles," he said in a dry, business-like voice, "you must stand by us now."

I was so surprised that I found it hard to speak.

"I told you I was through last night," I answered, "and I'm all the more through this morning."

"Charles," said Eliphalet Greer, "it's the first time you are intimately concerned."

The thought was so preposterous that I came near laughing. "Intimately concerned in what?" I asked.

"Charles," said Eliphalet Greer, "Mr. Parton is a very dangerous man. Have you thought what may happen when I tell him you were in my pay to murder him?"

A cold mantle seemed to fold itself about me, chilling me like a breath of wind from the ice. It was the words—to hear my thoughts in words—that shook me most. Curiously enough, Eliphalet seemed guiltless. Illogically, but certainly, I seemed to bear the guilt alone. I said he was a strong man. I had begun to feel his strength.

"Good God!" I cried hoarsely. "Did you think I'd have done that? How was I to know what you wanted when you sent me there?"

Eliphalet Greer's voice stopped me.

"Charles," said Eliphalet Greer, "go up to the Anchor House and stay indoors. I'll send for you in the evening."

He bent down and picked up his hat and cane.

Captain Murdock's cheeks were still of a light and unbecoming hue. As he stood staring at the closed door he drew a deep, uncertain breath.

"B'gad!" he murmured hoarsely, "you wouldn't have known he'd been there. It hasn't changed him at all."

Eliphalet Greer lifted the latch and the door creaked open. The wind had been light and uncertain that morning as it so often is after a day of storm. It had veered now and was blowing straight upon his face. It came from the ocean and bore with it those faint, indescribable odors of brine and seaweed and the exhalations of sand and mud that rise when the tide is low. Eliphalet Greer also breathed deeply and his fingers wound more tightly about the head of his cane. I have never known a breeze laden with the scent of the ocean which does not bear memories to anyone who has been at sea. Somehow it has an uncanny power peculiar to itself to flutter back the pages of the book of life. I sometimes think Eliphalet Greer's log was before him in that minute, with its leaves moving fitfully, turned by some power which was not his own to odd and half-forgotten entries. He turned and gave Murdock such a peculiar look that the Captain assumed a defensive attitude.

"I suppose you mean I've changed?" he demanded. "Well, you'll find out I haven't, and he will too. The Lord has dealt with me very gently. Come, we can't be staying here."

As he turned to close the door, Eliphalet Greer's eyes met mine, and then they were gone, both of them without another word. But he had me. As surely as if I were bound and gagged, he had me. Though I hated him for knowing it, he knew I was afraid.

XIII

For a moment I did not move. Now that they were gone, I seemed to be possessed of a sense of sane reality and what had passed seemed like a vision of sleep, and the words I heard were like the words which sometimes echo in unconscious ears and yet remain in our waking memories.

It had come like a black cloud out of the sea, heavy with the winds of venom, and I was a part of it now. It was a part of other men's hates, and my pay was a pocket full of banknotes.

I stared blankly across Captain Murdock's kitchen table. I could almost feel Eliphalet Greer's fingers on my shoulder with their cold, steady pressure biting through my coat. Then I heard a voice beside me.

"I told you if you stayed you'd learn to hate."

I had forgotten I was not alone. I looked up, and there was Captain Murdock's daughter. She was looking at me curiously, but not unkindly, but I was unable to meet her glance. I felt a deeper and bitterer shame than I have ever known. She had heard every word Eliphalet Greer had spoken.

"Was it true?" she asked. "Was it true what he was saying?"

"Yes," I answered. "Every word was true."

I thought she would turn away, but she did not. Instead she did something far worse.

"I don't believe it," she said. "You would never do a thing like that."

And then the pain and resentment within me welled up into my speech. I quite forgot I had never known her before. I quite forgot all reticence.

"But I never knew what he wanted," I found myself adding. "How was I to suspect him of a thing like that? How was I to know that landing on an island would lead me into this?"

But even as I spoke, I felt how my words echoed with futility, and I stopped, for even then I knew how useless it was to continue.

"What good is there saying anything?" I ended.

She did not speak for a long while after I had finished. It seemed strange to me that I should be disturbed by her silence, or that I should care for what she thought. She had walked to the window and the sunlight was playing through her hair.

"I don't believe it," she said. "No one who knew you would."

At first I could think of nothing to say. There is little kindness in a life at sea. I felt awkward as I tried to express my gratitude, awkward and very lonely.

"You're kind," I said at length, "kinder than you should be."

I no longer felt ashamed and ill at ease. Without any will of ours something had drawn us nearer. Perhaps it was because we had both been there when the shadows took stark shape and came to life, but I can never tell. I only know that she also felt it. She was looking up at me. Her lips were parted. There was an added color in her cheeks, and her eyes were wide and bright.

"Tell me how it happened?" she said gently. "It will be better if you talk to someone, and I'll never tell."

I knew that she would not, but even if I had thought she would, I should have spoken then. It was all before me again, the counting room, the window and the river, the *Felicity* and the parlor with the lamps. I could feel the chill of the parlor as I spoke. Though I had not intended it at first, I found myself repeating our conversation almost word for word.

She did not seem surprised. She was glancing out the window toward the river mouth where the tide was streaking the water.

"I always knew it would end," she said. "Poor man! Poor old man!"

"Do you think I could have lived here," she added, "without hearing them talk? Sometimes I could hear their voices all night long. I know. I've always known."

I never asked what she had always known. She had moved nearer to me, and her voice was low and trembling.

"You know it can't rest the way it is," she said. "Something is going to happen, something terrible. You must leave. I know them better than you. You must leave right away. You mustn't ever let him see you again."

"I can't," I said helplessly, "and leave this story behind me. It's worse than anything that could happen. It would follow me everywhere, always. He has his hand in me because I went to that island—because I took his money."

And she must have known it also, for she did not reply.

"But there's no reason for you to stay," I continued.

She looked up at me quickly.

"The stage will be going in half an hour," I went on. "You mustn't be in this place any longer. Here——"

I thrust my hand awkwardly in my pocket.

"Here's my pay. It won't do me any good now. Take it until this is finished. If you know what's going to happen, you know you mustn't stay."

She caught her breath and turned her face away.

"Please," I said, "there isn't much I can do except this. If you've heard them talking, you know it can't stay secret. You can't be mixed up in a thing like this."

"How do you know I'm not already?" she asked.

I tried to interrupt, but she only spoke more quickly.

"What do you know of me? You haven't known me for a day. Do you suppose I've never guessed? Do you suppose I thought they were honest?"

"Then don't you see you must go?" I insisted.

For a moment she stood silent, a slender, delicate figure, staring straight ahead of her with a level, unfaltering glance, as though she saw some intricate design of the fates which no one else could see. She never seemed so oddly out of keeping with her surroundings as she seemed then. Her skin was never so white. Her hands were never so slender. She seemed almost like a child then, lost in some strange and lonely place, and I knew I could not leave her so. Perhaps I understood her better then, because we were both alone, both in a land of shadows.

"Don't you see you must go?" I said, and then I saw her lips were trembling.

"I can't," she answered, "I can't leave him now—now that he's in trouble."

She paused, glanced at me and then away.

"He's the only one who ever did a kind thing for me," she said, "except you."

Our relations with one another are a strange and subtle matter. I often think there is a magician's touch in the way they change and shift. I had forgotten that she was Murdock's daughter. I had forgotten the room where I was standing. I had forgotten the whole black hour. I had never heard a voice that sounded as sweet as hers did then. Only a minute ago matters were far different, and now, irrationally, we had changed. We both had changed in one another's sight.

But why should I speak of what is life itself, of the one memory I know that still stays bright through all the uneven years'? I would not speak of it at all, except that it played its part in the story I am trying to tell. I say we stood there looking at each other, and that girl who had poisoned Captain Murdock's rum was as fair as song or story. There was a startled look in her eyes, half of surprise, and half of something else. It was almost as though she had never seen me till then.

"Except you," she repeated, and her voice was so low that I could scarcely hear.

"I haven't done anything kind," I said, "not anything at all."

"But you've tried," she answered. "It makes no difference that it was no use trying."

"Do you mean," I asked haltingly, "do you mean you won't go on account of Murdock?"

She started to speak, then paused indecisively, and then shook her head with a broken little laugh.

"On account of Eliphalet Greer," she said.

"Greer!" I stammered, "on account of Greer?"

She moved a step backward and turned half away.

"I think you'd better be going," she said. "There's no use in talking—no!"

"What have you got to do with Greer?" I asked.

"I said," she repeated, "that you'd better be going."

I took a step toward her, and she drew back. Why was it my hand was trembling as though I was afraid?

"Miss Murdock——" I began, and her voice broke in on my speech so harshly that I stopped.

"Don't call me that!" she cried. "Don't you see I'm not his daughter?"

"Then——" I stopped, startled by a suspicion that snatched at my breath.

"Then who are you?" I asked.

And her voice came back to me as though it was a long way off.

"I don't know," she said, "I don't know who I am at all."

Then, before I could speak, her words were on me like a torrent of rain, so fierce and violent that I could hardly believe it was she who was speaking.

"Don't you see why you must go?" she cried. "Are you going to make me tell you everything? You know who your father was. You know who your mother was. What use is there for you and me to stand and talk? Haven't you heard what they've said about me? Isn't that enough? Don't—don't try to speak to me again!"

Her voice had choked and tears were running down her cheeks.

"Now go!" she cried. "I wish—I wish I'd never seen you!"

She had snatched open the door to the attic stairs. She was on the lower step.

"Don't," I cried, "don't go!"

She paused to look back at me, and to my sight she seemed vague and intangible, blending with the black of those creaking stairs. Her face as it turned toward me was strained and white as river mist.

"Don't you see," she said softly, "it's only a bad dream," and then she closed the door....

XIV

The Anchor House is still standing down by the waterfront, a modest mouldering building, grizzled by the sea. Its windows have been boarded up long ago. Its name has been stripped from it. Its paint is seared and cracked, and the weeds are thick on the granite steps that lead to the old front door. I should not like to enter that doorway now, or to hear my footfalls on the bare boards, or to stare into the dusky taproom and see the empty bar, for it was a pleasant place once, not a place of ghosts, and I should rather remember it so.

When Jim Lowes had the Anchor House there was always a row of bowsprits across the way, and the hall always

had the odor of ships' cargoes. You could sit in the taproom with a tumbler of rum and with your coat off if you wished, for the Anchor House was not fashionable like the tavern on the main street. Plain men were always walking in and out, second and third mates from the deep water, and captains of coasting and fishing crafts, who seldom washed or shaved. They would sit in the dining room in a stolid silent row, conveying their food upward on the end of their knives, and now and then lunging forward to spear at the pickled cucumbers which floated in bowls placed upon the table at even intervals. They were plain men, but not one of them was mediocre. There was hardly one who had not seen the kingdoms of Cathay, or who had not aimed a gun on a privateer when he was a younger man. There was not one who would not have left the dining table and sailed to any port on earth as a matter of dull routine.

And Jim Lowes knew them all. The sights of many years had passed by his gimlet eyes, and had given him a bent and studious look. They used to say that Jim Lowes knew everyone who had ever stepped ashore in the township, and could tell enough to hang them if he would ever speak, but he never gossiped like hosts in other inns.

He would stand at his door on any pleasant morning, when trade was light. His left cheek would be bulging with tobacco, and he would spit benignly into the dust of the road. He was an old man then, and though his age had not run to superfluous flesh or to merriment, he had an equable disposition, such as anyone cultivates who chews tobacco. He told me once that he had learned the trick at sea to save him from thirst, and though he was frequently engaged in quenching his thirst when he and I were friends, he still used tobacco as a precaution. His shovel-shaped beard, which grew in luxuriant contradiction to his sparse gray hair, would move in even rhythm, and his eyes would half close and open again in a shrewd fashion as he opened and closed his jaws.

I had expected to see him at the door of the Anchor House that morning, but he was not there. I found him in the taproom—a deserted place at that time of day, except for Jim Lowes himself, who was filling a tumbler from a square bottle. He never gave way to verbal protestations of hospitality, but upon perceiving me he took down another glass from the rack behind him.

"Your room's ready," he said. "And what's more, it's been ready since I made out the *Felicity* yesterday. I ought to charge you, but I won't."

He coughed, rubbed his hands on his apron and tilted up the bottle.

"Say when," he said. "I hate to drink by myself, and I've gotter have one now. It won't cost you anything. Say when! I can't stay pouring all day."

Jim Lowes came of New England stock, and I knew that there must be something to explain his unexpected generosity.

"Say when," he repeated in an agonized manner. "Say when, or I'll stop."

"Jim," I asked, "is anything the matter?"

"Yes," he answered sadly, "I should say there was. I've swallowed my quid, and I'm not used to it. It sets heavy on you when you're not used to things like that."

"That's queer," I said, taking the glass he offered me. "You're the second man I've known to do that since I've landed," but he was not consoled.

"It may come easy for some folks," he answered, "but it don't for me."

I never stopped to think that small things may seem great to others. Such is our natural selfishness that I grew impatient at Jim Lowes and his quid of tobacco.

"I haven't done it," he added, "since I followed the sea and the Old Man ran the house, and that was twenty years ago."

"Then what did you do it for now?" I asked unkindly.

Jim Lowes set his glass on the bar, and said a curious thing, in a tone so natural that it seemed like an event of every hour.

"Because I saw a ghost," he said.

"A ghost?" I repeated. I know I should have smiled at it at another time, but somehow his statement was so unexpectedly like my own thoughts that I set my tumbler down also.

"It won't mean anything to you," sighed Jim Lowes. "When you're young you don't believe in things like that. You don't have any memories. You don't see memories in things around you, and he was before your time. But you can believe me or not—I saw him."

"You used to know him?" I asked. I was not thinking of Jim Lowes, but of another man who had seen a ghost that morning who was no ghost at all. It is only now when the twilight falls that I can feel a sympathy for Jim Lowes' words, only now when our whole town seems full of ghosts. Jim Lowes sighed again.

"Just you wait till you get on," he said, "and your eyes aren't what they used to be, and then you'll know. Wait till you set by the door the way I set, and begin chewing and wondering. Then you'll see 'em fast enough. You'll see 'em just the way an old dog sees 'em lying in the sun. Why, sometimes I can see the sloop I first put to sea in just as plain as plain, though she went down off Spain. Oh, yes, I've seen other ghosts, but never one as plain as him."

"Did he live here?" I asked.

I saw that he was inspecting the empty taproom. His glance was roving over the empty tables and past the crude paintings of ships that adorned the walls. His lips were curiously puckered. His nostrils were expanding and contracting as though he was sniffing the wind and looking for a change of weather. In the pause which followed I had forgotten about the tobacco. I had forgotten that I was listening to idle talk.

"No," he said, "he was a visitor from down state, but he used to be here right enough. Charles, you'd better close that door. The air is blowing on my neck."

"Are you afraid he may come in?" I inquired. "What's the good of shutting the door if he's a ghost?"

Jim Lowes squinted at me over the rim of his glass.

"There's ghosts and ghosts," he replied. "You close that door."

He was looking at me curiously when I turned back from obeying his request.

"I have a motto which I always keep," he remarked. "What may not be a ghost for some folks always is a ghost for me. It never does anyone any hurt to remember that."

He paused to take another swallow of rum.

"There I was," he continued, "standing right by the door by the road, and then I looked in front of me and there he was walking along like he used to walk, all springy like a cat, only more so, with his eyes winking and blinking—like that!"

"'Jim,' he says, just like he used to say it, 'give me a glass of rum.' And I looked at him hard, but he didn't fade away. 'Christmas!' I says, 'if it ain't Mr. Parton!'"

Jim Lowes must have seen me start, but he gave no sign. He watched me reach hastily for my glass.

"And then he laughed just like he always laughed," he went on smoothly, "like he saw something funny that we didn't see.

"'Yes,' he says, 'a ghost come out of the waves. Give me a mug of rum.'

"And then he walked right by me through the door, springy like a cat, and he sat right down at the table, right where you are sitting.

"Yes," said Jim Lowes, "right where you are sitting, right on the very chair. There ain't no cause for you to jump. You're not in his lap.

"'Gimme a mug of rum,' he said, just like he always said it, and I gave it to him.

"'It's damn rotten rum,' he says, just like he always said it. 'Where'd you get it?'

"'It's the best in town,' I says. 'I got it off of Eliphalet Greer.'

"Then he set down his glass and spat on the floor like it made him sick, and then what do you guess he said? What do you guess he said then?"

I knew my voice would be too unsteady to reply, and I only shook my head. Jim Lowes had squinted up his gimlet eyes again.

"'Jim,' he says, 'where is George Jervaile?'"

"He asked for my father?" I cried.

Jim Lowes nodded gravely.

"I thought mebbe you'd like to know," he answered. "I guessed it might make it int'restin' for you.

"'You ought to know what's happened,' I says. And then I told him.

"'And why,' he says, looking at me queer, 'ought I to know that?'

"'Because he's a sperit like you,' I says."

Jim Lowes leaned toward me, so that his voice sounded close to my ear.

"And then what do you guess he did?" he asked. "Why, he grabbed me by the sleeve. He hooked on to me just like that."

Jim Lowes' fingers had closed about my arm and his voice had sunk lower.

"'Jim,' he says, 'you be damn sure you remember I'm a spirit. Save me a room,' he says. 'I'll be back tonight,' and then he stood up and walked out so light I couldn't hear, and there I was standing by with the sweat running off of me."

"Why are you telling me this?" I asked, and Jim Lowes tightened his grip on my arm, and I shall never know just why he told me or just how much he knew, for his answer was vague as an oracle's.

"Because you're sailing for Eliphalet," he said, "and folks ought to look to wind'ard when they're sailing with him. Mebbe you wouldn't of known he was a ghost if I hadn't told you in a friendly way."

"What do you mean by calling him a ghost?" I inquired.

In the pause which followed I could hear the noises out in the street, vague and faint through the closed door and windows.

"He's a ghost," said Jim Lowes, "because he's been dead well on to fifteen years."

"Dead!" I echoed.

"Yes, dead," Jim Lowes replied. "I should admire it if I don't know when a man's dead and when he isn't. I guess I remember all right. He was Eliphalet Greer's partner back then. I don't know where he found him. Some say they signed together in New York and some say Portsmouth. I always guessed he wouldn't come to a good end."

"But what happened?" I asked. "What happened?"

"There's never telling what happens," he replied. "A boy like you wouldn't remember. They went out half-owners in a sloop they bought in eighteen ten. She was a good one, yes she was, and then they sold her, and bought another, and shipped a foreign crew, and then——"

He paused doubtfully the way others paused when Eliphalet's name was mentioned.

"Then some say one thing and others others. You know what they say. How'd he get rich? I don't know. It's a long time back, and he was gone a long time, and it's none of my business, and he always acted handsome. All I know is when he came back, him and a man named Murdock came as passengers on another ship, and Parton——"

Jim Lowes paused and began pulling a black braid of tobacco from his trousers' pocket. He seemed in no hurry to continue.

"What about Parton?" I asked.

"Parton," said Jim Lowes, "was lost at sea. Haven't I said he was a dead one? When Greer got home, he built him a vault up in the West Hill ground. Why should Greer do that if he wasn't dead?"

"You said he was Eliphalet Greer's partner?"

Jim Lowes was rubbing his tobacco between his palms.

"They used to be as thick as thieves."

"And when," I asked, clearing my throat, "when did he put up that stone?"

"Nigh fifteen years ago," Jim Lowes replied, inserting an oblong mass of tobacco into his left cheek.

"What'll you have to eat, Charles? There's bacon and eggs and pork scraps."

The dining room of the Anchor House was a simple place with a single long table covered with a red-checkered cloth. The sawlike weapons of three swordfish and a painting of a sloop tacking by a white lighthouse were its only decorations. The inmates of the Anchor House had finished their breakfasts long ago, for we all were early risers, and white crockery plates and gaping cups marked where they had been seated.

