

CHAPTER XIV. THE CABIN OF THE "FLYING SCUD."

The sun of the morrow had not cleared the morning bank: the lake of the lagoon, the islets, and the wall of breakers now beginning to subside, still lay clearly pictured in the flushed obscurity of early day, when we stepped again upon the deck of the Flying Scud: Nares, myself, the mate, two of the hands, and one dozen bright, virgin axes, in war against that massive structure. I think we all drew pleasurable breath; so profound in man is the instinct of destruction, so engaging is the interest of the chase. For we were now about to taste, in a supreme degree, the double joys of demolishing a toy and playing "Hide the handkerchief": sports from which we had all perhaps desisted since the days of infancy. And the toy we were to burst in pieces was a deep-sea ship; and the hidden good for which we were to hunt was a prodigious fortune.

The decks were washed down, the main hatch removed, and a gun-tackle purchase rigged before the boat arrived with breakfast. I had grown so suspicious of the wreck, that it was a positive relief to me to look down into the hold, and see it full, or nearly full, of undeniable rice packed in the Chinese fashion in boluses of matting. Breakfast over, Johnson and the hands turned to upon the cargo; while Nares and I, having smashed open the skylight and rigged up a windsail on deck, began the work of rummaging the cabins.

I must not be expected to describe our first day's work, or (for that matter) any of the rest, in order and detail as it occurred. Such particularity might have been possible for several officers and a draft of men from a ship of war, accompanied by an experienced secretary with a knowledge of shorthand. For two plain human beings, unaccustomed to the use of the broad-axe and consumed with an impatient greed of the result, the whole business melts, in the retrospect, into a nightmare of exertion, heat, hurry, and bewilderment; sweat pouring from the face like rain, the scurry of rats, the choking exhalations of the bilge, and the throbs and splinterings of the toiling axes. I shall content myself with giving the cream of our discoveries in a logical rather than a temporal order; though the two indeed practically coincided, and we had finished our exploration of the cabin, before we could be certain of the nature of the cargo.

Nares and I began operations by tossing up pell-mell through the companion, and piling in a squalid heap about the wheel, all clothes, personal effects, the crockery, the carpet, stale victuals, tins of meat, and in a word, all movables from the main cabin. Thence, we transferred our attention to the captain's quarters on the starboard side. Using the blankets for a basket, we sent up the books, instruments, and clothes to swell our growing midden on the deck; and then Nares, going on hands and knees, began to forage underneath the bed. Box after box of Manilla cigars rewarded his search. I took occasion to smash some of these boxes open, and even to guillotine

the bundles of cigars; but quite in vain--no secret cache of opium encouraged me to continue.

"I guess I've got hold of the dicky now!" exclaimed Nares, and turning round from my perquisitions, I found he had drawn forth a heavy iron box, secured to the bulkhead by chain and padlock. On this he was now gazing, not with the triumph that instantly inflamed my own bosom, but with a somewhat foolish appearance of surprise.

"By George, we have it now!" I cried, and would have shaken hands with my companion; but he did not see, or would not accept, the salutation.

"Let's see what's in it first," he remarked dryly. And he adjusted the box upon its side, and with some blows of an axe burst the lock open. I threw myself beside him, as he replaced the box on its bottom and removed the lid. I cannot tell what I expected; a million's worth of diamonds might perhaps have pleased me; my cheeks burned, my heart throbbed to bursting; and lo! there was disclosed but a trayful of papers, neatly taped, and a cheque-book of the customary pattern. I made a snatch at the tray to see what was beneath; but the captain's hand fell on mine, heavy and hard.

"Now, boss!" he cried, not unkindly, "is this to be run shipshape? or is it a Dutch grab-racket?"

And he proceeded to untie and run over the contents of the papers,

with a serious face and what seemed an ostentation of delay. Me and my impatience it would appear he had forgotten; for when he was quite done, he sat a while thinking, whistled a bar or two, refolded the papers, tied them up again; and then, and not before, deliberately raised the tray.

I saw a cigar-box, tied with a piece of fishing-line, and four fat canvas-bags. Nares whipped out his knife, cut the line, and opened the box. It was about half full of sovereigns.

"And the bags?" I whispered.

The captain ripped them open one by one, and a flood of mixed silver coin burst forth and rattled in the rusty bottom of the box. Without a word, he set to work to count the gold.

"What is this?" I asked.

"It's the ship's money," he returned, doggedly continuing his work.

"The ship's money?" I repeated. "That's the money Trent tramped and traded with? And there's his cheque-book to draw upon his owners? And he has left it?"

