

CHAPTER XIII

Captain Doane worked hard, pursuing the sun in its daily course through the sky, by the equation of time correcting its aberrations due to the earth's swinging around the great circle of its orbit, and charting Sumner lines innumerable, working assumed latitudes for position until his head grew dizzy.

Simon Nishikanta sneered openly at what he considered the captain's inefficient navigation, and continued to paint water-colours when he was serene, and to shoot at whales, sea-birds, and all things hurtable when he was downhearted and sea-sore with disappointment at not sighting the Lion's Head peak of the Ancient Mariner's treasure island.

"I'll show I ain't a pincher," Nishikanta announced one day, after having broiled at the mast-head for five hours of sea-searching. "Captain Doane, how much could we have bought extra chronometers for in San Francisco--good second-hand ones, I mean?"

"Say a hundred dollars," the captain answered.

"Very well. And this ain't a piker's proposition. The cost of such a chronometer would have been divided between the three of us. I stand for its total cost. You just tell the sailors that I, Simon Nishikanta, will pay one hundred dollars gold money for the first one that sights land on

Mr. Greenleaf's latitude and longitude."

But the sailors who swarmed the mast-heads were doomed to disappointment, in that for only two days did they have opportunity to stare the ocean surface for the reward. Nor was this due entirely to Dag Daughtry, despite the fact that his own intention and act would have been sufficient to spoil their chance for longer staring.

Down in the lazarette, under the main-cabin floor, it chanced that he took toll of the cases of beer which had been shipped for his especial benefit. He counted the cases, doubted the verdict of his senses, lighted more matches, counted again, then vainly searched the entire lazarette in the hope of finding more cases of beer stored elsewhere.

He sat down under the trap door of the main-cabin floor and thought for a solid hour. It was the Jew again, he concluded--the Jew who had been willing to equip the Mary Turner with two chronometers, but not with three; the Jew who had ratified the agreement of a sufficient supply to permit Daughtry his daily six quarts. Once again the steward counted the cases to make sure. There were three. And since each case contained two dozen quarts, and since his whack each day was half a dozen quarts, it was patent that, the supply that stared him in the face would last him only twelve days. And twelve days were none too long to sail from this unidentifiable naked sea-stretch to the nearest possible port where beer could be purchased.

The steward, once his mind was made up, wasted no time. The clock marked a quarter before twelve when he climbed up out of the lazarette, replaced the trapdoor, and hurried to set the table. He served the company through the noon meal, although it was all he could do to refrain from capsizing the big tureen of split-pea soup over the head of Simon Nishikanta. What did effectually withstrain him was the knowledge of the act which in the lazarette he had already determined to perform that afternoon down in the main hold where the water-casks were stored.

At three o'clock, while the Ancient Mariner supposedly drowned in his room, and while Captain Doane, Grimshaw, and half the watch on deck clustered at the mast-heads to try to raise the Lion's Head from out the sapphire sea, Dag Daughtry dropped down the ladder of the open hatchway into the main hold. Here, in long tiers, with alleyways between, the water-casks were chocked safely on their sides.

From inside his shirt the steward drew a brace, and to it fitted a half-inch bit from his hip-pocket. On his knees, he bored through the head of the first cask until the water rushed out upon the deck and flowed down into the bilge. He worked quickly, boring cask after cask down the alleyway that led to deeper twilight. When he had reached the end of the first row of casks he paused a moment to listen to the gurglings of the many half-inch streams running to waste. His quick ears caught a similar gurgling from the right in the direction of the next alleyway. Listening closely, he could have sworn he heard the sounds of a bit biting into hard wood.

A minute later, his own brace and bit carefully secreted, his hand was descending on the shoulder of a man he could not recognize in the gloom, but who, on his knees and wheezing, was steadily boring into the head of a cask. The culprit made no effort to escape, and when Daughtry struck a match he gazed down into the upturned face of the Ancient Mariner.

"My word!" the steward muttered his amazement softly. "What in hell are you running water out for?"

He could feel the old man's form trembling with violent nervousness, and his own heart smote him for gentleness.

"It's all right," he whispered. "Don't mind me. How many have you bored?"

"All in this tier," came the whispered answer. "You will not inform on me to the . . . the others?"

"Inform?" Daughtry laughed softly. "I don't mind telling you that we're playing the same game, though I don't know why you should play it. I've just finished boring all of the starboard row. Now I tell you, sir, you skin out right now, quietly, while the goin' is good. Everybody's aloft, and you won't be noticed. I'll go ahead and finish this job . . . all but enough water to last us say a dozen days."