But I only saw it with half an eye as I drew up to the festive board. The cloth was like a red blurr. The ship in the picture before me, which was breasting a series of waves as even as the furrows of a field, appeared to be bobbing and drifting to leeward. It was all like a bad dream. All the familiar surroundings were filled with an enormity beyond my scope. No wonder Eliphalet Greer had turned gray when Mr. Parton had walked in uninvited.

That island was like a mirage at first, faint as the reflection in some dim old mirror, rising up suddenly as you stood on deck, with its beach as white as white, and its palms green and fair as foliage always is after a week at sea. The hissing of the bacon in the frying-pan out in the kitchen made a sound like the tide as it rippled against that beach. I could almost see the clearing again with the thatched hut and the trees in front of it. It was mingling with the red of the tablecloth and the food Jim Lowes had placed before me.

Had he been there for fifteen years? Had he watched the tides flow their steady courses through all that time? Had he paced, a solitary figure, on that white clean beach?

"Say," said Jim Lowes, "where's your appetite?"

"Are you sure," I heard myself saying, "are you sure he built that vault?"

"And why shouldn't I be sure?" he replied. "It's right there, up by the Nickerson's lot, right up there on the hill, right where we all will be before we git much older."

No wonder Eliphalet Greer never had the look of peace, no wonder his eyes searched in the shadows. He said he had paid, and I knew that it was so. He had paid in the coin of sleepless nights, in the dread of every footfall that he heard, in the fear of each new face that he saw. No wonder his cheeks were seared like weathered wood and his eyes had a sombre light.

"Jim," I said, pushing back my chair, "you know everyone. You know about everyone. Will you tell me something, Jim?"

Jim Lowes thrust his head forward and chewed pensively at his quid of tobacco.

"Jim," I said—now that I had come to the point I found it hard to speak—"who is Captain Murdock's daughter?"

Jim Lowes glanced hastily about the deserted dining room.

"Christmas," he replied vaguely, "now who'd have thought of that? Who is she? Why, Murdock's daughter. That's who."

"She isn't," I answered quickly, "and you know she isn't. She's a lady. You know that. No one—no one who looks like her could be Murdock's daughter."

"You've seen her?" asked Jim Lowes in a hushed voice.

"Of course I've seen her," I replied.

Jim Lowes leaned nearer.

"Then keep away," he said, "keep away from the whole crew of them. Keep away from Greer. Keep away from Murdock. Keep away from her. There's rocks on the weather beam."

Did he know it too? As he looked at me his lips and jaws had ceased to move. Did he know all the dark lines of that story?

"Who is she?" I repeated. "You might tell me that."

"I might, but I won't," said Jim Lowes with sudden excitement. "I've always been a friend to you, Charles, and a friend of your father's too, though he didn't leave many behind. If I wanted to, I could tell you enough to turn your blood to poison. I know what was done to him, but it's better you don't. Take an old man's word and sheer off. I tell you it's time to come about. Don't you meddle into folks' affairs. You stay here quiet. Here—where are you going?"

"I'm going," I answered, "to look at that grave."

XV

I often think the dead in our town lie in a fairer place than the living. It is often so along our coast. They are on a high bit of ground close to the harbor, so that you can see their resting places from the decks as soon as you pass the first buoy, and when you climb from the street the dunes and the ocean catch your eye, and there is hardly a tombstone that does not stare blindly out to sea. Even in midsummer the grass is brown about them, for it is a sandy place and swept by

the wind. It was quiet as I climbed up the West Hill that morning. The sun was already high and I was quite alone. It was beating down on the rows of slate headstones, making their inscriptions as clear as the letters of the judgment book, terse and austere summaries of vanished endeavors. In the days those stones were reared few people cared for pretense, and seldom strove to hide the grimness of the end of man. As I walked through the gate at West Street, life lay before me like a page to read as I liked between the lines. Up and up the hill they stood in silent rows, the last memorial of names already forgotten, of frail humanity that had vanished in the air, leaving nothing but a few letters surmounted by a skull and wings. Deep as their names were carved, hardly one was more than a vague myth. Nothing they had done in their years of life remained to tax the memory.

I picked my way past their stones. The Nickersons I knew lay buried just over the rise of the hill. I had just come to the first of the family, old Jacob Nickerson, who once had a mill on the marshes, when I heard a sound which made me stop. It came to me on the wind, the sharp ringing sound of a hammer. I moved forward more quietly until I could see further down the slope.

Not thirty feet in front of me, where the hill inclined more gradually, was an imposing tomb of brick with a marble top. A man was leaning over it, a man with a spotted blue coat. It was Mr. Richard Parton. He was bending over the tomb with a hammer and chisel in his hand. As I looked, he dealt the chisel a series of deft blows, and then bent closer to blow off the marble dust. I could see the wind blow a touch of it back in his face, so that he coughed and half closed his eyes, but immediately he was at it again. I could see his profile contorted and intent. Something in the hasty pecking of his chisel, something in the way he was smiling, warned me it was better not to interrupt him then. I wished to move back, but I was afraid he might hear, so instead I crouched down beside old Jacob Nickerson's stone, and continued to watch.

If Mr. Parton was not used to the stone-cutter's art, he was an adept with his hands. Every motion he made was quick and sure, as though he had often rehearsed it. He must have been at work for some time, for the marble dust was heavy on his sleeves. As I watched him, I could hear him whistling a little tune between his teeth, a tune which rose clearly every time he poised his hammer. Once when his work seemed to strike him as peculiarly satisfactory, he even sang the words softly through his nose. I still remember them.

> "Three dozen niggers stowed safe in the hold,
> Three dozen diggers—the rest was stiff and cold."

I must have watched him for ten minutes before he finished. Still whistling, he stood up straight and dusted at his sleeves. Then he carefully dusted the tombstone itself. Then he turned and threw the hammer down the hill and the chisel after it. He seemed content with the message he had left for posterity, for he picked up his hat and set it jauntily on his head.

I watched him make his way carefully among the graves until he had disappeared. Even after that it was some time before I moved. I had never seen before, and I doubt if I shall ever see again, a man come back to examine his own tomb.

It was his tomb. There on the top in neat, deep capitals was his name.

Sacred to the Memory of
RICHARD PARTON, ESQ.
A Gentleman of Portsmouth Beloved by his wife
and child
A Trader in the Pacific and Indian Oceans
Lost at Sea April 18th, 1817
In the 37th Year of His Age
By his Former
Associate in Ventures of Trading

Eliphalet Greer
This monument is erected.

It was clear to see where his chisel had cut. There were rough, hasty gashes, and wavering lettering between the original lines, the result of an hour's or two hours' hasty work, scrawling uneven tyro's letters, but legible enough, and permanent. Words had been crossed out, and others added with little thought of evenness or space. Nevertheless, though the memory of other sleepers beneath the sod was permanently gone, Mr. Parton had added enough to make his personality vivid as long as that marble slab lay face upward toward the sky.

Sacred to the Memory of
RICHARD PARTON, ESQ.
A Gentleman of Portsmouth Beloved by his Wife
and Child
A Trader in the Pacific and Indian Oceans
Marooned April 18th, 1817
In the 37th year of his age
By his former marooner and
Associate in Ventures of Nigger Trading
Eliphalet Greer
This monument is erected
RETURNED TO THIS LIFE APRIL 18, 1832, IN THE
52d YEAR OF HIS AGE

XVI

It is not my own story I am telling, and if it were I should not be telling it. What there is of myself in these pages relate entirely to other men. I wish I could draw back altogether, but I cannot. For somehow passages in my own life are parts of the story itself. I wonder if my father ever thought when he threw down his hand and left for other spheres, ruined and discredited, of the part that he was yet to play?

I wonder what he would have written on his tomb if he could have returned as Mr. Parton had?

I must have been staring at Mr. Parton's tomb for some time, when I became aware that I was not alone on West Hill. Though Mr. Parton had hurried down the hill and out of sight, I knew I was not the only one watching by his grave. Quiet places possess peculiar properties unknown to frequented ways. They are unused to the sound of footsteps. The slightest variance of common sounds creates a discord which I cannot explain. Perhaps the discord is not even sound itself. It may only be a difference in the quality of silence. I knew I was not alone.

There was no difference in the noise of the wind. No shadow was cutting off the light. Yet I knew that things were different. Someone was behind me—not a ghost, not a memory, but someone as alive as I. For a moment I stood quite motionless. I stood quiet, but I could feel that I was trembling, and then I heard a sound, as though a garment had rubbed carelessly against a stone, but I did not turn around. I pretended not to hear, and put my hand in my pocket. My hand was over the pistol, the pistol I had taken to the island. It made my hand cold as I touched it. I moved my fingers over the lock. My thumb was on the hammer. The cap was in place. Slowly, very slowly, I drew the hammer back. I bent closer over the tombstone as though I could not decipher the inscription, and my fingers had closed over the trigger.

It was all the matter of an instant, but I could think quickly then. Eliphalet Greer had set someone to follow me, or

Mr. Parton had learned about me already, had seen me, and had rounded the hill himself. I bent closer, drew in my breath, and leaned my left hand on the marble. Then I turned, and drew my pistol as I did so. I was quick, very quick in those days. I had been aloft too often for my mind and body not to work together. By the time I was around, my pistol was level, pointing straight to where I had heard the sound.

"Put up your hands!" I said, and then I stopped.

I had been right. Someone had been behind me, but it was not one of Eliphalet's men, nor was it Mr. Parton. I lowered my pistol and let the hammer gently down. Not four feet from where I was standing was Prudence Murdock.

Her head was bare. Her hair was blown back from her forehead. A long gray cloak was wrapped about her, and she was holding it with both her hands. I remember I forgot in my surprise how strange it was that she should be there then. She had not started back. She was still as the stones themselves, still as some apparition. Her eyes were fixed steadily upon me. Her lips were closed in a tranquil line. She had not faltered back a step. She was pointing at the pistol.

"Put it back," she said, and smiled very faintly. "I can't put up my hands and keep my cloak on too."

As she stood with the wind blowing past, it did not seem strange that she and I should meet again, or that she should find me so. It was different in Captain Murdock's kitchen, but in the clear sea air she seemed a part of the day itself, as bright and as clear as the sunlight.

"You were a long way off," she said, "but I knew it was you walking up the hill."

Somehow, now that I saw her again, I felt strangely at rest. My dark thoughts grew clear, and somehow I felt that where she was, nothing could be wrong. Though she was a part of it, though I knew she was a part of it, she seemed far removed from the whole drab story, something distinct and beyond.

"Why were you looking at that stone?" she asked.

And then I told her what I had seen, but she hardly seemed to listen. When I finished, she still stood quietly looking out at the sea, unmoved and not surprised.

"Let me see," was all she said, and she moved nearer, and the wind blew a fold of her cloak against me, and the touch of her cloak was like the touch of a friendly hand.

"Yes, it's true," she said, "though he needn't have carved it here."

She spoke quietly as she always spoke, wearily almost, as though the matter was of small importance.

"How do you know it's true?" I asked. "What have you to do with a thing like that?"

She was still examining the altered lettering of the stone, and did not look up at my question.

"More to do with it than you," she answered listlessly. "He told me. He told me long ago. He had to tell someone."

"Eliphalet Greer told you!"

She nodded, and before I could speak again, before I could say what was on my mind to say, she turned and looked up at me, and I saw she had grown very pale.

"I couldn't stay down there," she said, "when I saw you weren't going. Aren't you going to go? Oh, aren't you going before it's too late?"

She had raised her hand to my arm and her voice was low and pleading.

"You see where it's going to end. What have you to do with a quarrel like that? He never meant what he said to you this morning. I won't let him say a word against you. He won't. I promise you he won't. Only you must go. Please, please

tell me you're going."

"Did you come here," I asked, "to tell me that?"

She turned away, and in that moment's silence I felt a strange elation. I could not see her face, only her hands groping at the folds of her cloak. She did not speak, and yet I knew. I seemed to know everything then. All knowledge seemed close to me, very close. Sometimes I think even now that I knew more then than all the lessons the world has taught me since. I have wondered since at the futility of life, but once I knew its secret. Once on that wind-swept hill I knew the reason of being and of death, and it was clearer, far clearer than any conclusion that philosophers have reached by their logic of points and lines. They were all in their right relations then, what had been and what had ceased to be. They all had some unity and direct relation which is vague and contradictory now, but I knew it then. I knew it in the way she turned her head. It was written in the sunlight on her hair, in the whiteness of her hands. Perhaps she never knew it, but once she held the secret in her slender fingers.

"Prudence," I heard myself saying, "Prudence."

But I hardly knew my voice. It had changed. There was a music in it which it had never possessed before, and when she answered her voice was different too, but why it was different I shall never know. I shall never know what there was in a night and a morning to change us both.

"Won't you leave me?" she said. "Won't you please?"

What was it I saw in that slender girl with the frightened eyes and the pale, drawn face? I see it now, but it is more than I can tell. I see it now in all its old radiance, just as I saw it then, when she asked me please to go.

"I won't. You know I won't," I said.

"Won't you go?" Her voice faltered. "If I ask you, not because of you, but for me? Won't you go because I ask you?"

I wonder what my father would have thought if he was hovering about his headstone? Up in the West Hill burying ground I was holding Captain Murdock's daughter in my arms. I could feel her body slender and yielding. I could feel her hair against my face, and her breath on my cheek, and all the world seemed very far away and yet very close about us both. Yes, before I knew what I had done I was holding her in my arms, speaking strangely, incoherently, words which I never dreamed were in my power to speak.

"Yes, I'll go," I was saying. "Anywhere you say, I'll go—anywhere the rivers run, anywhere there's tide. I'll go to Java. I'll go up to the ice—anywhere you say, if you'll go too."

She was smiling, though her eyes were wet and though her lips were trembling, and for a moment she did not speak or move.

"It shouldn't be, but I'm glad," she said. "Now let me go. I shouldn't have seen you. I shouldn't ever have come, but I'm glad I did. Nothing matters so much now. Please let me go..."

We were standing face to face beside Mr. Parton's tomb. Her cloak had fallen from one shoulder and her hand was against her throat.

"I'm glad you never thought," she said.

"Dear ... dear," I was saying, and still my voice did not seem mine. "What difference does it make if you tell me that you'll go?"

As I spoke, I seemed to be out of the dark, and my way seemed very clear. I knew that I had always wished it so. I thought it was destiny then. I knew the reason for my being, the reason of all loneliness and discontent. There was a radiance about her then like the radiance of some vision in a dream, a brightness like the sun upon the water, like the sun upon the new leaves of the spring. The cloak she wore was no longer a cloak made by the hand of man. She was not

wrapped in mortal raiment then. Now that the light is waning, now that I have lived through a drab span of even years, I know there is a time when all of us touch the robe of immortality, when love and hate and fear are melted in some crucible into an alloy which is life and more than life. Yet it can never be framed in words. It is slight and beyond all thought. We touch, and it vanishes beneath our fingers.

Even then it was going, faster, much faster than the sand in the glass. Even then it was going, and love and hate and fear were back. The light was going. I could see it dying from her eyes. She was trembling. I put my arm around her, and she drew away. It was gone, and we were back in the world again. She had turned her head away. She had covered her face with her hands.

"Don't!" she cried. "Don't ask me again! I mustn't! I mustn't, and if you ask me, you'll make me go."

"Make you——" I began.

She looked at me, and her face was wet, and her eyes were gentle and deep and soft, like the water in the early morning just as the mist clears before the sun.

"Oh," she said, "I never meant to hurt you. I know I should never have come. Don't you understand? We're both a part of something else. How could I come with you—how could I, without even a name, and a life like mine?"

"You know it makes no difference," I began. "What about my own name——"

"But it will," she said. "It will. You'll know it will tomorrow. Don't! Ah, please don't look so. You can't throw everything away. Don't you see—oh, don't you see it's all because I care?"

She was pointing down the slope past the wall where the land of the dead ended and the town of the living began, toward the square brick houses and the elms.

"Don't you see," she said again, "there's where you belong?"

I was looking beyond the houses down toward the wharves. They were far away, but I could see the men at work on them, like the distant figures in a picture. I could see Eliphalet Greer's wharf with its white pilings and the roofs of his gray slate warehouses.

"I can't leave him," she said, "when it's all like this."

And then I knew why she held back. He was back again. He was never far away.

"You can't leave Eliphalet Greer?" I cried hoarsely.

"I knew you'd take it so," she answered wearily. "You'll never understand. No men ever know that other men have different sides. Ever since I can remember he's been kind to me, the only one who ever has. Ever since I was a little girl he came to watch me by the garden fence. And when I was older he gave the money to send me away to school in Boston, because he said he wanted me to be a lady, and sometimes he would come to see me there, and talk to me about all sorts of things. He was very gentle. He always is when he speaks to me. You know his face, the way he looks sometimes, as though something is hurting him? I can't explain it to you. I said you wouldn't understand, but someone's got to stay."

Eliphalet's wharf was nearly half a mile away, but nevertheless Eliphalet Greer was close beside us then. It was not the first time I had that illusion. His shadow seemed to fall between us. I could almost feel his hand resting upon me, and then I saw something, something like the answer to a prayer.

"Look at his wharf!" I said. "Look at it!"

My voice was strained and hoarse in my excitement, and I moved a pace further down the hill.

"Look at the *Felicity*! They're bringing water-casks aboard. Look at them on the yards. They're bending new sail.

He's leaving. I tell you he's leaving!"

It was the *Felicity*. I knew the angle of every rope and spar, though her hull was hidden in the shadow of the wharf. They had warped her alongside, but they were not unloading. Instead they were rolling barrels and boxes aboard. I could see the men about her gangplank. I could almost tell who they were. Someone had stepped from the door of one of the warehouses, a man in black, and upon his appearance the men alongside were imbued with a new activity. I knew him. I knew him even from the graves of West Hill. It was Eliphalet Greer.

"He's going! Look at them throw the boxes on! Look at that! Look at that! He's going! He's going out tonight."

He was going. The whole dark phantasy was going. Suspicion, lies, fears, dread were being piled aboard, locked away like the dread things in Pandora's box, bound for some other place. He had brought them with him out of the sea. He was taking them away. The air seemed full of a new vitality. It was as though I had awakened from a restless night to find the day clear and the sun shining. She was looking at the wharf with her lips half parted, and her cloak drawn tight about her.

"Don't you see, dear," I was saying, "everything's over now. We're out of it. We'll hardly remember him tomorrow. I'm going down. I'm going down to see."

But she did not seem glad. She was looking at me as though she was afraid. I wonder if she saw something I did not see. I wonder if she saw the road before the end.

"And what if it ain't so?" she asked. "If he isn't running away?"

I bent toward her, but she still looked at the wharf. I kissed her, but she never turned her head.

"If he isn't," I answered, "we'll both stay on together. Don't you see I'll never leave you now?"

She was looking up at me.

"No matter what happens?" she asked.

"No matter what happens," I answered.

"I can't," she whispered. "Oh ... I can't ask you to go again."

XVII

I still wonder what it is about a wharf that sets the blood to run. They are still along our river, but their planking has rotted, and the weeds grow between the cracks. They were the sea, and more than the sea. They were trade and venture and memory and regret. For the dust of a dozen seaports was stamped into their planking. They were steeped in coral and Carribean sand, and spice and sandalwood and fish and rum and oak. They were the south and east and west, those wharves, the sea and all beside it that partakes of the restiveness of the sea.

Even when they were still they were full of change and hallowed by vain desire, even when the men were gone, and the orders and the creaking of the blocks had gone out with the evening tide. I can still remember how they thrilled with life when a ship was lashed along them ready for the sea. Their restiveness became a turbulence then. The confusion of sounds was a rythmic symphony like the chant of some old song, wordless but full of meaning, some song as old as sail.

I could hear it. I could hear it before I saw the *Felicity*, before I saw the men. It was rising above Eliphalet Greer's warehouses. Its refrain was taken up by the harbor gulls. It was quivering through the *Felicity's* spars like some wild benediction. She was lashed against the piling with planking over her bulwarks and her loading tackle rigging out.