"I guess he has," said Nares, austere, jotting down a note of the gold; and I was abashed into silence till his task should be completed.

It came, I think, to three hundred and seventy-eight pounds sterling; some nineteen pounds of it in silver: all of which we turned again into the chest.

"And what do you think of that?" I asked.

"Mr. Dodd," he replied, "you see something of the rumness of this job, but not the whole. The specie bothers you, but what gets me is the papers. Are you aware that the master of a ship has charge of all the cash in hand, pays the men advances, receives freight and passage money, and runs up bills in every port? All this he does as the owner's confidential agent, and his integrity is proved by his receipted bills. I tell you, the captain of a ship is more likely to forget his pants than these bills which guarantee his character. I've known men drown to save them: bad men, too; but this is the shipmaster's honour. And here this Captain Trent--not hurried, not threatened with anything but a free passage in a British man-of-war--has left them all behind! I don't want to express myself too strongly, because the facts appear against me, but the thing is impossible."

Dinner came to us not long after, and we ate it on deck, in a grim silence, each privately racking his brain for some solution of the mysteries. I was indeed so swallowed up in these considerations, that the wreck, the lagoon, the islets, and the strident sea-fowl, the strong sun then beating on my head, and even the gloomy countenance of the

captain at my elbow, all vanished from the field of consciousness. My mind was a blackboard, on which I scrawled and blotted out hypotheses; comparing each with the pictorial records in my memory: cyphering with pictures. In the course of this tense mental exercise I recalled and studied the faces of one memorial masterpiece, the scene of the saloon; and here I found myself, on a sudden, looking in the eyes of the Kanaka.

"There's one thing I can put beyond doubt, at all events," I cried, relinquishing my dinner and getting briskly afoot. "There was that Kanaka I saw in the bar with Captain Trent, the fellow the newspapers and ship's articles made out to be a Chinaman. I mean to rout his quarters out and settle that."

"All right," said Nares. "I'll lazy off a bit longer, Mr. Dodd; I feel pretty rocky and mean."

We had thoroughly cleared out the three after-compartments of the ship: all the stuff from the main cabin and the mate's and captain's quarters lay piled about the wheel; but in the forward stateroom with the two bunks, where Nares had said the mate and cook most likely berthed, we had as yet done nothing. Thither I went. It was very bare; a few photographs were tacked on the bulkhead, one of them indecent; a single chest stood open, and, like all we had yet found, it had been partly rifled. An armful of two-shilling novels proved to me beyond a doubt it was a European's; no Chinaman would have possessed any, and the most literate Kanaka conceivable in a ship's galley was not likely to have

gone beyond one. It was plain, then, that the cook had not berthed aft, and I must look elsewhere.

The men had stamped down the nests and driven the birds from the galley, so that I could now enter without contest. One door had been already blocked with rice; the place was in part darkness, full of a foul stale smell, and a cloud of nasty flies; it had been left, besides, in some disorder, or else the birds, during their time of tenancy, had knocked the things about; and the floor, like the deck before we washed it, was spread with pasty filth. Against the wall, in the far corner, I found a handsome chest of camphor-wood bound with brass, such as Chinamen and sailors love, and indeed all of mankind that plies in the Pacific. From its outside view I could thus make no deduction; and, strange to say, the interior was concealed. All the other chests, as I have said already, we had found gaping open, and their contents scattered abroad; the same remark we found to apply afterwards in the quarters of the seamen; only this camphor-wood chest, a singular exception, was both closed and locked.

I took an axe to it, readily forced the paltry Chinese fastening, and, like a Custom-House officer, plunged my hands among the contents. For some while I groped among linen and cotton. Then my teeth were set on edge with silk, of which I drew forth several strips covered with mysterious characters. And these settled the business, for I recognised them as a kind of bed-hanging popular with the commoner class of the

Chinese. Nor were further evidences wanting, such as night-clothes of an extraordinary design, a three-stringed Chinese fiddle, a silk handkerchief full of roots and herbs, and a neat apparatus for smoking opium, with a liberal provision of the drug. Plainly, then, the cook had been a Chinaman; and, if so, who was Jos. Amalu? Or had Jos. stolen the chest before he proceeded to ship under a false name and domicile? It was possible, as anything was possible in such a welter; but, regarded as a solution, it only led and left me deeper in the bog. For why should this chest have been deserted and neglected, when the others were rummaged or removed? and where had Jos. come by that second chest, with which (according to the clerk at the What Cheer) he had started for Honolulu?