"I should like to talk with you . . . to explain matters," the Ancient Mariner whispered.

"Sure, sir, an' I don't mind sayin', sir, that I'm just plain mad curious to hear. I'll join you down in the cabin, say in ten minutes, and we can have a real gam. But anyway, whatever your game is, I'm with you. Because it happens to be my game to get quick into port, and because, sir, I have a great liking and respect for you. Now shoot along. I'll be with you inside ten minutes."

"I like you, steward, very much," the old man quavered.

"And I like you, sir--and a damn sight more than them money-sharks aft. But we'll just postpone this. You beat it out of here, while I finish scuppering the rest of the water."

A quarter of an hour later, with the three money-sharks still at the mast-heads, Charles Stough Greenleaf was seated in the cabin and sipping a highball, and Dag Daughtry was standing across the table from him, drinking directly from a quart bottle of beer.

"Maybe you haven't guessed it," the Ancient Mariner said; "but this is my fourth voyage after this treasure."

"You mean . . . ?" Daughtry asked.

"Just that. There isn't any treasure. There never was one--any more than the Lion's Head, the longboat, or the bearings unnamable."

Daughtry rumped his grizzled thatch of hair in his perplexity, as he admitted:

"Well, you got me, sir. You sure got me to believin' in that treasure."

"And I acknowledge, steward, that I am pleased to hear it. It shows that I have not lost my cunning when I can deceive a man like you. It is easy to deceive men whose souls know only money. But you are different. You don't live and breathe for money. I've watched you with your dog. I've watched you with your nigger boy. I've watched you with your beer. And just because your heart isn't set on a great buried treasure of gold, you are harder to deceive. Those whose hearts are set, are most astonishingly easy to fool. They are of cheap kidney. Offer them a proposition of one hundred dollars for one, and they are like hungry pike snapping at the bait. Offer a thousand dollars for one, or ten thousand for one, and they become sheer lunatic. I am an old man, a very old man. I like to live until I die--I mean, to live decently, comfortably, respectably."

"And you like the voyages long? I begin to see, sir. Just as they're getting near to where the treasure ain't, a little accident like the loss of their water-supply sends them into port and out again to start hunting all over."

The Ancient Mariner nodded, and his sun-washed eyes twinkled.

"There was the Emma Louisa. I kept her on the long voyage over eighteen months with water accidents and similar accidents. And, besides, they kept me in one of the best hotels in New Orleans for over four months before the voyage began, and advanced to me handsomely, yes, bravely, handsomely."

"But tell me more, sir; I am most interested," Dag Daughtry concluded his simple matter of the beer. "It's a good game. I might learn it for my old age, though I give you my word, sir, I won't butt in on your game. I wouldn't tackle it until you are gone, sir, good game that it is."

"First of all, you must pick out men with money--with plenty of money, so that any loss will not hurt them. Also, they are easier to interest--"

"Because they are more hoggish," the steward interrupted. "The more money they've got the more they want."

"Precisely," the Ancient Mariner continued. "And, at least, they are repaid. Such sea-voyages are excellent for their health. After all, I do them neither hurt nor harm, but only good, and add to their health."

"But them scars--that gouge out of your face--all them fingers missing on your hand? You never got them in the fight in the longboat when the

bo's'n carved you up. Then where in Sam Hill did you get the them? Wait a minute, sir. Let me fill your glass first." And with a fresh-brimmed glass, Charles Stough Greanleaf narrated the history of his scars.

"First, you must know, steward, that I am--well, a gentleman. My name has its place in the pages of the history of the United States, even back before the time when they were the United States. I graduated second in my class in a university that it is not necessary to name. For that matter, the name I am known by is not my name. I carefully compounded it out of names of other families. I have had misfortunes. I trod the quarter-deck when I was a young man, though never the deck of the Wide Awake, which is the ship of my fancy--and of my livelihood in these latter days.

"The scars you asked about, and the missing fingers? Thus it chanced. It was the morning, at late getting-up times in a Pullman, when the accident happened. The car being crowded, I had been forced to accept an upper berth. It was only the other day. A few years ago. I was an old man then. We were coming up from Florida. It was a collision on a high trestle. The train crumpled up, and some of the cars fell over sideways and fell off, ninety feet into the bottom of a dry creek. It was dry, though there was a pool of water just ten feet in diameter and eighteen inches deep. All the rest was dry boulders, and I bull's-eyed that pool.