Eliphalet Greer was watching while they rolled the barrels of salt meat aboard and stored them in the after hatch. He was tapping with his cane on the planks while he listened to that medley of sound.

Murdock himself was standing aft, shouting directions and encouragement to a dozen perspiring men, who were grouped about the after hatch, and the spirit of it was stirring him also, giving rude poetry to his exhortations and lending his voice the blare of a trumpet.

"Git up in there!" he was shouting. "Step to it, you swabs! Ain't we going to clear tonight? Ain't you getting ten extra dollars apiece? Ten dollars! Ten dollars to get drunk on! Ten dollars and a wash in licker! Ain't that enough to make the sweat run off of you? Crack 'em down, then! Crack 'em down!"

But Eliphalet Greer never spoke. Every now and then he would look up at the rigging and then glance out at the channel markers in the stream, and then fall to tapping with his cane.

He was staring at the *Felicity* in a fascinated way, quite as though he had not seen her a thousand times before, as though he had not stood by himself while they selected her timbers. But he saw me. He saw me almost before I had picked my way through the gear that was still to go aboard, and turned his back on the *Felicity* and strode toward me.

"Charles," he said, "what are you doing here?"

"I came to see you go," I said.

As he looked at me, I felt that part of him had gone already. His eyes, his face were not the same.

"Why didn't you stay where I told you?" he asked harshly. "I've sent after you three times. Come into the counting-room. I've sent them all away. How can I think with this noise? Can't they be quiet? Can't those fools be still?"

Then he was walking down the wharf, hastily, noisily, not with his old firm step. He was hurrying like the man in the Bible possessed of some evil spirit. The counting-room was at the foot of the wharf, but even there I could hear Murdock's voice, and the calling of the men. Eliphalet Greer moved faster. He seemed to be hurrying from the noise, as though it was a voice of doom. He wrenched open the door of the counting-room, and I followed him, and he slammed it behind us. There it was, just as I remembered it with its bare, unplastered walls, the high stools and the desks with the ledgers, and the pine table and the chair where Eliphalet Greer had sat, long ago, very long ago. I remembered how quiet he had been. I remembered the smoothness of his voice, and the careful balance of his words. I remembered, and I was startled by the difference between then and now.

Eliphalet Greer did not sit down. He was breathing fast. His lips were dry and his eyes were feverishly brilliant.

"So you think I'm running away?" he said. "It's like you to come and see the old man go."

"Aren't you?" I asked. "You can't tell me the *Felicity* isn't going out tonight."

Eliphalet Greer's voice shook.

"You fool!" he burst out. "You muddle-headed fool! Do you think I'm going to run away when the knives are out? Do I look as though I was afraid? Do you think you're going to see the last of me because I'm putting water aboard a brig? Look at me! Look at me, and tell me if you think I'm going now!"

But he never waited for me to reply. His next words seemed to burst from him, hoarse and half coherent. I hardly think he ever knew what he said just then. It was his mind, not his will, that was speaking.

"I'll show him! By gad, I'll show him that he can't play loose, not any more than he could when he tried it last! Damn him! Does he think he can frighten me? Damn him! Damn his eyes! What right has he to come back and look me in the face? Haven't I seen him enough? Hasn't he been with me every day, every night, without his coming here?"

He stopped. His breathing had grown loud and stertorous. In those days, when the cold of winter was hard to stave

off and the forests still lay thick and dark not far to the west, good and evil were more definite and personal than they will ever be again. I wish I could be as sure of the devil's presence now as I was in Eliphalet Greer's counting-room. He was there in all his glory. He was gripping and goading Eliphalet like Sinbad's Old Man of the Sea, and Eliphalet was lost to himself in the force which was uppermost within him.

"Damn him!" began Eliphalet again, and I stepped forward and seized his arm. It was as rigid as the arm of a man in a trance.

"Be quiet, sir," I said, "or they'll hear you in the street."

When I touched him, he looked at me so queerly that I let him go again.

"Damn him!" he reiterated, but he did so with less force. His voice was halting, like a clock that is running down.

"Be quiet," I repeated, and he stopped. It surprised me how suddenly he stopped. He looked blank and almost startled, and then he drew a handkerchief from his pocket, and drew it across his forehead.

"Charles," he said, "I'm sorry. I'm not myself today. You'll know when you have something on your soul, and God knows I have enough."

"Why are you loading the *Felicity*?" I asked him.

I thought he was quite himself again, for before he replied he stuffed his handkerchief back in his pocket, and pulled back the armchair that stood by the pine table. Then he laid his cane on the table before him, and seated himself, as though he was very tired.

"You ought to know, Charles," he said. "Can't you guess?"

I shook my head, and the counting-room was still. I wished it was not. For some reason I felt a dread of its silence.

"Yes, Charles," he said at length, "the *Felicity's* going out, and Richard Parton's going with her."

"You mean," I asked incredulously, "that he's willing to do that?"

He looked fixedly at me before he replied, and though his face had never changed, I had a strange fancy that he was amused.

"No, that isn't what I mean," he said. "That's why I want you here."

Then a strange thing happened. Suddenly I saw his mouth twitch into a grimace that was far from amusement. He leaned forward, and seized my coat sleeve. His will had given way again. Its barriers were down. He was not looking at me. He was looking beyond me as I had seen him look before.

"Don't, Charles," he was saying. "Don't leave me alone here—all alone in here."

His plea was so unexpected that I started back, but he rose and slapped his other hand against my shoulder, and suddenly I felt as cold as stone. His face was not a foot from mine, and it seemed to me that everything he had striven to hide was there, every passion, every lust and pain.

"You heard me," he groaned. "I asked him to go in peace. I can't turn back from it now. Must I always go on ... always on and on..."

Then I felt his hand slipping from my shoulder. His face was gray. His whole body was sagging back.

"The chair," he said. "In a minute ... I'll be all right in a minute..."

He was beside the chair, clutching blindly at the arms. He pitched into it, and his face drooped toward the table, and

his hands groped forward across the bare wood.

"Stay where you are," he said. "I'll be all right in a minute."

And there I stood, shocked and motionless. I can never wholly understand what happened then. Perhaps it was physical weakness which seized upon him, but I think it was more than that, now that I have seen other men, partly good and partly bad. He was not himself. There was nothing familiar in the man who was sitting there. He was more than a single individual.

"Why was he just the same!" he groaned. "Why did he smile like that, just as he used to smile? He knows, oh, yes, he knows I used to love him once, even when he was steeped to the eyes in sin. Hasn't he done enough by putting the cup to my lips? He knew I'd be too weak ever to set it down."

"You say you loved him?"

Eliphalet Greer started at my voice. I have never known what it was that prompted me to speak, for I had made up my mind to be still.

"Then why," I asked, "did you leave him on that island?"

Eliphalet Greer drew himself straight up in his chair.

"I'll tell you," he said, "but there isn't any use. You'll never understand men like him and me, not until you're like us, and I hope you'll never be. You'll never know what makes us go on and why we can't stop. You don't know about the devil and his works. You've never had him whispering in your ear, whispering until everything inside you goes, just the way a sail tears off the yards. You've never had him beside you while you lie awake looking at the dark."

"Was that why," I asked, "you put him on the island?"

Eliphalet Greer turned in his chair to face me.

"I put him there," he said, "because he tried to kill me. Be quiet, boy. What makes you jump? You've heard of killing before."

"And why," I asked, "did he try to kill you?"

"Wait till the blood gets in your own eyes," answered Eliphalet Greer. "It will some day. I've always known it will. Wait till you see a man's face in your sleep, and his words begin to stick and scratch. He tried to kill me because we quarreled."

"You quarreled?" I asked.

I wonder now that he did not resent my questions. They seemed quite natural then. Only later I thought it was strange that he should answer me as though I was a sergeant of police.

"Why does anyone quarrel?" he said. "They're only two reasons, carnal reasons, either money or a woman. We quarreled over money."

Eliphalet Greer leaned toward me across the table, and some of his former violence was back in his voice again.

"Don't look at me like a preacher's son! Don't try to tell me what's right and wrong. I know it better than you do. You've never felt remorse. You can't feel it till you've been a man like me."

I had thought that he was afraid, but I knew he was not then. It was not fear which had broken him, but remorse itself. He was struggling with it like Sisyphus with his rock.

"You'd have done it if you'd been there. Don't tell me you wouldn't. You'd be no better than anyone else if Satan

came down beside you..."

But he never told me what I would have done. He seemed to have forgotten. His voice trailed away, and when he spoke again his words were in another key.

"Yes, Charles, I've been a wicked man, but it's not for you to judge. Only the wicked can judge the wicked, Charles—only the wicked know. I was born wicked. I was a sinner before I carried blacks, before I heard the chains clank in the hold. Yes, I was a sinner before I ever sinned. It was all marked out. I had to go on and on. I've always known every wrong I've done, but I could never stop. Every sinner is always damned. I've always been damned. God had me damned before I ever pulled a rope."

He had stretched his arms before him. They were poised in front of him, lank and ungainly in their black broadcloth, and his voice had soared out of his control. I started away from him. I was ashamed to stay and see him so, but I could not go. I could not, though no living man should see another as I saw Eliphalet then. There in his counting-room Eliphalet Greer was calling on his God. A torrent of wild words was surging to his lips.

"O Maker of all living things!" he cried, "Maker of the Heavens and the Earth, when wilt Thou set me free, O God! Wilt Thou never free Thy servant from the lusts of the flesh? Wilt Thou never send the Devil from me? Save me from the clutches of the Old Man, and let me sin no more! Now that my sins are as scarlet, I pray Thee make them white as snow."

Was he crying the cry of all sinners then? Was it the prayer of all lost men? For a moment I thought he had lost his reason, and it was only later I thought of it in the light of pathos.

"Be quiet," I said hastily, "or they'll hear you in the street."

I was not aware of the irony of my reply. His voice had been so loud that I was in genuine dread, and he may have felt my dread also, for he stopped hastily and lowered his arms.

"Charles," he said, "listen to me, Charles."

"I am listening," I said. "But you needn't tell me this. I know enough already. You don't know what you're saying. Why should I hear you so?"

"Because," he said, "I want you to pity me, Charles. I want you to know how I repent my sin, for I sin in spite of myself. I tell you it hurts me to do wrong."

"Then why do you keep on?" I began. "Why do you?"

Eliphalet Greer turned to me almost in anger.

"Because I must," he said. "Because it lies inside me—here. Won't you pity me? Won't you pity me when I've bartered away ten thousand lives, when my ships are bringing over more? Parton and I began it, and I've kept it on alone."

"But why," I asked, "have you kept on?"

"Because I couldn't stop," he said. "God knows I couldn't stop. I tell you it's in my blood. It runs through me like drink. I can't stop. Oh, Lord! O Maker of all living——"

"Don't!" I interrupted hastily. "Say your prayers when I'm gone."

The way he intoned his words had set my nerves on edge, but he did not appear to hear.

"Save me, O Lord," he cried. "How can I sell calicoes when I've sold men? I've tried, O Lord, I've tried! How can Your servant add figures when he's seen topsails up in a gale, and they sell for four hundred dollars a head? How can any man do right when he's done wrong, when he's heard the grappling-irons go down, and heard the shouting forward?

Oh, why hast Thou made it so sweet, O Lord, so that every moment is like wine until the shouting dies? Oh, why does it seem sweet now when I can hear it again, and the deck shakes, and I take another throw? Oh, when wilt Thou make it bitter, O Lord, and set Thy servant free?"

"Stop, Mr. Greer!" I cried. "You don't know what you're saying!"

But he hardly stopped for breath.

"And neither do you," he rejoined. "How can you know till you've sunk a ship? I've dealt in slaves and I've seen piracy, but he needn't throw it in my face. Damn him! He needn't sneer at me now. He was up to it as much as I was. He shipped the crew at Singapore. Damn him! He touched off the first gun."

It was curious to see how the flames sprang up again within him, how the very memory of it had set him off again, and had sent contrition flying. It was like the wine of which he spoke, and the distorted shapes which were rising before him were like the echoes of the trumpets and the shouting of the captains. If he was confessing his sins it was a grotesque way to do it. They had ceased to be sins as his imagination felt the heat. There was a contagion in the way he spoke, an ungodly thrill in what he was saying. I could guess his story as clearly as I know it now. The shadows were shadows no longer.

"Yes," cried Eliphalet Greer, "how can I sell dead fish when I've been around Good Hope, when I've seen the channels behind the islands, and the water streaked out in the sun? How can I be honest when I've seen a crew driven below? I can't stop it now!"

"Good Lord!" I exclaimed dizzily, "do you know you're as good as telling me you used to be a pirate? You're telling enough to hang yourself twice over!"

"And what if I have been?" demanded Eliphalet Greer. "Parton put me up to it, I tell you. He was the devil himself, the devil and all his works. He told me about the gold. He knew how it was loaded. He'd been there his first trip out of Boston, and he remembered it ever since. He knew the way they hove to at night. How could I stop after what he told me?

"Ask Murdock. Murdock knows. He boarded with us when we drove down the watch. He saw what we took off of her. He helped us row it back. He was there when we poured it on the cabin table, and all sail was up and we were running out of sight. There was enough to make us all rich. Oh, yes, Murdock was there. He was standing with his mouth hanging open.

"'Mr. Greer,' he said, 'it's better than niggers,' and I said: 'Lord stay Thy hand. Thy servant hath enough.' And Parton was there too, right under the light. Oh, yes, he was there, and he only laughed, and I answered him.

"'Richard,' I said, 'we have sinned in the eyes of God and man,' and he laughed again, and then I saw what I had done, and I knelt on the floor and prayed."

It must have been a strange and unbelievable sight, but I believed it then. Even at a time like that his conscience bore him down. I think it was always with that strange old man, the conscience of a minister enshrined where a conscience should never be, a lonely battered attribute alone in the Indian Ocean.

"You say you robbed a ship," I heard myself saying hoarsely. "I thought you were running slaves."

"Charles," said Eliphalet Greer, "it's the way of sin. We started with the slaves, and things were very well. We ran them in and came back for more until Parton grew tired. We ended in the Indian Ocean, robbing an Indiaman. It was sin upon sin, ever since I met him. He showed me the way to go. I was very weak, Charles, but I tried—God knows I tried. When I was young like you, I left this port an honest man. You see how I've ended now. Go back to the *Gazette*, and read how the *Daphne* was attacked in 1817."

I stared at the old man sitting before me. I was dazed by what I had heard. They were stupendous and terrible, his incoherent words, and the fleeting glimpses into the life that lay behind him. It was incredible that he should be there

with his gold watch-chain, sitting in his counting-room, when he was walking iniquity. It was like some story in the forecastle when the sea is running high.

"Yes," he was saying, "I knew what I had done, after it was finished. Don't say I never tried to put my sins behind me. I knew the horror of it then. It was like too much drink, and all the while he was goading me on. You've seen him. You've heard his voice.

"'Get up, Eliphalet,' he said. 'You'll be all right in the morning.'

"'Richard,' I said, 'I'll never be so again,' and he only kept on laughing.

"'You old fool,' he said, 'we've been through all this before. Get up off the floor. We've only just begun.'

"I pulled myself up to my feet, and it made me sick to see him. He could always hold himself just so. He was like a picture, but I knew what he was then. It made me strong.

"'Richard,' I said, 'we've finished. We've both of us done enough.'

"And he just stood there with the lamp swaying back and forth above his head, and his handkerchief over his wrist where he had been slashed, and his hair over his eyes. I can hear him now.

"'You damned old Methodist,' he said, 'look over there at the table. We've got enough to buy three brigs, and enough to load 'em full. Not one little sloop, but three brigs, three brigs full of niggers. In a year we'll have enough to be rich for life—you know how. Do you think I'm going to stop when we've just begun?'

"Oh, I knew what he said was true. The dealers were paying high, and we'd learned how to run them. We'd sold slaves at Rio and Havanna, but the Lord had given me strength.

"'Get thee behind me, Satan,' I said. 'No, Richard, we've sinned enough. Think of the wife you have ashore.'"

There was a moment's silence before Eliphalet went on.

"Yes, he had a wife—in Portsmouth it was. She was timid and played the spinnet, and thought he was a hero. She called him her knight. He had a way with women I could never understand. She thought he was the world, and he let her think so. He never told her a word of what he was up to. She was glad he was in partnership with a sober man like me. She's been dead a long while now, but she never knew. There was a child, not two years old when we left. Wouldn't you have thought he would have come to his senses when I reminded him he was a family man? He was fond of them both. I've often seen them together.

"'Richard,' I said, 'think of the wife you have ashore!'

"But it did no good. She was too far away.

"'Damn you!' he cried out at me, 'will you ever stop referring to that? I am thinking of her. I'm providing for her by the sweat of my brow.'

"I still was gentle with him.

"'Oh, Richard,' I said, 'can I not lead you to repent your sins, as I am repenting mine?'

"'Are you going to drop it?' he shouted. 'Are you going to sheer off just when things are coming our way?'

"And I was angry too, righteously angry with the anger of a just man.

"'Richard,' I cried back at him, 'I'm finished. I'll not go on. I'm sick. I'm sick of everything. I wasn't made for a life like this, and I'm finished. I'll not do it, and you'll not—not while I'm alive.'"

Eliphalet Greer wiped the perspiration from his forehead. I had never heard him speak for so long a time. As I set them down, his words do not seem much. I can remember better what he left unsaid, and what he did not say was probably truer than what he spoke, though the years already were thick about it. I know the story now. Everyone knows it who has sailed, but I wonder what it was that smote his conscience then, and sent him to his knees on the cabin floor. As I think of it, the circumstances which surround it do not matter. The name of the ship, the bearings, how they came aboard, and the amount of money that was sealed in the cabin are only a part of a hundred stories warped and exaggerated until they have lost all semblance of truth. Eliphalet Greer himself is the only fact that makes the story strange. He was an element as out of place in that narrative as a pulpit in a gambling-house. Was he always swaying back and forth, like some ill-weighted pendulum between right and wrong?

Eliphalet Greer paused. He seemed to be wrestling with some thought, some memory that was keener and more poignant than the rest.

"And what do you guess he did then?" he asked, staring at the wall. "How did he pay me for my kindness? How did he pay me for my forbearance and for the years I stood beside him? Because I wanted to do right he tried to murder me! He offered the crew a hundred dollars apiece above their shares to have me thrown overboard! He tried to throw me to the fishes like Jonah to the whale!"

Eliphalet's voice had risen to a weird crescendo.

"That's what came of my kindness. That's what came of my loving him like a brother! He tried to murder me when I raised my hand to save him from the eternal fire!"

I sometimes wonder if Eliphalet Greer had the same gaunt figure then as when I first knew him, and whether his arms had the same ungainly swing? He was probably not much different, for time has little effect on a certain New England build, and it is as awkward in youth as it is in age. He must always have been more like a school-teacher than a sailor, a humorous sight when he pulled at a rope, an Ichabod Crane when he was out on the yards. I can see why Mr. Parton laughed when Eliphalet knelt on the cabin floor. It must have been deeply and ironically amusing aboard a dirty little trading sloop that night, when he pleaded for right after assiduously devoting himself to wrong. I can understand why Mr. Parton laughed, but time had sapped that interview of its humor. Time had made it black when Eliphalet Greer told it in his counting-room. The wrong and the right were strangely intermingled when it came back to life.

"Why did he turn on me?" cried Eliphalet Greer. "He knew it would drive me mad! Why didn't he throw me in? Why did I have to know?"

"What did you do?" I asked. "How did you find it out?"

I was afraid, I am ashamed to say it—I was afraid he would start praying again, and that I should never know how it ended. But when I spoke, he stopped and looked at me in a startled way, as though he had forgotten I was there.

"Charles," said Eliphalet Greer, "I'm not the man I used to be. Open the locker by the window and bring me a glass of rum. Murdock told me that Parton was going to have me killed."

The rum was in a square brown bottle with a tumbler beside it. Eliphalet Greer picked up the bottle in an unaccustomed way, and tilted it over the glass. He coughed when he put the spirits to his lips. He was still coughing when he set the glass down before him.