"And how have YOU fared?" inquired the captain, whom I found luxuriously reclining in our mound of litter. And the accent on the pronoun, the heightened colour of the speaker's face, and the contained excitement in his tones, advertised me at once that I had not been alone to make discoveries.

"I have found a Chinaman's chest in the galley," said I, "and John (if there was any John) was not so much as at the pains to take his opium."

Nares seemed to take it mighty quietly. "That so?" said he. "Now, cast your eyes on that and own you're beaten!" And with a formidable clap of his open hand he flattened out before me, on the deck, a pair of

newspapers.

I gazed upon them dully, being in no mood for fresh discoveries.

"Look at them, Mr. Dodd," cried the captain sharply. "Can't you look at them?" And he ran a dirty thumb along the title. "'_Sydney Morning Herald_, November 26th,' can't you make that out?" he cried, with rising energy. "And don't you know, sir, that not thirteen days after this paper appeared in New South Pole, this ship we're standing in heaved her blessed anchors out of China? How did the _Sydney Morning Herald_ get to Hong Kong in thirteen days? Trent made no land, he spoke no ship, till he got here. Then he either got it here or in Hong Kong. I give you your choice, my son!" he cried, and fell back among the clothes like a man weary of life.

"Where did you find them?" I asked. "In that black bag?"

"Guess so," he said. "You needn't fool with it. There's nothing else but a lead-pencil and a kind of worked-out knife."

I looked in the bag, however, and was well rewarded.

"Every man to his trade, captain," said I. "You're a sailor, and you've given me plenty of points; but I am an artist, and allow me to inform you this is quite as strange as all the rest. The knife is a palette-knife; the pencil a Winsor and Newton, and a B B B at that.

A palette-knife and a B B B on a tramp brig! It's against the laws of nature."

"It would sicken a dog, wouldn't it?" said Nares.

"Yes," I continued, "it's been used by an artist, too: see how it's sharpened--not for writing--no man could write with that. An artist, and straight from Sydney? How can he come in?"

"O, that's natural enough," sneered Nares. "They cabled him to come up and illustrate this dime novel."

We fell a while silent.

"Captain," I said at last, "there is something deuced underhand about this brig. You tell me you've been to sea a good part of your life. You must have seen shady things done on ships, and heard of more. Well, what is this? is it insurance? is it piracy? what is it ABOUT? what can it be for?"

"Mr. Dodd," returned Nares, "you're right about me having been to sea the bigger part of my life. And you're right again when you think I know a good many ways in which a dishonest captain mayn't be on the square, nor do exactly the right thing by his owners, and altogether be just a little too smart by ninety-nine and three-quarters. There's a good many ways, but not so many as you'd think; and not one that has any mortal

thing to do with Trent. Trent and his whole racket has got to do with nothing--that's the bed-rock fact; there's no sense to it, and no use in it, and no story to it: it's a beastly dream. And don't you run away with that notion that landsmen take about ships. A society actress don't go around more publicly than what a ship does, nor is more interviewed, nor more humbugged, nor more run after by all sorts of little fussinesses in brass buttons. And more than an actress, a ship has a deal to lose; she's capital, and the actress only character--if she's that. The ports of the world are thick with people ready to kick a captain into the penitentiary if he's not as bright as a dollar and as honest as the morning star; and what with Lloyd keeping watch and watch in every corner of the three oceans, and the insurance leeches, and the consuls, and the customs bugs, and the medicos, you can only get the idea by thinking of a landsman watched by a hundred and fifty detectives, or a stranger in a village Down East."

"Well, but at sea?" I said.

"You make me tired," retorted the captain. "What's the use--at sea? Everything's got to come to bearings at some port, hasn't it? You can't stop at sea for ever, can you?--No; the Flying Scud is rubbish; if it meant anything, it would have to mean something so almighty intricate that James G. Blaine hasn't got the brains to engineer it; and I vote for more axeing, pioneering, and opening up the resources of this phenomenal brig, and less general fuss," he added, arising. "The dime-museum symptoms will drop in of themselves, I guess, to keep us

cheery."

But it appeared we were at the end of discoveries for the day; and we left the brig about sundown, without being further puzzled or further enlightened. The best of the cabin spoils--books, instruments, papers, silks, and curiosities--we carried along with us in a blanket, however, to divert the evening hours; and when supper was over, and the table cleared, and Johnson set down to a dreary game of cribbage between his right hand and his left, the captain and I turned out our blanket on the floor, and sat side by side to examine and appraise the spoils.