"This is the way it was. I had just got on my shoes and pants and shirt, and had started to get out of the bunk. There I was, sitting on the edge

of the bunk, my legs dangling down, when the locomotives came together. The berths, upper and lower, on the opposite side had already been made up by the porter.

"And there I was, sitting, legs dangling, not knowing where I was, on a trestle or a flat, when the thing happened. I just naturally left that upper berth, soared like a bird across the aisle, went through the glass of the window on the opposite side clean head-first, turned over and over through the ninety feet of fall more times than I like to remember, and by some sort of miracle was mostly flat-out in the air when I bull's-eyed that pool of water. It was only eighteen inches deep. But I hit it flat, and I hit it so hard that it must have cushioned me. I was the only survivor of my car. It struck forty feet away from me, off to the side. And they took only the dead out of it. When they took me out of the pool I wasn't dead by any means. And when the surgeons got done with me, there were the fingers gone from my hand, that scar down the side of my face . . . and, though you'd never guess it, I've been three ribs short of the regular complement ever since.

"Oh, I had no complaint coming. Think of the others in that car--all dead. Unfortunately, I was riding on a pass, and so could not sue the railroad company. But here I am, the only man who ever dived ninety feet into eighteen inches of water and lived to tell the tale.--Steward, if you don't mind replenishing my glass . . . "

Dag Daughtry complied and in his excitement of interest pulled off the

top of another quart of beer for himself.

"Go on, go on, sir," he murmured huskily, wiping his lips, "and the treasure-hunting graft. I'm straight dying to hear. Sir, I salute you."

"I may say, steward," the Ancient Mariner resumed, "that I was born with a silver spoon that melted in my mouth and left me a proper prodigal son. Also, that I was born with a backbone of pride that would not melt. Not for a paltry railroad accident, but for things long before as well as after, my family let me die, and I . . . I let it live. That is the story. I let my family live. Furthermore, it was not my family's fault. I never whimpered. I never let on. I melted the last of my silver spoon--South Sea cotton, an' it please you, cacao in Tonga, rubber and mahogany in Yucatan. And do you know, at the end, I slept in Bowery lodging-houses and ate scrapple in East-Side feeding-dens, and, on more than one occasion, stood in the bread-line at midnight and pondered whether or not I should faint before I fed."

"And you never squealed to your family," Dag Daughtry murmured admiringly in the pause.

The Ancient Mariner straightened up his shoulders, threw his head back, then bowed it and repeated, "No, I never squealed. I went into the poor-house, or the county poor-farm as they call it. I lived sordidly. I lived like a beast. For six months I lived like a beast, and then I saw my way out. I set about building the Wide Awake. I built her plank by

plank, and copper-fastened her, selected her masts and every timber of her, and personally signed on her full ship's complement fore-and-aft, and outfitted her amongst the Jews, and sailed with her to the South Seas and the treasure buried a fathom under the sand.

"You see," he explained, "all this I did in my mind, for all the time I was a hostage in the poor-farm of broken men."

The Ancient Mariner's face grew suddenly bleak and fierce, and his right hand flashed out to Daughtry's wrist, prisoning it in withered fingers of steel.

"It was a long, hard way to get out of the poor-farm and finance my miserable little, pitiful little, adventure of the Wide Awake. Do you know that I worked in the poor-farm laundry for two years, for one dollar and a half a week, with my one available hand and what little I could do with the other, sorting dirty clothes and folding sheets and pillow-slips until I thought a thousand times my poor old back would break in two, and until I knew a million times the location in my chest of every fraction of an inch of my missing ribs."

"You are a young man yet--"

Daughtry grinned denial as he rubbed his grizzled mat of hair.

"You are a young man yet, steward," the Ancient Mariner insisted with a

show of irritation. "You have never been shut out from life. In the poor-farm one is shut out from life. There is no respect--no, not for age alone, but for human life in the poor-house. How shall I say it? One is not dead. Nor is one alive. One is what once was alive and is in process of becoming dead. Lepers are treated that way. So are the insane. I know it. When I was young and on the sea, a brother-lieutenant went mad. Sometimes he was violent, and we struggled with him, twisting his arms, bruising his flesh, tying him helpless while we sat and panted on him that he might not do harm to us, himself, or the ship. And he, who still lived, died to us. Don't you understand? He was no longer of us, like us. He was something other. That is it--other. And so, in the poor-farm, we, who are yet unburied, are other. You have heard me chatter about the hell of the longboat. That is a pleasant diversion in life compared with the poor-farm. The food, the filth, the abuse, the bullying, the--the sheer animalness of it!