"You've sailed with him," he said. "Did you ever know a time when Murdock didn't know where his bread was buttered? Yes, he told me, and I knew what to do. I offered the crew five hundred apiece to put Richard Parton in irons."

Eliphalet Greer had half risen from his chair.

"And they did it! They knew me! They knew I'd keep my word better than he'd keep his. They grabbed him out of his bunk that very night. He swore at them. He begged them to let him go. Oh, Lord, I can hear him now. I've heard him often since. He thought it was turn about, but I knew what to do. I knew what he was. He was Satan—Satan himself. He was the spirit of darkness, and I sent him back to hell. The Lord was guiding me then. It came to me like a dream. I was

justice and I was fulfillment. I sat with him in the stern-sheets when we rowed him ashore, and he offered to fight me on the beach. I gave him his clothes. I gave him his prize money. I gave him everything that was his. He was standing on the beach when we backed the sails ... but he never called back. Why didn't he call? If he only had, I'd have set him aboard again. If he'd only called, no matter what he'd have threatened, I'd have set him on board. But he only kept standing there. He never moved a hand."

There was one thing which I could not understand.

"But why did you do that? You had no scruples. Why did you leave him there?" I demanded as though I was a judge. "When he tried to have you killed, why didn't you kill when your turn came?"

His answer was too quick and unconsidered not to be the truth.

"I did not dare," he said. "It wasn't in me."

And I could understand. It was his conscience clinging to him like a gyve, the conscience that held him still, that had always held him.

"I should have! I should have! Don't think I don't know that—but I couldn't. It was fate. It was where I always fail. When I hated him most, I couldn't raise my hand. I did what I did to save my soul, but I couldn't raise my hand."

"And yet——" I began.

"Yes," he said. "I sent you, but you'll never know how often I wished I'd called you back."

It was only a short while before that I had stood looking back at that lonely narrow land, watching the same beach Eliphalet Greer had watched, watching while it disappeared forever, watching until that whole island became as fragile as some island in the clouds. The beach was of ancient coral and was very white. A man standing upon it would be visible as long as the beach itself, a black speck on that white sand, a speck until he and the island became a memory, and even then he would be a speck, a disturbing speck against the white, like the blot of some old wrong.

Eliphalet Greer had fallen silent, and I knew I was not the only one who was thinking of the beach.

"Hasn't he done enough?" he cried shrilly. "Why does he come back to laugh at me after he's damned my soul?"

"I thought you marooned him to save your soul," I said.

Eliphalet Greer brought his fist down on the table.

"It didn't save my soul," he snapped. "When I got to Cape de Verde I couldn't stop—not when I saw the boats there and the money."

"And you started in again?" I asked incredulously. His story had changed from a moral tale. Eliphalet Greer bowed his head.

"God help me, I couldn't stop," he said. "Not any more than Murdock could stop drinking. It's in me. It's in me still."

He did not see the irony, or its uselessness. He seemed to have forgotten that he had marooned a man in a revulsion against sin only to sin again.

"Then there was no reason to leave him at all," I said.

His head was up again, and his face had grown as uncompromising as stone. I had a feeling that he had been reading from a book, reading of the tribulations of some imaginary man, and that he had finally snapped the covers shut.

"Charles," he said, "when you grow as old as I am, you'll find your ways are set. I will not say what I might do if I was younger. I have been speaking in heat and pain, but I will not any more. If I regret what I have done, it's too late.

Now do you know why the *Felicity's* against the wharf?"

Before I could reply, he had moved beside me.

"Because Richard Parton's going back to the island," he said.

I started away, but he seized me by the shoulder.

"You can't be thinking of that!" I cried. "Haven't you any mercy in you?"

"I'd have let him be if he hadn't threatened me," said Eliphalet Greer. "Oh, yes, I'd have let him be, but it's too late now. He's going as soon as it gets dark. He's going like a drunken sailor. They're watching him. His time is going to come."

As he spoke his hand on my shoulder tightened.

"You know how it's done. A crack on the head and down they go. Murdock was right. The old way is the best way. He'll find it won't do to play loose with me, not any more than it ever did."

It was no longer the past. He had closed the book, and I knew he would never open it again. By a single shift of speech he had skipped across the bridge of time, skipped to an act more horrible still, to a reality worse than any reminiscence.

"You can't mean you're going to leave him again!" I cried. "Think what you've done already. Isn't it enough to have ruined his life?"

And then I stopped. His face made me stop. I knew it was useless to try to hold him back.

"It's too late," he said evenly. "There's no good of speaking of things you'll never understand. I said you'd never understand a man like me. Let him leave me, and I'll leave him alone, but if he's in town tonight, he's going out for good. Be quiet, Charles. Don't begin again. Be quiet. Do you know why I've asked you here?"

"If you think," I began, "that I'm going to be mixed up in this—if you think——"

"You fool!" interrupted Eliphalet Greer, "why have I been talking to you? Answer me that?"

"God help you, I don't know," I said.

Eliphalet Greer folded his arms and every trace of kindness had gone out of him.

"Because you've sold your soul," he said. "Have you forgotten that? Because your life depends on your standing by. Because you and I are going up tonight to help Richard Parton on board."

I stepped toward him, but he stood still. For a second there was blackness around me. Everything seemed black. A wave of black was enveloping me. I was struggling against it.

"Be damned to you!" I gasped. "Get someone else to do your dirty work!"

Eliphalet Greer stood still with folded arms.

"There's no one else," he said. "Murdock's too old, and he's afraid. I want someone young with his back to the wall. That's why you're coming with me, Charles."

I saw the devil then. The devil was Eliphalet Greer himself in his black coat.

"That's right," he was saying. "I know how you feel. Twist if you want, but you won't get away. I've got the steel in you. Twist and be damned! I've got the hooks in. If you don't stand by me, we all go together—you, Murdock, all of us.

Listen to me! I'll pull you tighter yet. I'm too old to stop at anything now. If you don't lend a hand tonight, so help me, I'll let him stay! He'll tell a pretty story, and I'll let him tell it. He'll tell 'em what I am—but I swear if I go down, you'll go down with me. You've been in my pay. That'll be enough to damn you when the time comes, and I'll swear the rest on the Book. I'll tell 'em a story they won't forget. I know how to do it. I've broken men before. When I get through you'll be better dead, the whole damned crew of you. I'm not going down alone. I'll pull the whole temple down like Samson. Do you think you can take my money and not pay me back? Put down your arm. Don't raise your hand to me, you paid murderer!"

The stillness of the counting-room must have brought me back. I was standing close to Eliphalet Greer with my arm half raised, and he had not moved. He had not taken his eyes from mine, but the room seemed brighter and I could see other things beside his face. I heard the noises on the wharf again. I saw the sun on the water and the spars of the *Felicity*.

"Do what you like," I said. "I'll take my chances against anything you say. Do what you like. I've listened to you before."

And then I stopped. He must have seen my expression change, but he never knew what I was thinking. He said we would all go, and I knew we would.... Only a little while ago she had been standing with her cloak around her watching me go down the hill, and he had said we would all go, and I knew we would, and I knew we would not be the only ones. She seemed to be standing close beside me again, and I knew I could not leave her so. I knew what they would say. I could hear the gossip go already....

"Ah," said Eliphalet Greer, "I thought you would understand."

But he never knew what I understood.

"Making up your mind is always the hardest part," he said. "It will be as easy as easy now. I knew you would see the truth."

"I see it," I answered, but he never knew what I saw.

Eliphalet Greer sat himself back in his chair, and pulled out his heavy gold repeater.

"Charles," he said, "you'll be a man before we're through. I wish we both were young. Sit down now, and listen."

XVIII

Why should I tell what I did that day, when I did nothing through my own volition? I was only waiting, waiting to play a part in Eliphalet Greer's own story, and while I was waiting it still went on along the lines the stars had set, and I do not believe that any living man could have stopped it then.

The noon meal had been cleared long ago when I entered the Anchor House. The tables had been laid for supper, and the taproom was filled with an increasing number of men whose work at the wharves was over. I had been walking, though I cannot remember where. My head was aching, and my shoes were covered with mud. It seemed strange that no one knew, that everything had been going on just as it had before, just as it had for a hundred other days. I was young then, too young to know how pitifully little we ever see of others' lives. There must have been a dozen men in the taproom, seated comfortably about the open fire, and I knew them all. My entrance did not disturb them, however. It hardly caused a ripple. They greeted me as though I had never been away to sea, for in those days when everyone came and went, exits and entrances meant less than they do now, and in a place as transient as the Anchor House almost nothing. Jim Lowes was almost the only one who looked at me a second time. He had been standing behind the bar, but when he saw me he walked hastily around it.

"Where've you been?" he asked.

"Walking," I answered.

"Where?"

"I don't know," I said, and I didn't know. I hardly heard him. I only half saw the taproom and the fire.

"Charles," he said regretfully, "you look like you've seen a ghost. I might have known you'd see too much. Why didn't you leave ghosts to old folks who know what's best?"

I did not answer, and Jim Lowes had moved closer beside me, and waved his thumb toward the fire.

"Bend down," he said suddenly, "I can't be hollering up at you. Bend down. I want to tell you something."

And then he lowered his voice to an undertone.

"I'm not the only one who's seeing things," he whispered. "When the day's queer, the night's queer, Charles. Listen. Where's your ears? Listen."

Jim Lowes was pointing toward the guests about the fire. I became aware of something I had not noticed before, of an unusual interest, of excitement almost in the way they spoke and listened that was different from other afternoons. Old Ephraim Hoopes was bending forward, pounding the arm of his chair.

There was nothing strange about Ephraim Hoopes being there. Everyone in town knew his habits. He was in the taproom any afternoon. Any morning, when the weather was fit, his fishing sloop would put out of harbor before it was light, and he always went alone. He knew the ledges like the palm of his hand. He fished, not because he had to, for he had enough means to avoid work. Though he was old, he was still an active man, and he always said that he disliked sitting still until his clock struck. I do not believe he was ever happy unless he was out of sight of land, for he had spent his life on deep water. He was always restless. He was always anxious to be out to see how it looked off shore, and it was plain to see that he had taken his trip that morning. His beard was jutting forth aggressively from his chin and moving like a white-cap on a wave. He had thrown out his chest as he always did after his third glass, and was glancing indignantly about him.

"I tell you I saw it," he was saying. "Ain't it enough to tell you I saw it?"

Jacob Rice, who ran the store across the street, was sitting beside him, smoking his clay pipe. He tapped the ashes out on the palm of his hand as Ephraim Hoopes finished speaking. I still remember Jacob Rice's sharp nasal voice.

"Ephraim," he said, "won't you never stay ashore where you belong? Won't you ever stop gallavanting about in that little nutshell when there isn't any need? You've told a lot about what you've seen, but ain't you getting too old, Ephraim, to go on jeopardizing your immortal soul?"

Ephraim Hoopes whirled indignantly toward him.

"What about you, you old skinflint?" he demanded. "Don't you talk to God-fearing folks, when I saw you putting sand in your sugar yesterday."

"Stuff!" said Jacob Rice, unmoved. "You saw me like you saw that ship, and you saw that ship because you like to talk, and folks are tired of your old yarns and you like to have folks listen."

Ephraim Hoopes made an indignant gesture.

"By Godfrey!" he demanded, "don't any of you believe me—not when I saw with my own eyes—not when I saw her lines? I know what I see and what I don't. My eyes are good enough for that, and they've seen a sight more than anybody's here. She was coming down right on top of me, before she put about. I was as near as over the street. I saw 'em on the

deck. I saw every eternal line of her. I know every ship that's come out of the Morrill yard. I know how young Morrill cuts the bows. I know what he builds as well as I know myself. She was one of Merrill's ships—I'll swear it on the Judgment Book. She was launched in twenty-five. Her name's different. Her paint's different. Her rigging's not the same, but I know her."

"And she's out there now?" someone asked.

"She's out there, standing off and on, like she's waiting a time to come in," Ephraim Hoopes answered.

"If she's out there, what's she waiting for?" asked Jacob Rice. "Who ever heard of a skipper in his senses standing on and off on a quiet day with everything clear?"

Before replying, Ephraim Hoopes glanced around him, and the semi-circle of chairs scraped forward.

"Ask Eliphalet Greer," he said. "Mebbe he knows if anybody does."

The chairs scraped nearer.

"But she's no ship of his," someone said.

Ephraim Hoopes shook his head dejectedly.

"It's like you," he said, "never to remember. She was a ship of his. She left here in his name. She left here seven years ago. He sold her—he sold her in Baltimore, if I remember right. You ask him. Mebbe he's bought her back again."

I heard Jim Lowes catch his breath, as sharply as though he had been plunged into cold water.

"You say she's out there still," he asked, "standing off and on?"

"That's where she is," said Ephraim Hoopes. "You can't fool me. I know her. I know the hull of every vessel I've ever clapped an eye on. She's one that Morrill built for Eliphalet Greer, and which sailed out in twenty-five, and now she's painted black as pitch, and all her ports are open, and when the lookout saw me, he sang out, and they put over just like that. They sheered off as if they were afraid. I tell you there's wickedness aboard her. She ain't an honest ship. I know what she looked like to me, but I won't say."

"Stuff," said Jacob Rice. "If she's out there, she was blown in last night, and she's lost her bearings."

"Well, well," said Ephraim Hoopes more pleasantly, "I'm only telling what I saw. Go out and look for yourself."

Jim Lowes was wiping his hands hastily on his apron, though there seemed to be no need.

"Charles," he said, "you'll be wanting to see your bed-chamber, Charles."

"I want to hear what he's saying," I objected, but Jim Lowes was pulling me away.

"Haven't you heard enough?" he answered tartly.

He kept pulling at my sleeve. I followed him from the taproom up the creaking stairs. There was a musty smell in the passageway, and I knew that my room would smell the same. It was before the time of machine-made carpets and the halls were bare, so that our feet sounded heavily. A row of doors stood on either side, but Jim Lowes passed them all, and turned to a side passage at his left, toward the ell above the kitchen.

"Here you be, Charles," he said.

He spoke without much pride and there was a reason. There was never much cause to be proud of the accommodations which the Anchor House afforded. It was a narrow room with a single window open toward the harbor. There was a bed close to the wall, a rush-bottom chair with a candle upon it, and a jug and a pitcher. I remember it

seemed like a very small room to hold both of us. Jim Lowes was breathing rapidly, and his breath sounded unusually loud in those close quarters.

"You heard what he said," Jim Lowes whispered. "He saw a ship out there."

"Jim," I said, "I'm not feeling well. I want to be alone."

"He said he saw a ship," Jim Lowes answered, "a ship standing on and off."

"What if he did?" I replied. "I've got other things to think about."

"Doesn't it mean nothing to you at all?" he asked.

"Jim," I said, "I want to be alone."

Jim Lowes sighed and stuffed a handful of tobacco in his cheek.

"Don't it mean nothing," he said, "when first *he* comes blowing in, and then there comes a ship? I guess I'm a superstitious man, because it means something to me. First a dead man walking in the door and now a ship that left in twenty-five—a ship that's never been home since—a ship that hasn't come in sight of land. Is she another ghost? That's what I want to know. Is she another ghost heading back for home?"

The little room seemed very chill. My hands were cold, and I rubbed them hastily together.

"It can't have anything to do with him," I said. "You can't think that."

Jim Lowes was staring out the window.

"If she's a ghost, Lord help us all!" he said. "Not you and me or all of us could lay a ghost like that."

"You're not afraid," I demanded incredulously, "because Ephraim Hoopes saw a ship?"

Jim Lowes turned toward me, and his face seemed unnaturally sharp, and there was a penetrating quality about his glance that set my nerves on edge.

"And why shouldn't I be afraid?" he said. "I'm not the only one—oh, no. Two ghosts aren't natural. One is enough in a single day for a quiet man like me. I don't feel easy about what's going on tonight."

"So you know about it already?" I asked.

Jim Lowes glanced about him nervously.

"You needn't speak so loud," he remonstrated. "Ain't it hard enough without talking, I should admire to know? How can I keep respectable without I keep things quiet? Ain't it bad enough to have him four doors down the hall, just settin' on a chair with his legs cocked up on the bed, reading a book, just like he was a teacher at the college, reading a book? And Jim Young and West down in the street watching if he goes out, and there he's just settin' as if everything was peaceful. What makes him so quiet for, that's what I'd like to know?"

"Richard Parton's in here now?" I stammered.

"Charles," said Jim Lowes, "since I've been keeping tavern I've always satisfied my customers, and I don't call to interfere in gentlemen's quarrels. If Mr. Greer wants the house quiet, I'll keep it quiet, and no questions asked, provided he pays enough. I know when a man's dead and when he isn't—but what's he reading a book for? It isn't like him just to be settin' still."

Jim Lowes moved toward the door.

"I never have liked it, and now there comes a ship," he said.

Then I was alone in my room. The walls were blank, and painted a dingy yellow. The floors bare except for a thin strip of carpet by the bed. The single window was an uncompromising square of light. The bed covering was white, unrelieved by a single spot or shadow. There were not more than three paces from the door to the window. I remember the number well, for I walked back and forth for a little while. I was quite alone, and yet I was never less alone than I was then. Faces kept leaping up in my memory, faces and disjointed words. I had been ashamed to be seen in the streets, but it was worse there by myself. The thing I was going to do kept running through my mind. Eliphalet Greer's voice kept ringing in my ears.

Once I thought of going to her, of seeking out Murdock's cottage again, of telling her everything, but I did not go. Something held me back, something like diffidence, something almost like shame. I could save her from sitting in a courtroom. I could save her from being known as the daughter of a felon. Eliphalet Greer and I could end it all that night, and yet I was ashamed. I was ashamed as though I knew that my determination was a weakness, and even now when the night is still I am sometimes shaken by doubts. I wonder—did I truly act that night on account of her, or was it from fear for myself, or fear for both of us? I wonder if I was juggling with my conscience then, if I have been all these years? I wonder if, after all, Eliphalet Greer is not the better man?

I know I was afraid in my room in the Anchor House. I had not felt it out of doors, but between those narrow walls I was filled with a curious sickly fear. Mr. Parton was reading in his room, four doors away, Jim Lowes had said. He was waiting and I was waiting, but I was not afraid of him. My fear was of something greater than Mr. Parton would ever be. The walls of that room seemed to press upon me. They seemed to be moving nearer like the walls in some cell of the Inquisition, until the air itself seemed possessed of an intolerable weight. The room itself was like a cell. It was shutting me from life. It was like the island where he was going. I wanted to look at the water again, at the water and the sky.

I could see it from my window, just above the elm trees in the street beneath. The sun was upon it so that it moved and shone like blades of bluish steel. The river was like a road, widening at its mouth into a great plain that vanished in the sky behind a bank of clouds, which already were growing vague and soft as clouds do when the sun falls low. It was hard to see where the water ended and the sky began. Now and then the sun's rays would strike on a wave which seemed to lap against the clouds themselves, but then the wave would sink again, and I could see the ocean swell beyond. At first I thought there was nothing upon that stretch of water. It seemed as lonely as it had in the beginning, and then I saw a sail.

It was like light on the water at first, it was so far away. It appeared and vanished at first like the rising of the water, but as I watched, it became a constant, definite thing, a speck of white distinct from sea and cloud. It was only a speck of white, but I knew it was a sail, a sail standing in toward shore.

I remember I felt tired, deathly tired. I recall that I stretched myself on my bed, and that the mud from my shoes smeared the white coverlet. I remember staring up at the ceiling, but the sea was still before me. I shut my eyes, but the sun was still upon the water. Voices were calling across it. I could hear the creaking of blocks and the straining of wood. And then my mind had gone to strange places, airy, fantastic places, filled with sights I had seen before and sights I had never seen. Eliphalet Greer was with me. He kept darting out from chaos, and even when everything grew still, and blacker than night, Eliphalet Greer was there. His hand was on my shoulder, and I could hear a voice soaring feebly into the dark.