The books were the first to engage our notice. These were rather numerous (as Nares contemptuously put it) "for a lime-juicer." Scorn of the British mercantile marine glows in the breast of every Yankee merchant captain; as the scorn is not reciprocated, I can only suppose it justified in fact; and certainly the old country mariner appears of a less studious disposition. The more credit to the officers of the Flying Scud, who had quite a library, both literary and professional. There were Findlay's five directories of the world--all broken-backed, as is usual with Findlay, and all marked and scribbled over with corrections and additions--several books of navigation, a signal code, and an Admiralty book of a sort of orange hue, called *Islands of the Eastern Pacific Ocean, Vol. III.*, which appeared from its imprint to be the latest authority, and showed marks of frequent consultation in the passages about the French Frigate Shoals, the Harman, Cure, Pearl, and Hermes reefs, Lisiansky Island, Ocean Island, and the place where

we then lay--Brooks or Midway. A volume of Macaulay's *Essays* and a shilling Shakespeare led the van of the belles lettres; the rest were novels: several Miss Braddons--of course, *Aurora Floyd*, which has penetrated to every isle of the Pacific, a good many cheap detective books, *Rob Roy*, Auerbach's *Auf der Hohe* in the German, and a prize temperance story, pillaged (to judge by the stamp) from an Anglo-Indian circulating library.

"The Admiralty man gives a fine picture of our island," remarked Nares, who had turned up Midway Island. "He draws the dreariness rather mild, but you can make out he knows the place."

"Captain," I cried, "you've struck another point in this mad business. See here," I went on eagerly, drawing from my pocket a crumpled fragment of the *Daily Occidental* which I had inherited from Jim: "'misled by Hoyt's Pacific Directory'? Where's Hoyt?"

"Let's look into that," said Nares. "I got that book on purpose for this cruise." Therewith he fetched it from the shelf in his berth, turned to Midway Island, and read the account aloud. It stated with precision that the Pacific Mail Company were about to form a depot there, in preference to Honolulu, and that they had already a station on the island.

"I wonder who gives these Directory men their information," Nares reflected. "Nobody can blame Trent after that. I never got in company with squarer lying; it reminds a man of a presidential campaign."

"All very well," said I. "That's your Hoyt, and a fine, tall copy. But what I want to know is, where is Trent's Hoyt?"

"Took it with him," chuckled Nares. "He had left everything else, bills and money and all the rest; he was bound to take something, or it would have aroused attention on the Tempest: 'Happy thought,' says he, 'let's take Hoyt.'"

"And has it not occurred to you," I went on, "that all the Hoyts in creation couldn't have misled Trent, since he had in his hand that red admiralty book, an official publication, later in date, and particularly full on Midway Island?"

"That's a fact!" cried Nares; "and I bet the first Hoyt he ever saw was out of the mercantile library of San Francisco. Looks as if he had brought her here on purpose, don't it? But then that's inconsistent with the steam-crusher of the sale. That's the trouble with this brig racket; any one can make half a dozen theories for sixty or seventy per cent of it; but when they're made, there's always a fathom or two of slack hanging out of the other end."

I believe our attention fell next on the papers, of which we had altogether a considerable bulk. I had hoped to find among these matter for a full-length character of Captain Trent; but here I was doomed, on the whole, to disappointment. We could make out he was an orderly man,

for all his bills were docketed and preserved. That he was convivial, and inclined to be frugal even in conviviality, several documents proclaimed. Such letters as we found were, with one exception, arid notes from tradesmen. The exception, signed Hannah Trent, was a somewhat fervid appeal for a loan. "You know what misfortunes I have had to bear," wrote Hannah, "and how much I am disappointed in George. The landlady appeared a true friend when I first came here, and I thought her a perfect lady. But she has come out since then in her true colours; and if you will not be softened by this last appeal, I can't think what is to become of your affectionate----" and then the signature. This document was without place or date, and a voice told me that it had gone likewise without answer. On the whole, there were few letters anywhere in the ship; but we found one before we were finished, in a seaman's chest, of which I must transcribe some sentences. It was dated from some place on the Clyde. "My dearist son," it ran, "this is to tell you your dearist father passed away, Jan twelft, in the peace of the Lord. He had your photo and dear David's lade upon his bed, made me sit by him. Let's be a' thegither, he said, and gave you all his blessing. O my dear laddie, why were nae you and Davie here? He would have had a happier passage. He spok of both of ye all night most beautiful, and how ye used to stravaig on the Saturday afternoons, and of auld Kelvinside. Sooth the tune to me, he said, though it was the Sabbath, and I had to sooth him Kelvin Grove, and he looked at his fiddle, the dear man. I cannae bear the sight of it, he'll never play it mair. O my lamb, come home to me, I'm all by my lane now." The rest was in a religious vein and quite

conventional. I have never seen any one more put out than Nares, when I handed him this letter; he had read but a few words, before he cast it down; it was perhaps a minute ere he picked it up again, and the performance was repeated the third time before he reached the end.