"For two years I worked for a dollar and a half a week in the laundry. And imagine me, who had melted a silver spoon in my mouth--a sizable silver spoon steward--imagine me, my old sore bones, my old belly reminiscent of youth's delights, my old palate ticklish yet and not all withered of the deviltries of taste learned in younger days--as I say, steward, imagine me, who had ever been free-handed, lavish, saving that dollar and a half intact like a miser, never spending a penny of it on tobacco, never mitigating by purchase of any little delicacy the sad condition of my stomach that protested against the harshness and indigestibility of our poor fare. I cadged tobacco, poor cheap tobacco,

from poor doddering old chaps trembling on the edge of dissolution. Ay, and when Samuel Merrivale I found dead in the morning, next cot to mine, I first rummaged his poor old trousers' pocket for the half-plug of tobacco I knew was the total estate he left, then announced the news.

"Oh, steward, I was careful of that dollar and a half. Don't you see?--I was a prisoner sawing my way out with a tiny steel saw. And I sawed out!" His voice rose in a shrill cackle of triumph. "Steward, I sawed out!"

Dag Daughtry held forth and up his beer-bottle as he said gravely and sincerely:

"Sir, I salute you."

"And I thank you, sir--you understand," the Ancient Mariner replied with simple dignity to the toast, touching his glass to the bottle and drinking with the steward eyes to eyes.

"I should have had one hundred and fifty-six dollars when I left the poor-farm," the ancient one continued. "But there were the two weeks I lost, with influenza, and the one week from a confounded pleurisy, so that I emerged from that place of the living dead with but one hundred and fifty-one dollars and fifty cents."

"I see, sir," Daughtry interrupted with honest admiration. "The tiny saw

had become a crowbar, and with it you were going back to break into life again."

All the scarred face and washed eyes of Charles Stough Greenleaf beamed as he held his glass up.

"Steward, I salute you. You understand. And you have said it well. I was going back to break into the house of life. It was a crowbar, that pitiful sum of money accumulated by two years of crucifixion. Think of it! A sum that in the days ere the silver spoon had melted, I staked in careless moods of an instant on a turn of the cards. But as you say, a burglar, I came back to break into life, and I came to Boston. You have a fine turn for a figure of speech, steward, and I salute you."

Again bottle and glass tinkled together, and both men drank eyes to eyes and each was aware that the eyes he gazed into were honest and understanding.

"But it was a thin crowbar, steward. I dared not put my weight on it for a proper pry. I took a room in a small but respectable hotel, European plan. It was in Boston, I think I said. Oh, how careful I was of my crowbar! I scarcely ate enough to keep my frame inhabited. But I bought drinks for others, most carefully selected--bought drinks with an air of prosperity that was as a credential to my story; and in my cups (my apparent cups, steward), spun an old man's yarn of the Wide Awake, the longboat, the bearings unnamable, and the treasure under the sand.--A

fathom under the sand; that was literary; it was psychological; it smacked of the salt sea, and daring rovers, and the loot of the Spanish Main.

"You have noticed this nugget I wear on my watch-chain, steward? I could not afford it at that time, but I talked golden instead, California gold, nuggets and nuggets, oodles and oodles, from the diggings of forty-nine and fifty. That was literary. That was colour. Later, after my first voyage out of Boston I was financially able to buy a nugget. It was so much bait to which men rose like fishes. And like fishes they nibbled. These rings, also--bait. You never see such rings now. After I got in funds, I purchased them, too. Take this nugget: I am talking. I toy with it absently as I am telling of the great gold treasure we buried under the sand. Suddenly the nugget flashes fresh recollection into my mind. I speak of the longboat, of our thirst and hunger, and of the third officer, the fair lad with cheeks virgin of the razor, and that he it was who used it as a sinker when we strove to catch fish.

"But back in Boston. Yarns and yarns, when seemingly I was gone in drink, I told my apparent cronies--men whom I despised, stupid dolts of creatures that they were. But the word spread, until one day, a young man, a reporter, tried to interview me about the treasure and the Wide Awake. I was indignant, angry.--Oh, softly, steward, softly; in my heart was great joy as I denied that young reporter, knowing that from my cronies he already had a sufficiency of the details.

"And the morning paper gave two whole columns and headlines to the tale. I began to have callers. I studied them out well. Many were for adventuring after the treasure who themselves had no money. I baffled and avoided them, and waited on, eating even less as my little capital dwindled away.