"O Lord," it was saying, "my sins are as scarlet. I pray Thee make them white as snow."

But I could not tell whether he was calling or whether it was I.

XIX

I had an indefinable knowledge of the lateness of the hour when I was called from blackness into something blacker

still, a knowledge which comes only of a restless life, a life of unexpected wakings. I knew it was late, very late. It was the period of the whole day's cycle which marks the very depths of time, when everything is quiet with that strange stillness which only comes when time lapses into some unknown dimension, when dreams and death and wakings seem strangely intermingled, so that each is like the other.

I remember a tapping on the door, and the chill darkness of the room as I listened, but I had no sensation of being awake. My head was light. My hands were devoid of any sense of touch. I heard the latch raised. I heard the door creak open, but I had no feeling of apprehension. I was not even stirred by curiosity. I heard Jim Lowes' hoarse whisper in the dark, but it might have been the whisper of my thoughts.

"Charles, are you there, Charles?"

As I told him that I was, he seized my wrist.

"Speak low," he whispered, "or you'll wake him up. Speak low and come downstairs. It's time now. The old man's in the kitchen."

There was the same musty smell in the hall outside, but I did not feel awake. The darkness seemed too thick, and our footsteps too soft and vague. The hall was black. Everything was black. There was no relieving lightness from any window, not a crack of light beneath a door to steady us, to show us we were in the Anchor House and not floating through the air. I was glad it was so still, for I had a tense desire for silence. I was glad of the dark, because he could not see me. I was afraid. I was still afraid as he led me along the passage. We were going down the kitchen stairs.

I remembered the kitchen. I had often sat there with Jim Lowes when the hour was late and his guests had gone to bed. There were two candles and a lantern on the table that held the serving dishes. Their flames were soft and yellow and far from bright, but they gave me a sensation of unholy brilliance as I came in from the dark. At first I could not take my eyes away from those lights on the table. Then I saw the fireplace still glowing warm with coals, and the rows of kettles hung on nails along the wall. But I still felt only half awake.

A man was standing beside the fire. I watched him as the blindness from the candles left my eyes, and I saw it was Captain Murdock. He appeared to me unnatural, only a travesty of himself. His face was as puckered as an apple on the ground when the wind has seared it and its juice begins to go. It bore only a trace of its old complacent rotundity. He saw me, but he seemed to have forgotten that any unpleasantness had passed between us. He was fidgeting and blowing on his fingers. He was like a man awakened from a bad dream. His eyes kept narrowing and widening again, as though the sights of the dream were still about him. He was like some fantastic recollection, but not the Murdock I had known. He was like all the rest, a part of fantasy. Jim Lowes was different, too. He was imbued with a new alertness, with a heightened intensity that placed him on a level with the night. I had never seen him look so sharp, so unbelievably sharp.

And then quite suddenly I knew I was awake, wider awake than I had ever been before. It was not the light, nor Murdock, nor Jim Lowes. Someone had been standing behind Murdock. As I came into the kitchen he had moved forward. It was Eliphalet Greer. Beside Murdock he looked very tall and thin. He was wrapped in his black cloak, just as I had seen him on the day when the *Felicity* set sail. It was thrown over his shoulder in folds, like the folds of cloaks I had seen where the air is soft and the sun is bright. His hat was off. His hair was back from his forehead, leaving it high and white. Except for his cloak, I might have thought he was some divine called into the night to minister at the bedside of the dying. He gave me the same detached greeting, the same look of a man whose mind is on greater things.

"Charles," he said, "you're cold. Step over by the fire. You'll be better warm before we start."

I was cold. As I spoke a shiver ran through me, which seemed to communicate itself to Captain Murdock also.

"What he needs is a drink," said Captain Murdock suggestively. "It isn't the outside of him that's cold. It's his insides—all our insides. Now how about it—a little something all around? It never hurt nobody."

Eliphalet Greer did not so much as look at him.

"Is he up there?" he asked. "Are you sure he's up there now?"

"Mr. Greer," said Jim Lowes, "he couldn't have sneaked out without I heard him. I've been listening all night long."

Eliphalet Greer was no longer like a preacher or a prophet, in spite of all his black.

"Then he'll get it!" he choked. "He'll get it! Why in God's name didn't he go? Why didn't he go and leave me? Why did he bring it on himself? He only had to go. He only had to leave, and I'd have never touched a hair of him. He only had to leave me here in peace."

It was unpleasant to watch him standing with his head upraised, lost in the maze of his own thoughts while we stood still and waited. It set my nerves on edge, and the vagueness, the uncertainty of it disturbed Captain Murdock also, for he stepped toward Eliphalet Greer and jogged him familiarly and irreverently with his elbow.

"Hey!" he said uneasily. "Now don't go gettin' like that! Ain't we all waiting here? Ain't we all ready to put him on board? You ain't going to stop when everything's all ready?"

Eliphalet Greer's shoulders wrenched forward as though someone was pulling them.

"Keep quiet!" he said hoarsely, "or by God! I'll break your neck!"

I thought he was going to do it. I could almost hear the place ring with its noise. I saw Jim Lowes draw a deep breath as though he was about to cry out. I saw Captain Murdock jump backward and snatch up an empty bottle.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!" Jim Lowes whispered, "for the love of the Lord, be quiet! Do you want him to wake up?"

Captain Murdock moved away, and I wanted to follow him. I could hardly repress my desire. The fear I had felt alone in my room was back upon me. Eliphalet Greer was looking at me now. He was moving toward me, and I understood my fear. I was afraid of him. I had been afraid of him all the while. I was afraid as I tried to meet his glance. I felt a loathing of the darkness in his eyes. I loathed the weakness and the strength that drew the wrinkles of his mouth. I hated his black coat. I hated the loose skin on his hands.

"Charles," he said, "you're not giving way?"

If my limbs had not refused me, I think I should have run away. Instead, I only stood dazedly, trying to face him squarely, and then I started away until my back came against the wall. Eliphalet Greer had reached forward. His hand had come down on my shoulder.

"Charles," he said, "are you coming?"

I found my voice. It rose in me as my revulsion rose—into an unreasoning crisis that was beyond my mind to fathom or suspect.

"Take off your hand," I said chokingly. "Why should I be afraid? Take off your hand!"

I remember I was pulling at his wrist, clawing at it, as though his hand was on my throat.

"Hush!" Jim Lowes was pleading. "Hush! Or you'll wake him up."

"Why should I stop now?" I was saying wildly. "Doesn't it mean I'll see the last of you? I'd go upstairs and cut his throat, as long as I never see your face again! Take off your hand!"

I had wrenched his fingers free of my shoulder. I had flung them back, and his lips moved convulsively, but he stood quite still.

"So that's the way it blows?" he said, and then he paused, and his voice sank very low.

"It's better," he said, and his voice was an old man's voice. "After all, it's better," and he turned away.

"Come here," he said, nodding at Jim Lowes, and Jim Lowes moved nearer.

"What room is he in?" he asked.

"As you go upstairs, the second on your left," Jim Lowes answered.

Eliphalet Greer nodded.

"Who else is in the ell?" he asked.

"Mr. Jervaile's the only one," Jim Lowes replied. "Yes, sir, he's the only one. I'm doing what I set out to do. It's quiet like I promised it would be, all locked off from the rest of the house, all locked like a family vault. No one can come out or in without they use these stairs."

Eliphalet Greer rubbed his chin.

"It won't disturb anyone," he said, "if there's a noise?"

"Everyone's asleep in front," Jim Lowes said. "They wouldn't be like to hear, and if they did, it wouldn't mean nothing."

I heard Eliphalet Greer draw in his breath in a deep, quavering way, as though something had hurt him.

"Then take off your coat, Charles," he said. "You'll be better without it. You say he's asleep?"

"I've been listening," said Jim Lowes, "and he hasn't made a sound."

"Give me that rope on the table," said Eliphalet Greer, "and the lantern."

Then he leaned toward me so close that I could feel his breath, and though he was whispering, his words seemed to echo through me.

"Listen!" he said. "Are you listening? Then look at me. What's the matter? You're not afraid to look?"

I looked at him. Except for his mouth, the muscles of his face were motionless as stone.

"He's quick. I know him. He's like a cat. There won't be any time. He mustn't know, till it's too late. Don't try the latch. When we're up at the door, smash it in. You're strong enough to do it. Smash it in and get him by the throat. I'll hold the light."

Eliphalet Greer drew another sobbing breath.

"He's strong! I tell you he's strong, and he's like a snake. Get him by the throat, I say, and let him have your fist in his face. I want him still. That's all I want—to have him still. Don't let me hear him call. Hold him still. I'll do the rest."

Every motion he made was suddenly smooth and accurate. There was nothing ungainly about him any longer. His feet made no sound on the floor. He was folding his cloak about the lantern.

"Open the door to the stairs," he said.

It is curious how values change when thought becomes an act. I had sickened at the thought of it, but it was different now that we were moving up the stairs. I wonder whether the old man was right when he said that I was unfitted for the pursuit of peace? I wonder if he knew more about me than I have ever known? The lantern was under his cloak. The light was almost entirely hidden, but as we moved up into the dark, an occasional ray from the oil frame would dart from under his cloak, and would cover him with a dull light and disappear again, like the light of some fire within him that he was striving to conceal. My eyes were on his back, always on his back, and I was moving up after him. As I went up those stairs, as I tiptoed along the hall, I felt a strange elation. It had nothing to do with conscience. It was apart from

right and wrong. It was a joy in my own strength, in the sureness of my step. Life was strong within me. I was curiously light and free. I knew it was wrong. I remember thinking I was lost to everything I knew and hoped as I followed him, but it did not cast me down. I drew a breath of the musty air, and it set my blood tingling. It gave me a desire to laugh. I wanted to feel the door against my shoulder. I wanted to hear it crash....

That night has never seemed like life. It has never been a rational memory. I could hardly hear his tread upon the stairs. His cloak made a rustling sound, but even in the dark, where hearing is unnaturally acute, it was hard to hear. I wanted something to break the silence. I wanted it to end, no matter how it ended. I wanted it to end, though I seemed lost to all time and space.

Eliphalet Greer had stopped. I could see his dark cloak ahead of me, an unearthly garment with the rays of the lantern shining through it. He was whispering to me. It sounded like the rustling of half-dead leaves.

"There's the door," he whispered. "Stand back and smash it in!"

He had moved his cloak. The hall grew brighter. I could see it before me, a dim panel of white with a black old hand-wrought latch. As I hesitated, the rays of the lantern had ceased to be steady. Eliphalet's arm was swaying back and forth like a bit of seaweed in a rip of tide.

"D'you hear me?" he shouted. "Smash down that door!"

It was his voice that made me do it, his voice as it burst out of him. It sent me off my feet. It sent my body hurtling forward, and I remember that the hall was light. Eliphalet Greer had dropped his cloak.

The door went down like paper. I carried it off its latch and hinges, and it crashed into the room ahead of me. I stumbled over it and then regained my balance. The room was small. There was not a corner but was clear under Eliphalet Greer's lantern, and it was no different from mine—a bed, a chair, a table, a bowl, a pitcher, and that was all. The window was half open. The door with two shivered panels was lying across the carpet, and there was no one there, no one but Eliphalet Greer and me.

I turned toward him. He was glancing wildly, uncomprehendingly, at the bare walls. I thought he would drop the lantern, and I snatched it from his hand.

"He's not here!" he cried hoarsely. "He's not here!"

But I hardly heard him. The crash of the door was still in my ears. It seemed to have blotted out all other sound. I saw Jim Lowes. He must have followed behind us, for he scurried in as Eliphalet spoke, and stared at us vacantly. Then he pulled some tobacco from his pocket.

"He's gone!" he said, cramming it into his cheek. "Right out through the window. I always knew that something queer would happen, but who'd of thought that he would get away? Who'd of thought it, and me listening all the time?"

Eliphalet Greer snatched roughly at his shoulder.

"Spit out that tobacco," he cried, "and tell me the truth! Is he hiding in some other room? Give me the lantern!"

"He couldn't be anywhere else," Jim Lowes protested. "The ell is locked and every chamber in the ell is locked, excepting his and Mr. Jervaile's."

"He can't be gone!" cried Eliphalet Greer. "He can't! Show me the other rooms. West and Young would have seen him go."

"I tell you," said Jim Lowes, "the other rooms are locked."

"Unlock them," said Eliphalet Greer, "unlock them, every one."

I wish it would not stay by me still, but I can see it all. Yes, I can still see it, that long, narrow hall growing large and growing small as the lantern swayed back and forth, while our shadows loomed up like spectres and dwindled back to nothing with each swing of the light, and Eliphalet Greer, who was black as any shadow but who never changed. As each door opened he darted in with his lantern as though the secret of life lay just inside. As each door opened, I could almost feel his excitement mounting like a wave, and the sound of our footsteps rose and fell in our hearing as though they were part of some invisible sea, and I was following, not through any will of mine, but because I was in some current beyond myself.

There were eight rooms in all. We entered them every one. They were so much alike that they might have been the same rooms, and each was empty, stark and empty.

Eliphalet Greer strode back into the hall. His mouth had fallen open. His eyes were glazed and blank with incredulity. He was hurrying toward the stairs that led to the inn kitchen. As I followed him, I heard him catch his breath. He stumbled down the stairs. He strode across the kitchen and placed his lantern on the table. He was curiously changed. I thought he would be angry. I thought he would be restless and apprehensive. If Mr. Parton was not in the Anchor House, he could not be far away. I wondered why he waited if Mr. Parton was not there. Even in the yellow light of the candles his face was gray. It was like the face of a man who has passed through a spasm of some disease, as wan as though it had been touched by the fingers of death. But it was calm, calm as I had never seen it. His eyes were wide and incredulous, and his voice was incredulous as he spoke.

"He's gone." He said it very softly, more gently than I ever guessed he could speak. "He's gone. I don't have to send him there. He's gone."

He said it like some prayer, some prayer of thanksgiving.

"He ain't gone far," Jim Lowes objected.

But he did not seem to hear.

"He's gone," he said. "Gone like a watch in the night. I'll never have to send him there—never now."

Had he halted in the road at last, the road he had trod so long? Had the burden grown too heavy? Had he finally set it down?

"Maybe," said Jim Lowes suggestively, "I ain't saying, but mebbe I could help you find him."

Had the fire within him died at last, never to burn again? I thought it had at first, and then I understood. He had heard Jim Lowes the second time. He was pointing toward the stairs.

"What difference does it make," he said, "as long as he isn't there? What difference does it make? I've done enough tonight. He's gone. Thank God—he's gone!"

He opened the kitchen door. He was out in the night.

"Murdock," he was saying, "he's gone. Thank God—he's gone!"

Jim Lowes was staring after him and whistling softly.

"I wouldn't believe it," he said. "Not if you'd told me, I wouldn't believe it. He didn't want to do it. He didn't want to at all."

XX

But I was beyond thinking of Eliphalet Greer. The sins that bowed his head meant nothing; I had no curiosity for any emotion which shook him, now that he was gone, now that I felt the damp night air through the open door. My own thoughts were all about me. I was alone again with that part of myself which sits in judgment, alone as we always are whether we are in the city street or on the sea. Nothing beyond myself had any meaning, except the thing I had almost done.

It was strange how it had changed now that it lay behind me. Its wickedness was still growing within me. It was taking root in my being. It was filling me with such a sickness that it seemed like an act accomplished. I must have looked as wild and as strange as Eliphalet Greer. I saw that Jim Lowes was startled, and he was used to curious sights. I heard myself breathing deeply, almost as a swimmer might who is struggling against a current, and then I was saying Eliphalet Greer's last words just as he had said them.

"Thank God—thank God he's gone!"

But whether I was giving thanks for Eliphalet Greer's or for Richard Parton's absence, I was never sure.

Jim Lowes had helped me on with my coat, and, hardly giving a thought to what I was doing, I picked up a candle and started for the stairs. Jim Lowes never spoke. As I passed through the kitchen, however, he moved toward me, as though to urge me to stay, but he stopped almost as soon as he had started, and stood looking at me as I began to climb the stairs. He made very little effort, but I like to think he tried to make me stop. I heard him call me once when I was halfway up, or I thought I heard him call me, but I did not reply. Just then the bells outside began striking at the hour. I think it was three they were striking, but I am not sure, for the bells in the different church towers began together, and I did not bother to distinguish one from the other. Nevertheless it did me good to hear them, for it gave me a sense of time and space. I have said that night is always a fantastic memory, but I gained a sense of reality from those bells transient but strong. It was the first time that I fully realized that Richard Parton had gone. When I remember the excitement I was laboring under, it does not seem so strange that it took me a minute to be filled with the knowledge. I was almost at my door when I was struck with the certainty of it, and it made me pause in the passage. I had never known how Eliphalet Greer had twisted and turned me until then. As I opened the door of my room, I was still dazed by the relief that had come over me, but as I opened the door the bells had stopped ringing and everything was very quiet.

At first I was not surprised at what I saw. It was like a part of the night again. As I recall it, it is still like another fancy taking shape, another vision on the border line between sleep and waking. I only looked ahead of me and stood quite still. My room was just as I had seen it a few minutes back when Jim Lowes and Eliphalet Greer and I had entered it. The bare yellow walls were the same. The bed was disordered. I could see the marks of mud that my boots had made when I last lay upon it. I looked away. I looked away on purpose, and then back at the bed again. I had thought it would be changed, but it was not. It gave me a curious feeling that my mind and not my body was there. I had no consciousness of holding the candle or of drawing my breath. Everything within me was centered on what I saw.

Sitting on the bed with his feet crossed in front of him, and leaning slightly back, was Richard Parton. He was there in the life. He was not a part of my imagination. I could see his blue coat move as he breathed, and his eyes shift as he stared me up and down. He reminded me of the time I had first seen him. He had the same appearance of lightness and wiry muscular grace. He was sitting on the bed and looking up at me, but he did not move when he saw me, as an ordinary man would move. He must have known what had happened, but he did not move.

If he had done so, it would have made me much easier. His quietness startled me more than the unexpectedness of seeing him. Richard Parton was a man, like all the rest of us, but he still seems something more. When I saw him then his stillness made him as fantastic and visionary as some shape that troubles conscience. He had a confidence and certainty that made him like a part of destiny. I could have only stood looking at him for a second, but it still seems a long time. At first I stood without any sensation, but suddenly I became horribly afraid. I can never analyze my fear. It was more than Richard Parton I was afraid of. I wanted to cry out, but I did not dare, and I did not dare be still.

He must have seen what was passing through me, for he smiled faintly, but he did not move, not so much as to unclasp his hands, which were folded across his knee.

"Don't," he said, "don't be a damned fool."

And then my terror came into my voice.

"Jim!" I shouted suddenly. "Jim Lowes!"

But I could not keep my eyes from him even when I called, and he did not move or try to interrupt me.

"So you are a damned fool," he said. "The world hasn't changed since I've been away. People are still damned fools, especially when you tell them not to be."

I was going to call again, but I stopped with the words half formed. Richard Parton had twisted himself to his feet. He was wonderfully quick.

"Be still," he said. "He knows I'm here. I've paid him enough to keep my neck safe. Be still, and set down that candle. Ah ... don't move your hand like that! You're not good enough to joke with me."

I stopped. His voice was even and modulated without a trace of excitement, but it was not his voice that made me stop.

"Ah," said Richard Parton, "that is better. It's easier to do things in an orderly way, but I don't much care how I do them. Mind that—I don't much care."

I could not look away from him, but I had no desire to call. Richard Parton was balancing a pistol in the palm of his hand. He smiled, but his muscles were tense as springs.

"Set down the candle," he said. "And don't try to put it out. It's my lucky night tonight, and I can see in the dark. There, that's better now, and there's a chair over by the window."

He bowed and pointed toward it.

"I'm sure," he said, "you're tired of standing."

And then I found my voice.

"How did you get here?" I asked him. "You weren't up here before."