"It's touching, isn't it?" said I.

For all answer, Nares exploded in a brutal oath; and it was some half an hour later that he vouchsafed an explanation. "I'll tell you what broke me up about that letter," said he. "My old man played the fiddle, played it all out of tune: one of the things he played was Martyrdom, I remember--it was all martyrdom to me. He was a pig of a father, and I was a pig of a son; but it sort of came over me I would like to hear that fiddle squeak again. Natural," he added; "I guess we're all beasts."

"All sons are, I guess," said I. "I have the same trouble on my conscience: we can shake hands on that." Which (oddly enough, perhaps) we did.

Amongst the papers we found a considerable sprinkling of photographs; for the most part either of very debonair-looking young ladies or old women of the lodging-house persuasion. But one among them was the means of our crowning discovery.

"They're not pretty, are they, Mr. Dodd?" said Nares, as he passed it over.

"Who?" I asked, mechanically taking the card (it was a quarter-plate) in hand, and smothering a yawn; for the hour was late, the day had been laborious, and I was wearying for bed.

"Trent and Company," said he. "That's a historic picture of the gang."

I held it to the light, my curiosity at a low ebb: I had seen Captain Trent once, and had no delight in viewing him again. It was a photograph of the deck of the brig, taken from forward: all in apple-pie order; the hands gathered in the waist, the officers on the poop. At the foot of the card was written "Brig Flying Scud, Rangoon," and a date; and above or below each individual figure the name had been carefully noted.

As I continued to gaze, a shock went through me; the dimness of sleep and fatigue lifted from my eyes, as fog lifts in the channel; and I beheld with startled clearness the photographic presentment of a crowd of strangers. "J. Trent, Master" at the top of the card directed me to a smallish, weazened man, with bushy eyebrows and full white beard, dressed in a frock coat and white trousers; a flower stuck in his button-hole, his bearded chin set forward, his mouth clenched with habitual determination. There was not much of the sailor in his looks, but plenty of the martinet: a dry, precise man, who might pass for a preacher in some rigid sect; and whatever he was, not the Captain

Trent of San Francisco. The men, too, were all new to me: the cook, an unmistakable Chinaman, in his characteristic dress, standing apart on the poop steps. But perhaps I turned on the whole with the greatest curiosity to the figure labelled "E. Goddedaal, 1st off." He whom I had never seen, he might be the identical; he might be the clue and spring of all this mystery; and I scanned his features with the eye of a detective. He was of great stature, seemingly blonde as a viking, his hair clustering round his head in frowsy curls, and two enormous whiskers, like the tusks of some strange animal, jutting from his cheeks. With these virile appendages and the defiant attitude in which he stood, the expression of his face only imperfectly harmonised. It was wild, heroic, and womanish looking; and I felt I was prepared to hear he was a sentimentalist, and to see him weep.

For some while I digested my discovery in private, reflecting how best, and how with most of drama, I might share it with the captain. Then my sketch-book came in my head; and I fished it out from where it lay, with other miscellaneous possessions, at the foot of my bunk and turned to my sketch of Captain Trent and the survivors of the British brig Flying Scud in the San Francisco bar-room.

"Nares," said I, "I've told you how I first saw Captain Trent in that saloon in 'Frisco? how he came with his men, one of them a Kanaka with a canary-bird in a cage? and how I saw him afterwards at the auction, frightened to death, and as much surprised at how the figures skipped up as anybody there? Well," said I, "there's the man I saw"--and I laid

the sketch before him--"there's Trent of 'Frisco and there are his three hands. Find one of them in the photograph, and I'll be obliged."

Nares compared the two in silence. "Well," he said at last, "I call this rather a relief: seems to clear the horizon. We might have guessed at something of the kind from the double ration of chests that figured."

"Does it explain anything?" I asked.

"It would explain everything," Nares replied, "but for the steam-crusher. It'll all tally as neat as a patent puzzle, if you leave out the way these people bid the wreck up. And there we come to a stone wall. But whatever it is, Mr. Dodd, it's on the crook."

"And looks like piracy," I added.

"Looks like blind hookey!" cried the captain. "No, don't you deceive yourself; neither your head nor mine is big enough to put a name on this business."