"And then he came, my gay young doctor--doctor of philosophy he was, for he was very wealthy. My heart sang when I saw him. But twenty-eight dollars remained to me--after it was gone, the poor-house, or death. I had already resolved upon death as my choice rather than go back to be of that dolorous company, the living dead of the poor-farm. But I did not go back, nor did I die. The gay young doctor's blood ran warm at thought of the South Seas, and in his nostrils I distilled all the scents of the flower-drenched air of that far-off land, and in his eyes I builded him the fairy visions of the tradewind clouds, the monsoon skies, the palm isles and the coral seas.

"He was a gay, mad young dog, grandly careless of his largess, fearless as a lion's whelp, lithe and beautiful as a leopard, and mad, a trifle mad of the deviltries and whimsies that tickled in that fine brain of his. Look you, steward. Before we sailed in the Gloucester fishing-schooner, purchased by the doctor, and that was like a yacht and showed her heels to most yachts, he had me to his house to advise about personal equipment. We were overhauling in a gear-room, when suddenly he spoke:

"I wonder how my lady will take my long absence. What say you? Shall

she go along?'

"And I had not known that he had any wife or lady. And I looked my surprise and incredulity.

"'Just that you do not believe I shall take her on the cruise,' he laughed, wickedly, madly, in my astonished face. 'Come, you shall meet her.'

"Straight to his bedroom and his bed he led me, and, turning down the covers, showed there to me, asleep as she had slept for many a thousand years, the mummy of a slender Egyptian maid.

"And she sailed with us on the long vain voyage to the South Seas and back again, and, steward, on my honour, I grew quite fond of the dear maid myself."

The Ancient Mariner gazed dreamily into his glass, and Dag Daughtry took advantage of the pause to ask:

"But the young doctor? How did he take the failure to find the treasure?"

The Ancient Mariner's face lighted with joy.

"He called me a delectable old fraud, with his arm on my shoulder while

he did it. Why, steward, I had come to love that young man like a splendid son. And with his arm on my shoulder, and I know there was more than mere kindness in it, he told me we had barely reached the River Plate when he discovered me. With laughter, and with more than one slap of his hand on my shoulder that was more caress than jollity, he pointed out the discrepancies in my tale (which I have since amended, steward, thanks to him, and amended well), and told me that the voyage had been a grand success, making him eternally my debtor.

"What could I do? I told him the truth. To him even did I tell my family name, and the shame I had saved it from by forswearing it.

"He put his arm on my shoulder, I tell you, and . . . "

The Ancient Mariner ceased talking because of a huskiness in his throat, and a moisture from his eyes trickled down both cheeks.

Dag Daughtry pledged him silently, and in the draught from his glass he recovered himself.

"He told me that I should come and live with him, and, to his great lonely house he took me the very day we landed in Boston. Also, he told me he would make arrangements with his lawyers--the idea tickled his fancy--'I shall adopt you,' he said. 'I shall adopt you along with Isthari'--Isthari was the little maid's name, the little mummy's name.

"Here was I, back in life, steward, and legally to be adopted. But life is a fond betrayer. Eighteen hours afterward, in the morning, we found him dead in his bed, the little mummy maid beside him. Heart-failure, the burst of some blood-vessel in the brain--I never learned.

"I prayed and pleaded with them for the pair to be buried together. But they were a hard, cold, New England lot, his cousins and his aunts, and they presented Istar to the museum, and me they gave a week to be quit of the house. I left in an hour, and they searched my small baggage before they would let me depart.

"I went to New York. It was the same game there, only that I had more money and could play it properly. It was the same in New Orleans, in Galveston. I came to California. This is my fifth voyage. I had a hard time getting these three interested, and spent all my little store of money before they signed the agreement. They were very mean. Advance any money to me! The very idea of it was preposterous. Though I bided my time, ran up a comfortable hotel bill, and, at the very last, ordered my own generous assortment of liquors and cigars and charged the bill to the schooner. Such a to-do! All three of them raged and all but tore their hair . . . and mine. They said it could not be. I fell promptly sick. I told them they got on my nerves and made me sick. The more they raged, the sicker I got. Then they gave in. As promptly I grew better. And here we are, out of water and heading soon most likely for the Marquesas to fill our barrels. Then they will return and try for it again!"

"You think so, sir?"

"I shall remember even more important data, steward," the Ancient Mariner smiled. "Without doubt they will return. Oh, I know them well. They are meagre, narrow, grasping fools."

"Fools! all fools! a ship of fools!" Dag Daughtry exulted; repeating what he had expressed in the hold, as he bored the last barrel, listened to the good water gurgling away into the bilge, and chuckled over his discovery of the Ancient Mariner on the same lay as his own.