His voice was as smooth as a gentleman's at tea, but there was nothing easy in his look. His eyes were blue and hard as a winter sky.

"No," he said, "I wasn't here. I still have some respect for my body. I still like to see the world moving, and it's a long time since I've seen it. I'm not likely to lie asleep when I've been watched all day. I remember what he's like. It was like old times to hear him storming through the hall and groaning in the kitchen. Yes, it was always that, always storming and groaning."

"Where were you," I asked him, "if you heard him downstairs?"

"Where I could hear the fun," said Richard Parton, and he made a gesture with the pistol, and all that Eliphalet Greer had said about him came back to me.

"I'm an old dog," he said. "I know what to do. It's been a long while, but I can still look out for myself. I've made 'em jump in the good old days, and I'll make 'em jump again."

I never knew what he referred to, but I had no doubt that he could. He was as different from Eliphalet Greer as I could well imagine, and yet they had a curious similarity. They both seemed consumed by the same thing, an ungovernable restlessness. It made Richard Parton's eyes snap, and made him take little steps backward and forward. It was blazing out in his speech as it had in Eliphalet Greer's.

"Blast me!" he exclaimed, "but it's good to be alive again. It's good to hear the wood cracking, even if it's been

smashed by bungling fools. Damn me, if it isn't good to feel a thing like this in my hands. I've a good mind to hear it crack and smell the smoke again."

It was a pocket pistol he was holding, very nicely made and balanced. He moved the fingers of his left hand softly over the barrel as he spoke and the pupils of his eyes grew wider.

"Yes," he said, "I came near killing him to-night."

I was sitting in the straight-backed wooden chair, but I had my courage with me again, now that he was talking.

"Well," I asked, "what are you going to do? Are you proposing to kill me, now that you've missed him?"

"Do you think," said Richard Parton, "if I had cared for that, I'd have bribed Jim Lowes to keep me safe?"

He stopped and rubbed the pistol barrel.

"He was always a clever man," he said. "I knew Jim Lowes could take two bribes at once. I paid him to give me the key to the main building. That was all. When you came upstairs, I opened the door at the end of the ell, and walked into the front passage. You never looked there. You only tried the passage door. I had locked it from the other side. Do you think I'd have paid for a safe way out if I had wanted to shoot? No, no, I don't want to see it finished by a snap shot in the dark. I won't kill you this time. I knew your father well enough for that."

He paused again, but I could only sit and watch him without speaking. Had he been on that island fifteen years? Did he know I had been there too?

"Yes," Richard Parton was saying, "money is a wonderful thing when put into circulation. He made a mistake to leave me money, all good, negotiable money. It was a long time before I could spend it, but I'm spending it now. I've paid Jim Lowes twice what Eliphalet paid him. I paid the skipper to run me in last night enough to keep him in liquor all his life. The whaling captain who sighted my shirt on a palm tree has enough to buy a house and farm, and they're not the only ones I've paid. Yes, Eliphalet made a mistake to leave me my prize money. He should have thought what money could do when there's a will behind it."

He was poisoned with restlessness, and he could not be still for long. He had been standing, but now he sat back on my bed. He had taken a black cheroot such as they smoke in Havana from the breast pocket of his coat. Still watching me, he placed it between his lips and bit off the end.

It was incongruous. It was the only homely thing I ever saw him do, the only thing that hinted at enjoyment of tranquillity and peace. Yet even when he reached out for the candle and lighted his cigar, he was not like other men I knew. He is always a part of that evening, light, inhuman and fay. There is so much I can never know, so much I can only guess.

He was sitting on my bed. He had stopped talking, and was tapping the floor with his toe, and I could see him peering at me through the blue cigar smoke.

"You didn't," I suggested, "come here to smoke a cigar!"

"No," he said, "not entirely for that."

My nerves were badly strung. I was growing frightened again, although there was no reason.

"Then what are you here for?" I asked.

Richard Parton seemed in no hurry to tell. He flicked the ash off his cigar and what he said reminded me of another speech I had heard not long before.

"What do you know of why a man like me does anything? You'll never understand. I'm damned if I know why I came

myself, except that you're your father's son."

I remembered what Jim Lowes had told me. Parton had asked for my father that morning.

"Oh, yes," he said. "I used to know him. We've often sat playing cards before my luck got twisted. Yes, I know what you think. I've often told him to be more careful of the company he kept, but he was like you—he was a damned fool too."

"Mr. Parton——" I began.

"Sit down," said Mr. Parton wearily. "Lord knows why I don't kill you. If you've got a temper like his, it would save a lot of trouble. Wouldn't he blow up if he could see you now, a man who sat in the General Court, a man who was a friend of the President? What would he do if he knew his son—his son—was starting the way I started—his son taking money like a pirate to do Eliphalet's dirty work? Why didn't you come to me? I'd have paid you more."

I had rather, much rather, he had struck me then. I was going out in the tide again. Everything I had done was behind me and around me, and I seemed to be moving before it.

"So you're a slaver, are you?" said Mr. Parton. "Fancy that—George Jervaile's son in the nigger trade! Why, if he could have guessed it, he'd have shot you when he shot himself."

Before I knew what I was doing I was out of my chair.

"Mr. Parton," I began, "before God, Mr. Parton——"

And he was standing before me with his hand raised in a deprecating way.

"Good Lord," he said, "don't think I'm reproving you! Why, I admire you for it. I'd have done it myself if there was enough in it! Surely you can't think I have any hard feelings!"

And he tapped his forehead sympathetically.

"I know the way you feel," he said. "I know how it keeps burning in you. It's burning in me still. When once you're going, you must keep going on, if only to forget where you're going——"

A curious glitter had come into Mr. Parton's eyes and his face had grown redder.

"Oh, yes, I understand. If I had it all to do again, I'd play it just the same. I'd go right back with old Eliphalet again, damn his eyes, and we'd do it all together. He knew the way it felt when he wasn't saying his prayers."

He paused, moved uneasily and tapped at his cigar.

"I wonder what's the matter with me?" he said suddenly. "I didn't come here to tell you this. It must be thinking of Eliphalet that does it, but it's a long time since I've had anyone to talk to who might know what was what. It was a week before I got my voice after they took me on that whaler. Lazarus must have known how it felt to talk again."

Now that he spoke the name, I knew why I was afraid, and why he seemed unreal. He was like Lazarus. He alone knew what lay behind him in those years when he stared at the sky and the horizon rim. No one could ever share his knowledge, for the vacancy of it must have been almost as deep as death—the days of self, the years of self, which had made his voice fade out like a candle in the wind.

"And when you see a friend," he said, "it's queer how it pulls at you. I almost forgot everything when I saw old Eliphalet again."

And then I spoke in spite of myself, urged by an interest which was not my own.

"You call him your friend," I exclaimed, "after you tried to kill him!"

Richard Parton sighed and blew a cloud of smoke between his lips.

"Of course," he said, "you wouldn't understand. What do you know about friendship? But I'll stop. I came to do you a kindness, not to talk philosophy."

"A kindness?" I echoed.

"Yes, a kindness." His voice had not risen, but his words were slower and more distinct. "I've come to tell you to leave Eliphalet and me alone. Keep out of it, Jervaile."

I felt a deep relief, for I had expected more than that. To keep out of it was all I wished. I was about to tell him so, to tell him everything, when he spoke again, and stopped me.

"You've lived on the docks. Did you ever hear them tell the stories of the black ghosts, the earth-bound ghosts, that aren't allowed to go because there's something they've left undone? That's why I'm here. I'd have been dead long ago if there wasn't something left I had to do, but you don't have to do it. It's no affair of yours. You don't have to pay, because it's his time."

"Mr. Parton," I said, "I swear I'm not guilty of anything I——"

"Rubbish!" snapped Mr. Parton. "What's the use in saying that when you've been sailing out with Murdock? All I say is keep away from Eliphalet Greer, if you value your neck. He's done for. If there's a hangman's noose inside fifty miles of here, his head's as good as in it. The ship's as good as in the harbor. The old man's good as sunk, and I'm not going to have you run and tell him."

"A ship?" I asked. "What ship?"

Richard Parton's face twisted as though the sun was in his eyes.

"Never mind what ship," he said. "You'll find out soon enough."

I knew what he wanted at last. He was afraid I would go to Eliphalet Greer, and he was there to stop me. The sight of him, the nervous twitching of his lips, the slight unconscious motions of his hands filled me with his own restiveness. I found myself wishing he would go. He was becoming like a thought one tries to dismiss and which grows more vivid from the trying.

"Yes," he was saying, "you'll know soon enough. Gad! How your father would be clawing at his tomb if he knew what you'd done tonight!"

"Confound you!" I burst out. "Will you leave my father out of it? If that's all you've got to say, why don't you go? Leave my father out of it and go."

"And let you trot off to Eliphalet Greer and tell him what I've said?" laughed Mr. Parton. "I'm not ready yet for a knife in my back. Before I go, I'll tell you something that'll make you stand by and let me finish him—that'll make you beg me to do it."

"But I'm no friend of his——" I began.

"That's a likely yarn," sneered Mr. Parton. "Sit down in that chair and listen."

"Then leave my father out of it," I said.

"Ah!" said Richard Parton, "so his name means something to you still. After everything, you call yourself his son."

"Will you——" I began. Richard Parton snatched up his pistol.

"Take your hand away from your pocket," he said. "Why do you see red when you hear me speak? I'm not the man to

kill. Try your hand on Eliphalet Greer if you call yourself George Jervaile's son."

I was still on my feet. We both were facing each other.

"What do you mean?" I asked, trying to control my voice.

Richard Parton looked at me curiously. He did not tell me to sit down again.

"I mean," he said, "you're the hired servant of the man who as good as killed your father. Do you understand me now?"

For a moment the room was still as still, and the air was lifeless and leaden. I seemed to be in a hiatus of time, midway between fact and fact. His words seemed as loud in the passing seconds as they had been at the start. Yet somehow they were beyond my grasp.

"So that hits you, does it?" asked Richard Parton. "I thought it would throw you in the wind."

"How do you know?" I asked.

I thought the hardness went out of his face. It was almost kindly for a moment and his voice itself was different.

"Because I know Eliphalet Greer," he said. "I guess because it takes a thief to know him."

"Will you answer me?" I asked more loudly. "Will you tell me how you know?"

"He's always wanted your father's wharf," said Richard Parton, "ever since he first put out to sea. He told me he'd get his fingers on it."

I wanted him to be wrong. There was something terrifying in the possibility that he might be right. I was caught in the tide again. It was sweeping me out of myself, but I still struggled against it.

"He came by it honestly," I said. "If he didn't, do you think I'd have stood still! My father had friends. Do you think they wouldn't have told me? He lent my father money, but that had nothing to do——"

I stopped with the sentence half finished. It had happened long ago, but it was coming back—stray words and faces, the muffled sounds in the quiet rooms...

"Good God!" I exclaimed. "He couldn't—not here——"

"Couldn't he?" Richard Parton's voice interrupted me. "Couldn't he? Why should anyone have told you, when it was better you shouldn't know? You have no legal redress. Go and ask your father's friends. Ask them if Greer didn't hold all your father's notes. Ask 'em why he held them."

I reached my hand toward the wall behind me, but I did not answer. Richard Parton was speaking on, and his voice seemed to strike upon me like a blow from his hand.

"Oh, yes," he was saying, "it was honest enough, but I wonder if you'll call it honest? That's what I want to know."

I felt a hundred memories stirring in me that I had striven to put away. I shall not tell them here, for they have nothing to do with what I am setting down. I could see our house and the garden. The veil that we all strive to draw across the things which give us pain was going, going like the mist from the sea as Richard Parton spoke.

"Every one knows how he lost his money," I said. "He lost it buying land."

"And who did he buy the land of?" Richard Parton's voice made me start. "Who sold it to him the way a gold brick's sold to a farmer at a fair?"

"He bought it from agents," I said.

"Yes," said Richard Parton, "and who helped George Jervaile buy it? Who advised him? Has anyone told you that? Who loaned him ready money to buy more land when the price was going down? Do you suppose your father would do that without advice? Who got into his confidence and urged him to buy and buy—yes, urged him to ruin himself? You know who came to see your father most, if you were living in the house."

"You were never there," I cried. "How do you know all this?"

"No man knows," admitted Richard Parton mildly. "No man knows for sure, and no one here dares make a guess aloud, but ask Jim Lowes if you don't believe me. Ask Deacon Green who he thinks brought down George Jervaile. Ask the *Record* office what they think. Ask the pastor of his church. They'll tell you what Jim Lowes told me this morning, if they dare to tell at all."

"Then why didn't he tell me before?" I demanded hotly.

My temper never stayed down for long. It was stirring inside me. It was shaking my voice as a gust of wind shakes a sail.

"Because he was afraid of Greer like all the rest of them," said Richard Parton. "But he isn't afraid now. Ask him, and he'll tell you."

He was more than a man that night. He was a part of the inevitable balance of things as he stood there in his spotted coat. As I looked at him, I knew he was right. I wondered that I had not known it long ago. I would have known, if I had known Eliphalet Greer. But that others knew it was what hurt me most, that others knew it and had let me take his pay.

"I told you I was fond of your father," Richard Parton was saying. "Are you going to be a dupe like him?"

"Don't!" I said. "You've told me enough. There's no use going on."

I moved my hand from the wall behind me, for suddenly I felt quite able to stand alone.

"Are you going to let him play the same game with you he played with George Jervaile?" demanded Richard Parton as though he had not heard. "That's what I want to know. Are you going to let me finish him, or are you going to stay by him until you're finished too, because of an old thief's promise and because of a pretty face?"

I should have known it was coming. I should have been ready, but instead my own face grew red. Richard Parton was grinning at me and pulling at his coat.

"Yes, a pretty face. What makes you color up over a little affair like that? Eliphalet still knows how to play the game. He knew you wouldn't be up to snuff unless there was a woman. Oh, I saw you up on West Hill! I suppose you still think it's romance. Can't you see he's limed you like a bird on a twig, and leaded your eyes like an Italian goldfinch? Do you think she ran after you because she loved you? Why can't a man ever keep his senses when he sees a petticoat? Greer sent her there, you fool! *He sent her so he could send you here tonight!*"

For a second I stared at him vacantly. My mind, my body, both seemed still as death, unable to act or resolve. I could hear the wind in the trees outside, and the branches shaking with a noise that was like faint laughter, and then there was a roaring in my ears. It was my own voice sinking back inside myself.

"You lie!"

The floor swayed beneath me like a cabin floor, and then I had a strange feeling that everything was falling. Everything I had hoped for was falling, crushing me with its weight. Each minute I had lived seemed falling upon me like a house of rotted timbers, and then my head cleared and I saw the room again. Yet it was changed, as subtly altered to my sight as a familiar place after a journey's end. Richard Parton had moved back to the wall, and was watching me intently with his head tilted to one side.

"Back your sails," he said. "Don't run in too close."

"You lie!" I repeated.

But he still was speaking.

"Why should she care for you?" he asked. "Use your brains, Jervaile. Forget she's damned good looking."

He must have seen what was in me, but he still went on. If he had stopped—I wonder what would have happened if he had stopped?

"Stand still and think," he said. "Don't let your temper go. Will you let a woman draw you any further? Come, come. You know too much of the world for that. Who is she? Have you ever thought? She's not Murdock's daughter. He's never had a child. It's Greer who's paying for her keep. The whole town's been talking of it, if you only had sense to listen. There're some things he can't keep still. He's paid for her schooling. He's paying to teach her music. He's paying for her clothes. Is he doing that for charity? Is he dressing her like a lady to please his æsthetic taste. Come, come, Jervaile, why does any old man do that for a girl of nineteen?"

For a moment I did not speak, but I was cool again, quite cool. I even felt a curious sort of strength which made me feel quite steady.

"That's better," said Mr. Parton. "Now you're taking it right. I knew you'd understand."

And before I could answer, he turned to the door and raised his voice.

"Jim," he called.

Jim Lowes must have been listening in the hall, for he opened the door at once.

"God help me, Charles," he said, "it's so. It's all the Bible truth that he's been telling. Now don't look so. There's other men been caught before. Look at Antony and Julius Cæsar. What you need's a drink, and you'll have it on the house."

Richard Parton sighed and put his pistol in his pocket.

"Never you mind, my boy," he said. "I'll finish him up for fair. Just sit here quiet. That's all I ask. I know you'll leave him, now that you know it all."

I was not myself. My reason had been thrust somewhere out of reach, but I did not mind. I was looking at Richard Parton, but it was not his face I saw. It had changed. The sunburn had gone off it. It was longer and more wrinkled. It was not Richard Parton's face. It was Eliphalet Greer's. I remembered what he had said in Murdock's house. I remembered what she had said. A half a dozen incidents were passing before me in a mocking line, clear in the light of my anger, so clear that I forgot the rest.

"Now will you keep away from him?" asked Richard Parton.

"No," I said, "I won't," and my voice sounded very loud.

"Damnation!" cried Mr. Parton. "Damn me if he isn't mad!"

I laughed, and my laughter rang out strangely, but I did not mind.

"I won't leave him," I said, "till I've finished with him."

It was the only time I ever saw Richard Parton surprised. His face changed color, and suddenly he became very grave.

"Lord!" he said very softly, "I hadn't thought of that," and he looked away from me and drew his hand across his forehead. "Would you mind telling me what you propose doing?"

My answer when I spoke it did not seem strange, nor was I startled by my speech when I heard it.

"I intend to kill him," I said.

"To kill old Eliphalet?" Richard Parton looked me slowly up and down, and continued very quietly, "Now who'd have thought the cat would jump like that? But it has its points.... Yes, it has its points."

And suddenly he made a deprecating gesture like a very courteous gentleman.

"You're sure?" he asked. "You really want to kill him? I assure you there's no need for it, but if you insist—— Be quiet, Lowes. Let Mr. Jervaile speak."

I was out in the tide by then, far out in the middle of the stream. Suddenly I was caught in my own self pity and my wretchedness choked my voice.

"What else," I asked, "is there left for me to do?"

Richard Parton nodded politely and shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, well," he said resignedly. "It will mean I've been to a lot of trouble for nothing ... but still it has its points."

And then his face brightened.

"Gad!" he exclaimed. "It's like the ending of a play. First he sends you to kill me, and now I send you to kill him. If you're really set on it, I don't know as I shall mind. Here—you're not as impulsive as that! You're not going already?"

I had shouldered my way by Jim Lowes and out into the hall, and then I felt Mr. Parton's hand on my arm.

"Perhaps it's better so," he said. "You won't mind my coming too? Surely you won't refuse me that. If one of us should miss, there'll always be the other."

XXI

I know there is no past. No matter how the leaves are turned, I know the book is never closed. As long as I think and am, I know there is no past; as long as there comes no blackness that makes me cease to think and cease to be. The past is no memory. I know better, far better than that. I know it, because the past is in me now. It moves and turns. It's still as living as nerve and flesh. It is the present and the future too. It is what I am, whatever I may be. I know it, and I'm not the only one who knows. Ask the others in that restless, wide-eyed army who have touched the brand of Cain.

Now that I'm nearly finished and I try to tell the end, I know that nothing has gone, no, nothing. Once in the angle of a wall that surrounded a Roman garden a thousand years ago, I saw finger-marks in the mortar, made when the wall first stood out against the sun. The hand had gone, but it is different with living things. Those unseen hands that plucked us up, and grasped us like drunkards in a tavern, and turned us out into the darkness of ourselves, those hands are still upon us. Ask those others who have drunk the cup whether the draught passed with another morning.... No, the fumes of hate are in us still, and the hands that seized us when they mounted to our brains still close upon us. The invisible Publican and the light-fingered waiters at the bar have never left our elbows.

I have come to it now, the Thing that will never go. I have come to it, and I feel their hands. They are setting me atremble, pulling at me in their old perverted way, setting my eyes to staring, and pulling at the corners of my mouth. The

past is not the past. It is the present still. I am staring stupidly. I still see Eliphalet's face, and only that sly Publican knows why. He alone knows why he twists the soul of every man who steps inside his door.

"Are you drunk? What makes you hurry so?"

It's Richard Parton's voice, so plain he might have spoken this minute instead of forty years ago. And there is the street, black and waiting, and the stark shadows of the elm trees and the breath of the tide and the roar on the outer beach. And I am walking fast, very fast. I can hear the ring of my sea-boots on the bricks in a sharp, stacatto time, yet dim and unobtrusive like a constantly recurring noise in a medley of other sounds.... And my mind and body seem very far apart, each lost to the other in the night.

"What makes you hurry so?"

I hear his voice again.... But I hardly saw the street or felt his hand upon my arm....

It is strange that I never knew I had loved her so until I had learned to hate. My memory was very clear. She was with me then, now sad, now smiling and bright as sunshine in the black. Her voice was in the heartbeat that echoed in my throat, and whispering in the blood surge that was singing in my ears—clear, so clear that it made my heart beat faster, until my mind went black as the night itself and stormy as the water.... And it would pass, just as it passes now ... and there she would be again, but why should I go on? It is not what I have set myself to tell. I have said it is not my story. What I have to tell is something stranger than that, or so it seems to me.... And still it all is black. The things that passed my mind and sight are curiously unrelated. They remind me of flames that spring from the embers of a fireplace in a darkened room, lighting first one corner and then another. If I had only watched him then, I wonder what I should have seen? I could tell it much more clearly if I had only watched, but I only have a glimpse of him. I see it still.

We were passing a street lamp. Its light was flung out into the darkness in a hazy yellow sphere, like the light of a lonely world. The light was on his face and mine, and I think that he was changed. It may have been a trick my eyes played me, but the lines of his face seemed to waver like some image beneath the water, as though there was some new element between us, different from the air. His eyes seemed curiously wide and innocent, like a child's eyes.

"Perhaps," he was saying, "it's better so."

And then it all grows black again, but still she is with me, a part of my very mind. My memory of it and my memory of her are confused and indivisible, and with it I hear my footsteps going on. He is there also in that aching maze of thought, for I can pick out his voice again before we reached the doorway. But perhaps it was not his voice. I wish I could be sure, for I might use it as the answer of a riddle. It was low, like the noises of the night. Perhaps it was not his voice but my own thoughts speaking, it lodged so readily in my mind.

"He'll be finished in a minute.... He'll be gone ... and then there'll be nothing left ... nothing left when once he's gone."

I wonder if I could have heard him, and as I wonder his face comes back, as I saw it beneath the light with his eyes wide and puzzled, and softened by a strange incomprehension. But how can I be sure he spoke, when he is only a wild shape in the end of that black night? Yet there is still the voice faint as the dying wind and distant as the harbor bell....

"There'll be nothing left when once he's gone..."

It's strange how clear everything becomes when once I reach the door. My drunkenness must have left me then. There was a light in the street in front of it, and the wick was badly trimmed, so that the rays flickered over the columns of the portico and on the fan shutters above. The house was clear even without the light. It was darker than the sky, for the sky was growing gray. The night must have gone weary half an hour before. Though I never thought of the dawn, I felt it. Its chill was biting through my coat. It was coming with the falling of the wind, and I could see its faint gray on the river where the ships' lights already were growing dull....

I never thought of knocking. When we reached the top of the broad stone steps, I lifted the latch. There was no need to knock. The door gave, and the hinges hardly creaked. Eliphalet Greer had forgotten to place the bar or to draw a

single bolt. He must have been in a strange way to have forgotten that, but it seemed very natural then. I was about to open the door further when Richard Parton pushed past me and peered inside. For a moment his head was half inside the hall, and then he turned and drew me a step back. His fingers closed on my arm so sharply that I caught my breath, and his face was so close to mine that I could see the wrinkles move about his eyes.

"He's there!" he whispered, and his hand shook on my arm. "God help us both, he's there! There's a light at the end of the hall, the very end. The door's closed, but I can see it on the floor."

He seemed strangely moved and shaken, but I never gave it a thought, for my blood was running hot.

"Then let me go," I whispered back. "I knew I'd find him here."

I was not sure, but I thought his grasp grew tighter.

"You'll give him a chance?" he whispered. "You won't just snuff him out?"

If I had only looked, I wonder what I should have seen? If I had only stopped to wonder why he asked me that—— But instead I snatched his hand away. Those other hands were on me, and the door was like a gateway to desire.

"Why not?" I whispered back. "What difference does it make?"

My hand was in the pocket of my coat. It had closed over the pistol, the pistol I had taken to the island. I could feel the hammer and the lock. My fingers moved over it. I could feel the cap in place, but Richard Parton was not watching me. He was looking out toward the river in that same puzzled way, looking vaguely out at nothing.

"God knows," he said, "I don't know anything I thought I knew."

I can see him standing there, and it puzzles me, as it always has, for I find myself faced with something I can only tell and not explain. I am sorry it is so, for it is the strangest thing of all. It is stranger than Prudence weeping when they carried Murdock out into the rain. It is stranger than Eliphalet Greer hurrying out into the night away from the thing he had tried to do. Was Richard Parton also weary of the road? If I had only known him better, perhaps it might be clear—if only he was something more than a figure who travelled by my side for an hour or so before he stepped back among the shadows and out of my path forever. But I can only tell it as it happened. I can only guess his meaning when he said he knew nothing that he thought he knew.

He was looking out toward the river. He seemed to have forgotten we were on Eliphalet Greer's doorstep, or why we had come, but I had not.

"Are you coming in?" I asked.

He turned toward me, and his eyes met mine. They still were vague. Though he spoke, he hardly appeared to notice me, and he made no answer to my question.

"Good Lord!" he whispered in an awestruck tone. "Everything that's kept me up is going. Think of it! Once you go inside, there'll be nothing left at all."

To look at him one would have thought he had made a great discovery. He had reached some hill-top of his own and was surveying some vista of thought which had been closed out from his sight.... Yes, what I am telling is the strangest thing of all. Just as I was about to answer him his hand fell on my arm.

"Don't," he whispered, "don't go in just yet. I know I'm a fool to say it. I know you won't understand, but everything will go, once you step inside."

Was he trying to hold me back? For a moment I was so astonished that I stood stock still. I could not believe it, and it still seems hard to understand that he was weakening right before my eyes. Surely he could not be feeling pity or remorse. Surely he must have wished for the thing I was about to do. Yet there he was standing on Eliphalet Greer's

doorstep and pulling at my arm.

"Don't," he whispered again, "don't go in just yet."

I did not ask him why. I did not care to know. My temper was surging over me and my sense of my own outrage was shutting out my thought and sight.

"You infernal coward!" I hissed back at him. "Get out, if you're afraid."

I caught him squarely then. I felt him quiver like a tautened rope, and he snatched his hand away.

"Afraid, you fool?" he whispered fiercely. "Go in and kill him—and be damned to you—but don't call me afraid, when I hate him a thousand times more than you ever can."

There is the strange part of it. He did hate Eliphalet Greer, and yet—could anything be stranger?—there he was holding me back. I said I could not explain.

"What has he done to you, but hurt your pride? Has he ever killed you? Has he ever put you alive into a tomb? That's what he did to me. Don't call me afraid, when there's nothing left inside me! Go in—I won't stop you now."

"Are you coming?" I asked.

He did not answer me. He was staring at the gray shapes on the river, and pulling at his coat, when I turned my back upon him and pushed open Eliphalet Greer's front door. If I had been myself, I should not have left him, but I was thinking of other things. Indeed, it was only afterwards that I thought of him at all, or remembered what he said, and only later that what he said seemed strange.

... I stepped into the hallway with a marvelously gentle tread. I seemed to be a part of the dark. There was a certainty within me that made me like an element in some abstruse calculation. The darkness closed about me like hands that pushed me back inside myself, and for a second I stood staring at the dark. And then I saw the light that Richard Parton had seen. It was the only light in that dark house, a faint yellow ray creeping beneath the parlor door where feet had worn the threshold. And then, before I knew it, I was in front of the door, and pressing up the latch. I knew Eliphalet Greer was there.

The parlor lamps were lighted just as I had seen them last. He had been sitting at the table. I heard the scraping of his chair before I saw him. When I entered, he was standing with his back to the lamps on the chimney-piece. His cloak and hat and cane were flung across a chair by the wall, and the room was warm from the lamps and the air was thin and close. His ledger and a pen and ink were on the table. He had been writing, for his quill was on the page where he dropped it, and a great blot of ink had fallen from the point.

Though my heart was pounding inside me like a piece of loose ballast, I can remember those little things. It's strange, but I can even recall the shape of that blot of ink. It was still spreading out across the page, making little arms and rivulets on the rough paper, a little sea of black among the fine drawn figures. I could hardly have seen the room, and yet I might as well be in it now. Every piece of furniture, every light and shade seem to have one purpose. They are like the parts of an ingeniously composed picture, each in a logical relation to the other, leading the eye to the central figure there, toward the old man by the chimney-piece.

His head was thrust forward. His hair was falling over his forehead. His coat and waistcoat were unbuttoned, and he was pulling at his neck-cloth. He was pale, and though his eyes were wide with sleeplessness, he was staring at me confusedly, like someone suddenly awakened. We stood there with half the room between us, and everything seemed to stop, while he looked at me with his half-awakened glance.

"So it's you," he said. "It's only you. I thought——"

His eyes grew brighter, and his words trailed off to nothing. He must have seen. He must have known at once. My hand was deep in my pocket. I saw him glance at it, but he never moved a finger.

"Don't you know better than disturb me to-night?" he demanded suddenly. "Why are you here? Why——"

My own voice sounded like a voice in a dream.

"You know why," I said.

He knew. He started and his head went up, and a sort of understanding passed between us that was more than words. He knew, but he gave no other sign.

"So they've told you," he said. "I knew you'd find out sometime."

And there we stood with half the room between us, and I knew it could not end so, and he knew it.

"Is that all you have to say?" I asked.

He was silent for a moment, and then he answered me with a curious dignity.

"Charles," said Eliphalet Greer, "if you know what I think you know, is there any good of saying more? Is there any use of saying I am sorry? You know there's no use. You would never believe me, and there's nothing else to say."

"No," I answered. "There's no use saying that."

There was always something in him I could never understand. Just as I finished speaking his whole expression altered.

"Then leave me!" he cried out so loudly that I started. "In God's name get out of my sight! Haven't I enough to bear without your standing here looking at me with his face? How can I help what I've done now? It's a stone around my neck. It's sending me to hell—isn't that enough?"

He must have seen it was not enough, for his glance darted down toward my hand, and he was like himself right to the end. He only stopped to catch his breath. The world was still clinging to his coat-tails.

"So that's the way the wind lies!" he cried. "Do you think I'll stand and let you shoot me like a dog, because your father was fool enough to shoot himself—because he was such a fool that I am in the house you ought to own? I'll kill you first! ... Stop—will you stop? You can't match your hand with mine!"

As he moved, I also moved by instinct. As he thrust his hand inside his coat, my pistol was half out of my pocket. There was a noise in my ears like the sea. My whole life was in that instant.

"I'll try," I said.

I could see his face. It was reddened and contorted as I knew it in my dreams.

"Stop!" he was shouting. "Will you stop before I sin again?"

All my life was in my eyes. I was quicker, much quicker. My weapon was at his breast as his hand flashed out of his coat. I knew I had him and he must have known, for I saw his face change. My hand had just gone steady. My eyes were on the barrel. My whole life ran out on that straight line of metal and shut the room out of my sight.

I never saw, I only felt what happened. It came so quickly that I hardly felt it. A blow fell on my wrist that sent my arm dropping downward and made my grasp relax, and then all feeling went out of my arm and hand, and my weapon clattered on the floor.

It threw me off my balance. It made me step forward to save myself from falling, and my motion brought my head around. Richard Parton was standing a pace away with Eliphalet's cane in his hand.

XXII

No one spoke. Eliphalet Greer must have stopped dead just after the blow had fallen; he was as motionless as the carved columns that stood on either side of the fireplace. That blow was like some stroke of magic, for it cast the madness out of me. It cast the devils out. Something, some force of spirit outside of me or in me, something which held me up and urged me on was broken and was gone. Without it I felt very weak. My knees seemed giving way beneath me. And I was not the only one that blow served, or the only one who staggered beneath its impact.

Richard Parton was speaking, and his voice was quite weary and slow.

"Eliphalet," he said, "you're getting old. Who'd have thought anyone could come over you like that?"

Then there was another pause. There they stood, face to face, though each seemed only half conscious of the other. Each of them seemed lost within himself in thoughts which no one else could share, and both their faces were set with a sort of wonder, vague and almost stupid. They had forgotten me. They had forgotten everything else but each other. Some bond of their own making had shut them out from every other living thing.

Eliphalet Greer still held his pistol half drawn from his coat, but he had forgotten he was holding it. I think I could have taken it out of his hand and he would have never known. His lips moved, and though no sound came from them at first, I knew they were framing Richard Parton's name.

"Richard..." he said at length. "Richard..."

He spoke the name mechanically, but its sound seemed to give life to the surprise which had held him silent.

"Whatever made you?"

At first I thought that Richard Parton did not hear, he paused so long before replying. Then I saw him shake his head. That simple question seemed too much to answer. A dull weariness had settled over him, something more than bodily fatigue.

"God knows—I don't know why," he said. "Unless——"

He stopped and bit his lip.

"Unless I've thought too long," he ended.

But Eliphalet Greer still looked at him with blank incomprehension.

"Richard," he said, "I still don't understand."

And Richard Parton made a strange response, as strange as any I have ever heard. It seemed to come from somewhere deep within him, without his own volition. It seemed torn from him, though his will rebelled against it, and it choked his voice.

"You've done too much," he said. "I've hated you too long to see you die."

His words sank into the silence of the room, but they are with me still, just as he spoke them, slurred and shaking with an emotion that was something more than hate. Sometimes they seem as bombastic and crude as the speech of a villain in an ill-starred play. I can nearly laugh at them sometimes, for I know they are like a part of a story to tell when the decanter is on the table. It is very near to the ridiculous. Indeed, it is so near that the line is hardly there which draws ridicule from pain.

I say I can almost laugh, but it would be hollow laughter. I should be laughing at the agony of a soul that knew no rest, and at a pain I never felt, but still can comprehend. I can guess the void of wretchedness that made him speak, for those words always come to me from a depth of agony and over a distorted path of broken things.

For a while they both were silent, yet I think there was a tacit understanding. Perhaps they even recognized the humor that had drawn them both together. Wearily, dispassionately Eliphalet Greer stared before him, like a man who has been moved too much and whom the world can move no more.

"Yes," he said very gently, "I know what you mean."

It stands now as I saw it. I can only guess what it was he knew, and what it was that happened in that bare lamp-lit room, and sometimes I think its walls know as much of it as I. For are we not all like walls, reared and balanced by hands beyond ourselves, and standing in our own selfishness for some purpose that is more than self, and limited and blinded by the frame of our own dimensions? I often think we are, even in our most enlightened and exalted moments. Even then we still trip and run, the humble little servants of our passions, jumping and jigging like ingenious toys until our passions leave us for a time.

Was that what Eliphalet Greer knew? When he spoke, was he thinking of the long, dead years, and the shadows that were preying on his mind, and the island and the sky and the figure walking, walking on the sand? There are such things as thoughts that become part of us and as vital as our lives. Was it a thought that held them there, I wonder, staring half-bemused each at the other? It is strange what I am going to say, for there is nothing stranger and less tangible than the freaks and twists of mind that make us move. It is only there the powers outside ourselves can touch us, if there are such powers. I wonder if it could be that each of those restless, pain-swept men, who had sinned together so long ago, who had clashed together in their hate—I wonder if it could be that each had held the other in his mind so long that each had somehow grown dependent on the other, and their hate had become a part of themselves and changed to more than hate?

I know I am not clear, for I can hardly make it clear even to myself. Yet when I think of that meeting and what came afterward, it seems the answer to many things.

Eliphalet Greer's surprise had left him, and a sort of hopeless lassitude had come to take its place, a weariness that accepted what there was and what there would be.

"Yes," he said again, but he hardly seemed conscious that he spoke at all. "I know what you mean."

Then I felt his eyes upon me. They were dark and very tired. A veil had come across them like the first trace of ashes on the coals of a dying fire. He had not finished speaking.

"Charles," he said, "God help us both! It's better as it is. I know what you're feeling, Charles, but it's nothing to what lies in me, to all the burned dead things.... You'll know ... You'll know ... Shall we part in peace, Charles? It's always better so. It's what your father would tell you if he were standing here."

I said that something had gone from me, some hysteria, or folly, or sense, which had held me up. I could not look at him. His face and his voice filled me with a bitterness of degradation and wretchedness. He had placed his hand gently on my shoulder, and I could not bear its touch.

"Don't!" I said hoarsely. "Don't you see I'd rather be dead?"

My voice broke from my humiliation at my weakness. I could not go on, and Richard Parton saved me from it. He spoke, and his voice had its old ring.

"You damned old hypocrite!" he snapped. "Will you be still and leave him be, or do you want him at you again? You know it's not the father. It's the girl—the girl! Haven't you any decency? Don't you see he loves her?"

Eliphalet Greer stepped away from me, and looked toward Richard Parton with a curious dignity. I could almost believe he had never known.

"The girl——" he said. "What girl?"

"Can you never tell the truth?" cried Richard Parton. "Where's the good in lying now, when everyone will know everything, yes, everything when the sun goes up? What girl? Have you got a half a dozen of 'em? The girl you've made Murdock call his daughter. You can't always be skulking in the dark. The shadowy, slender girl with the white hands and the brown-gold hair that you set after Charles Jervaile. Your mistress, you sly-faced, lying sinner—that's the girl I mean! Who else do you think would have brought him here tonight?"

Surely it was not acting that made him catch his breath and made him wince again.

"You mustn't!" Eliphalet Greer cried out as though he was in pain. "You mustn't think that, Richard! I swear it isn't so!"

Richard Parton had been holding Eliphalet's cane. Now he sent it slamming to the floor.

"Mustn't I?" he sneered. "Now why the hell mustn't I? Since when have you joined the Holy Choir? It only makes it truer if you say it isn't so. What about the white girl at Rio and the brown girl at Singapore and the yellow one——"

"Don't!" Eliphalet Greer interrupted him. "I say you mustn't think a thing like that. I've done my best for her. I swear I have. I——"

"I'll lay ten to one you have!" said Richard Parton bitingly.

"Don't!" cried Eliphalet Greer. "In God's name, don't! I've always given her shelter. I was going to do more. She would have had a place in the world when everything was ready. Don't you see? You would have, if you'd only looked. She's got your eyes. She——"

Richard Parton's face must have made him pause. There was no reason for him to finish, but he did in a hushed and breathless way.

"She's your daughter, Richard," said Eliphalet Greer.

For a little time Richard Parton stood without replying, staring at Eliphalet with that same vacant stare. Eliphalet was silent also, but I think they understood each other, although I cannot tell what was passing in their minds. They both were back somewhere along the path of years, and their faces were blank and weary. When Richard Parton finally spoke, it was in such a toneless way that I knew he had rehearsed his answer, and had curbed his tongue against any sudden stumble.

"I believe you," he said. "You're fool enough for that. You never had the strength to keep on as you started."

He paused, and drew his hand across his eyes, but his voice was steady when he continued.

"You may as well tell me the rest," he said. "It's hurt me enough when I've thought of it. My wife, man—what became of her? Did you let her starve? There was no money but what I left her when we sailed. Her family cut her off when we married. They knew me well enough for that. What happened? You couldn't have hurt her."

"No," Eliphalet cleared his throat. "There are things I've never done. I swear it, Richard. I went to her as soon as I landed. It was the hardest thing of all."

"Why?" Richard Parton raised his eyebrows.

"Because she believed me," answered Eliphalet harshly. "She believed every lie I told her. I told her you were lost at sea. I did my best, Richard—don't think I didn't. I gave her money. I told her it was yours. She wilted like a flower. She never cared for life after you were gone. I——"

"You fool," Richard Parton's voice broke, "I knew you loved her all the time, though I bet you never told her so.

Why don't you say you loved her?"

"Richard," said Eliphalet steadily, "it is more than you ever did."

He stopped and that was all we ever knew.

"Go on," said Richard Parton. "I'm waiting."

"She died," Eliphalet did not shift his glance, "and I took your daughter. She had nowhere else to go. I would have taken her to my own house, but don't you understand? I could not bear to look at her. It was too much. It was too hard."

Richard Parton laughed.

"Well," he said, and his voice was no longer steady, "why don't you say something else? You always did take the taste out of my mouth. It's like you to do it now."

And still Eliphalet Greer did not reply.

"Do you think," demanded Richard Parton, "you can end it by telling me that? Do you think I'm grateful for it? I'd rather see her dead."

Eliphalet Greer moistened his lips.

"I know," he said, in a curiously mechanical way. "I know."

Somehow I had it in me to be sorry for him then, for his spirit had gone out of him and he was wearily abject.

"Does she know?" asked Richard Parton. "Have you told her?"

And Eliphalet Greer said no.

"Then what made you tell me?" Richard Parton asked.

Eliphalet's voice was very low.

"How should I know?" he said. "Oh, Lord, how should I know?"

I think that he intended to speak further. I wish he had. I wish I had heard either of them speak so again. If they had only spoken, there would be so much I might explain. I might know what it was that had dulled and tamed them both and what it was that brought them haltingly together, but I shall never know. I only had a glimpse of them when their time was near the ending. Their story would not stop for curiosity such as mine. It was moving then. All the while it had been moving. I had been in the vortex of it, and now I was cast aside, but their story was moving still.

It was a noise that made Eliphalet Greer stop, a noise of the rattling of the latch on the front door. The metal gave a sharp, incisive sound that made him look up. It made me turn hastily about, and I saw Richard Parton turn also. Then there was a sound of running feet in the hall. The parlor door was open, a rectangle of black. We all must have seen at once when the black changed. We all must have started at the suddenness of it. But it was as though what we all were thinking of had become an embodied fact. There in the lamplight, with her face flushed and her breath coming fast, was Prudence Murdock.

Sometimes I think it's strange that I never knew. There was no doubting the resemblance. It was clear as day as she stood there struggling to quiet her breath. Her forehead was the same as his. The arch of her brow was the same, and the way she held her head, and the airiness of the way she stood. Her head was fair. She had on her same gray cloak. She was clutching it across her breast with her right hand. As she saw us she snatched at the folds convulsively, and gave a low, frightened cry.

"You're not——" she gasped. "You're not——"

It was Richard Parton who answered her. He was standing to my left and in front of me, so that I could see him clearly. His shoulders gave a slight shrug. I saw him draw a deep breath and clench his hands, but he gave no other sign that anything had stirred him.

"No, indeed," he said very courteously. "We're not. We were. We may, but we're not."

Then I heard Eliphalet Greer's voice from somewhere behind me.

"Has something happened to Prudence?" he asked. "Tell me if it has? Don't be afraid."

"No," said Richard Parton. "You mustn't be afraid. It all seems—under the circumstances—to be quite in the family. You mustn't be afraid."

Perhaps she understood through some intuition of her own, for she looked at him as he spoke, and continued looking. Did she know, I wonder? If she did, she never asked. She never spoke of him again. And though I might have told her, I never did, because I knew it was as he wished it. It was for him to speak and he did not. Was it pride that kept him silent, or shame, or kindness, I wonder? Perhaps it was all three. I only know he never spoke. He stood with his fingers biting at his palms, and I heard him catch his breath again, but that was all. Yet I knew he was hurt, for at last he turned away.

"Don't be afraid," he said again, and his raillery had left him. "There's nothing—nothing will hurt you here."

And that was all he said. He never addressed her another word.

"Prudence," said Eliphalet Greer, "has something happened?"

I think she had half forgotten why she came, for she looked toward him in quick confusion.

"Yes," she said. "There's a ship just outside the harbor, drifting. He sent me here to tell you.... It's light enough to see.... He said it's your ship ... and it's drifting ... drifting in."

She stopped and looked about her, pulling aimlessly at her cloak.

"Won't you look?" she cried suddenly. "I can't tell any more—not here."

I knew there was something wrong. It must have been the silence of the room that told me, for there are varying sorts of silences. Her voice had pulled us taut. I saw Eliphalet Greer grow rigid, and glance hastily at Richard Parton, and Richard Parton looked at him, not dully, but with the concentration of a student faced with a rarity of knowledge. I knew there was something wrong. The world outside was coming to us again through the open door. We had been halted for a little while, but now we were moving again in our courses.

"Eliphalet," said Richard Parton, "I'd look if I were you. Don't you see—we all want to have you look."

And he nodded toward the closed shutters of a window that faced out to sea, but Eliphalet still looked at Richard Parton.

"Won't you look?" inquired Richard Parton more loudly. "Didn't you hear her tell you? Your ship is coming in."

Though Eliphalet did not answer, I saw his eyes light up and his lips draw tight together.

"Yes, Eliphalet," said Richard Parton, and the tension in his voice relaxed. As he continued, I could almost believe it was a friend who spoke. "Your ship is coming in. It's out of our hands now."

"Out of our hands?"

Perhaps Eliphalet guessed what was coming upon him. He moved his own hand to the chimney-piece, and closed it tight over the white wood.

"Yes," said Richard Parton, "you'll see what I mean."

Eliphalet Greer drew his hand from the chimney-piece and stood very straight. "We were near him, but he seemed solitary and drawn away from us, very far. In some strange way he had become inanimate, as motionless as a tree beside the marshes.

"Won't you look?" cried Prudence. "You can't wait! You mustn't stand like this."

Eliphalet Greer moved forward uncertainly, and halted and looked toward the hall, and again I remember how lonely he seemed. He was the only one of us facing the thing outside, and perhaps he craved some sort of companionship, for he glanced at us all, one after another.

"Where's Murdock?" he asked suddenly. "Why didn't he come himself?"

"He's down on the wharf," said Prudence. "He's waiting for you there."

Eliphalet threw back his head. I remember how his gray hair waved back as he did so.

"He's not," he said. "He's coming now."

He had been listening all the while, and I heard the sound, a scuffling on the stone steps, a slamming of the door.

"Greer!" a voice was shouting. "Greer!"

There was no mistaking. It was Captain Murdock. As he stamped into the room, he seemed to fill it with his presence, and his voice hurried from him like the stamping of his feet.

"One of the slave ships—she's off the bar and drifting in. Her crew is gone. The watch on the *Felicity* saw 'em put off in the boats. I tell you—she's drifting in."

Eliphalet took a step toward him. Something in him that had glowed fitfully, that I half suspected but only guessed at, gave him an unnatural vitality.

"You've been drinking," he said. "Drinking all night. I smell it on your breath. You've got the horrors. What should a slaver be doing in here? Take care how you lie to me!"

"Look out the window," said Richard Parton. "He's not lying."

But I was the only one who heard him.

"Didn't I see her with my two eyes?" cried Captain Murdock. "Ask the girl. She saw her, and we ain't the only ones. She's the *Seal*—the one you sent out orders to three months back—the one you've been waiting to hear from since she cleared off Guinea. Mebbe I'm drunk, but there she is—drifting in with her cargo right aboard. I could hear the noise they make. She's yours, I tell you, and we're not the only ones who know it. There's not a man in town who won't remember Morrill built her. What'll you do if the papers are aboard? What are you standing still for? Didn't I say she's coming in? The customs boat will be going out to her. They'll be alongside her any time."

Captain Murdock was afraid, and his fear lent him an unnatural excitement. He was shifting from one foot to the other, and making futile little motions with his hands. I knew if such a ship was there, it was the end, or very near the end. Eliphalet Greer could never live it down if a ship of his was there, bearing his sins to land. There was an unreality about the news, and that unreality was terrible, for it made it like a dream and gave it the doubt of dreams.

Had they really seen a ship out in the morning mist, or was it the mist itself that made a ship, a ghostly shape of retribution bearing down on that old man's head? Was there a ship outside, stamped and sullied with an unmentionable trade, foul as every ship was foul that bore the cargo, fouled so that every man of the sea could tell her? Was there such a ship outside, lost to her harbor, lost from her seas, a piece of filth and refuse, drifting in unworldly currents to the land,

or was it a shape of the night that had outlived the dark and stayed into the dawn? It was too strange to be true. I saw his incredulity rise over him as he listened.

But it was not all I saw. Eliphalet Greer was changing again, as I had seen him change before. I could almost fancy invisible hands were changing him. Again he was looking younger, unhealthily, unnaturally young. Again his mouth was a mouth of violence. A new light had sprung into his eyes, unregenerate and wild. I wish some man of God could have seen him then, for he was a curious sight. If there was latent evil, if there was original sin, it had risen up within him. He raised his right arm. It was gaunt. His hand was old, but it still seemed very strong.

"Open the shutters," he said to Captain Murdock. "Open them up and let me see!"

Captain Murdock's fingers were fumbling clumsily with the bolts. I remember the yellow glare of the lamps on Eliphalet's face, and then he was beside Murdock at the window, and we were behind him as though we had been drawn there by wires.

"You clumsy swab!" cried Eliphalet Greer. "Take your hands away!"

And he flung back the shutters himself and the whole room changed, and we all changed with it. The yellow light was gone with its softness and its warmth, and the gray light of early morning took its place. It seemed to turn us all to gray, shadowy and cold. It made Eliphalet Greer's face gray and old again, and only his eyes seemed unchanged as he stared into the dawn.

The whole world was gray outside, dreary and harsh from its struggle with the dark, and silent with the reality of early light. His wharf, his warehouses were standing out from the thin mist of the river. The water itself was hidden, but the ships were there, strange airy shapes, riding in the clouds of mist, as they always rode at dawn. Yes, it all comes back to me, the damp planking of the wharf, and the white piles and the dripping roofs and the trees by the street on the waterfront. At the head of the wharf was a group of men looking out to sea, but it is all only a part of a memory formed from a hasty glance, for I was looking, we all were looking, out beyond the sand spits that guard the river mouth.

Perhaps a mile out toward the dawn where the sky was growing bright was a ship stark against the sky. She was a brig, but her masts were raked far back, and her bow was like a sea-bird's beak, sharp and trim. Her hull was black and her sails, even her topsails, were set, but not a sail was drawing. Yet as we watched, they drew. For an instant she bent under the cloud of canvas, delicate and beautiful. Every rope of her went taut, but almost as soon as she went in motion her head moved to the wind. She trembled, stopped, and her sails began to shake again. I could almost fancy I could hear the noise they made.

"There!" cried Captain Murdock. "Do you believe me now? And look at her water-line. She's filled clear full."

"Yes," said Eliphalet, "I believe you now."

But he did not move from the window. He continued to look at the ship. The tide was taking her in and she seemed to struggle against it, catching at the wind and losing it again. There she was, a fast ship such as Eliphalet liked to buy, but I knew what she was. Her speed betrayed her, and the rake of her masts that gave her speed. If I had not known I might have thought she was a pretty sight, but now the thought of her turned me sick, for I seemed to hear the sound that was coming from her hatches and to smell the stench that filled her deck.

She was coming ashore. She would be beached in half an hour. If there was ever retribution, it was there. Everything Eliphalet Greer had striven to hide was coming ashore. All the talk and whispers about him were coming true. His sin itself was coming to meet him under those untrimmed sails.

And Eliphalet was at the window watching.

"There's no one at the helm," he said.

"Didn't I say her crew has left her!" cried Captain Murdock impatiently. "They all went out in boats. But what does that all matter? There's the ship you ordered built. There she's coming home. What'll we do if her papers are aboard?

What'll we do anyway? Won't you say something? Won't you do something but look?"

Eliphalet still stared out at the ship that was drifting in, leaning his head forward, drawing his brows together the better to see, and I knew that everything around him was going. His money would mean nothing once that ship came in. His name would mean nothing, or his reputation at the banks. I knew he could never escape the evidence she brought and he must have known it too. Everything was going. Everything he owned was going.

Then he asked a question, though I think he knew the answer.

"It's MacDonald's ship," he said. "He knew his orders. What brought him in like this? Why should he want to ruin me? He was paid enough."

In the silence that followed Eliphalet turned from the window toward Richard Parton.

"You ought to know, Eliphalet," he said. "Why have I been here waiting?"

I expected anything to happen then from the look on Eliphalet's face, but though his lips moved he did not speak and he stood where he had turned.

"Did you think I came back here for nothing?" demanded Richard Parton. "I said I'd see you done for. Do you remember the money you left when you left me behind? It took half of it to turn the trick. What made you keep on men I used to know? MacDonald cared for me as much as you, and he'd do anything for money."

Richard Parton's voice grew louder.

"They'll know your writing, Eliphalet. He's left every scrap of it right on the cabin table. It cost five thousand extra dollars to make him do that, every letter you told him to burn, every order. Everyone will know why you sent Murdock to Africa twice a year. Everyone will know what your drafts are for on London. Oh, yes, we're even now. How does it feel to be high and dry! How does it feel to see your world break down? How does it feel to hear it going the way you smashed down mine?"

I only understood half of what he said. Though many have thought differently, I never knew the devious ways Eliphalet once trod. I was only there to see the climax of something that had been growing through the years. The rest of it lay between them both, and neither of them told.

But Eliphalet knew. It was all spread before him. The walls were written with it. He knew he was ruined then. I saw him change with the knowledge. Yet I never expected he would take it as he did. It has always seemed to me that somewhere, mixed with all his roguery and his wickedness, there was a certain greatness that surmounted all the rest and a greatness that belonged with a better man.

"Richard," he said, "we're even now. You couldn't have done less."

There was no anger in him when he said it. Rather he spoke with a sort of sympathy, which Richard Parton seemed to understand.

"Yes," he said, "we're even now."

There was a pause and Eliphalet turned to the window again and looked out at the sea—and that was all there was of Richard Parton's strange revenge. Perhaps they had both of them seen too much to have it move them. Perhaps it had the irony of all accomplishment. They both seemed to accept it without triumph or without rancor.

It was Prudence who broke the silence. She had stood looking on with Murdock and with me. Somehow something in Eliphalet and Parton made us all diffident and loath to speak, for the time seemed only theirs, to be disturbed by no one else. But Prudence stepped beside Eliphalet and took his hand in hers.

"I'm sorry," she said. "You know I'm sorry."

Eliphalet cleared his throat.

"There's nothing to be sorry for," he said.

"What's sorrow got to do with it?" Captain Murdock blurted out suddenly. "To hell with sorrow! What are we going to do? The revenue man will be aboard her. We can't be staying here."

Captain Murdock's words awoke Eliphalet from his reverie.

"Who are those men on the wharf?" he asked.

"For the *Felicity*," said Captain Murdock. "Waiting to go aboard."

Eliphalet Greer nodded, and once more glanced quickly out the window.

"Take this key," he said, fingering his gold watch-chain. "Open the desk in the room across the hall. Take the money out of it and bring it here. And you'll find a pair of pistols in the second drawer."

Richard Parton started. Eliphalet was tossing his cloak over his shoulders.

"Charles," said Eliphalet Greer, "you came once to see me go. I'm going now. You came to see me pay. You're seeing me pay."

"Eliphalet," said Richard Parton, "what are you going to do?"

And neither seemed to think the question odd or out of place.

"Do you think I'll stay here," replied Eliphalet Greer, "when there's seaway and a ship to get aboard of? There's the *Felicity*, dropped in mid-stream. I'll put her crew to rights once I get aboard, and the wind's fair to tack against the tide."

Richard Parton gave a low exclamation. If I had not known, I might have thought they were friends. Every trace of bitterness seemed to fall from them with Eliphalet's answer. Another feeling had taken its place. They both were gazing out the window, both their faces were tense like gamblers' faces with some new excitement. It was a strange thing, but they did not think it strange. Unconsciously each seemed to accept it.

"Not out again," cried Richard Parton, "out where we used to sail?"

"Where's there another place," replied Eliphalet Greer, "that will hold me now? I know the old harbors and the bearings still."

And then Captain Murdock's footsteps interrupted him.

"Get down to the wharf," said Eliphalet. "Get the men in the longboat."

"You ain't——" exclaimed Captain Murdock. "B'gad! We ain't going to sail?"

"Of course we are, you fool!" snapped Eliphalet Greer. "Haven't we run before? We'll take her out and see what it's like again. We'll sell her in Havana, and get a ship, and a crew that is a crew."

Captain Murdock's mouth was open. His eyes were round and glassy.

"B'gad!" he muttered softly, and with a reverential wonder. "B'gad! You're still a man!"

"Get out the boat and get the men in it," replied Eliphalet Greer. "We haven't time to talk!"

He was going, and I think he was glad to go. He surely showed no sorrow now that his hour was there. He picked up the ledger from the table and tucked it beneath his arm. He picked up his beaver hat and set it on his head. It was hard

to believe that he was going, going forever, for he hardly looked about him. He might as well have been going out to his counting house instead of out of our lives. It was hard to remember that he was a ruined man, fleeing like a thief in the night. For always, always as I think of him then, he has a strange sort of magnificence and something of the greatness of a greater man. At least he took his fortune quietly without a word or without a struggle, and I know of no harder thing to do.

He was paying, and he knew how it would end. He was going down a road that had no turning. He was going to meet the end which all men of violence meet, toward the inevitable end which he had often seen, friendless, hated, without a shred of honor.

Did his sorrow come later, I wonder? At some time later, on the deck beneath the stars, did his face grow taut with pain? Sometimes I hope it did not, for he had unhappiness enough. Little as I have to thank him for, I like to think of him looking out to sea without remorse and without regret.

Yes, he was going. He had turned toward us.

"Prudence," he said, "there's no cause for you to feel so."

And I saw that she was crying, and then he bent toward her, very tall and gaunt. I had often thought his black clothes had a sinister aspect, but they had not then.

"Good-bye, Charles," he said. "You'll forget me sometime."

But he was wrong. I have never forgotten him. He is always behind my thoughts.

He said nothing more. There could not have been a quieter parting. He walked into the hall, and the three of us were staring out. The room had grown very still. We heard him open the front door.

And then a strange thing happened, the last I have to tell, and I cannot explain it any more than the rest. We all three stood watching, but it was only for a moment. And then Richard Parton left us, and I heard him in the hall, and then I heard his voice.

"Eliphalet!" he was calling. "Eliphalet Greer!"

His voice was discordant, and Eliphalet did not answer.

And then I remember I was at the window looking out at the wharf, and Prudence was standing beside me, and she still was crying, but I only remembered it afterward. For I was filled with a single desire then. I wanted to see him go. Then I saw him. Both the wharf and the street were playing before me. I saw him as he turned the corner.

"Look!"

It was Prudence. Her hand was on my arm, and she was pointing out at the street. And then I saw why she had cried out. Eliphalet Greer was not alone. Richard Parton was walking at his side.

"They're going out together."

They were. They were walking side by side. I could not believe it at first. They were talking. I wish I knew what they were saying, for they were not speaking in anger. They were walking down the wharf, a tall, gaunt figure in black and a slighter one in a faded blue coat.

I could not believe they were going, but they were. They both were going together. They were walking together to the ladder where the small boats were tied. I saw Eliphalet go down it, and Richard Parton follow. Yes, they had gone down one after the other. How can I tell what brought them there? How can anyone tell? They are only shadows in my life. They came like shadows and they went like shadows.

I never saw them again. The *Felicity* is back, but no one has ever heard where those two went, or where they finally came to rest.

A boat had slipped out from the wharf, out toward the open sea, and for the last time I saw them. For me, they went out then into something vaster than the sea. But I could see them. And Eliphalet Greer was steering and Richard Parton was beside him.

"Yes." It was her voice again, very clear and quiet, and I felt her hand in mine. "They're going out together."

Yes, they were together, and we were together.

[End of *The Black Cargo*, by John P. Marquand]