

## CHAPTER XVI. IN WHICH I TURN SMUGGLER, AND THE CAPTAIN CASUIST

The last night at Midway, I had little sleep; the next morning, after the sun was risen, and the clatter of departure had begun to reign on deck, I lay a long while dozing; and when at last I stepped from the companion, the schooner was already leaping through the pass into the open sea. Close on her board, the huge scroll of a breaker unfurled itself along the reef with a prodigious clamour; and behind I saw the wreck vomiting into the morning air a coil of smoke. The wreaths already blew out far to leeward, flames already glittered in the cabin skylight; and the sea-fowl were scattered in surprise as wide as the lagoon. As we drew farther off, the conflagration of the Flying Scud flamed higher; and long after we had dropped all signs of Midway Island, the smoke still hung in the horizon like that of a distant steamer. With the fading out of that last vestige, the *Norah Creina*, passed again into the empty world of cloud and water by which she had approached; and the next features that appeared, eleven days later, to break the line of sky, were the arid mountains of Oahu.

It has often since been a comfortable thought to me that we had thus destroyed the tell-tale remnants of the Flying Scud; and often a strange one that my last sight and reminiscence of that fatal ship should be a pillar of smoke on the horizon. To so many others besides myself the same appearance had played a part in the various stages of that

business: luring some to what they little imagined, filling some with unimaginable terrors. But ours was the last smoke raised in the story; and with its dying away the secret of the Flying Scud became a private property.

It was by the first light of dawn that we saw, close on board, the metropolitan island of Hawaii. We held along the coast, as near as we could venture, with a fresh breeze and under an unclouded heaven; beholding, as we went, the arid mountain sides and scrubby cocoa-palms of that somewhat melancholy archipelago. About four of the afternoon we turned Waimanolo Point, the westerly headland of the great bight of Honolulu; showed ourselves for twenty minutes in full view; and then fell again to leeward, and put in the rest of daylight, plying under shortened sail under the lee of Waimanolo.

A little after dark we beat once more about the point, and crept cautiously toward the mouth of the Pearl Lochs, where Jim and I had arranged I was to meet the smugglers. The night was happily obscure, the water smooth. We showed, according to instructions, no light on deck: only a red lantern dropped from either cathead to within a couple of feet of the water. A lookout was stationed on the bowsprit end, another in the crosstrees; and the whole ship's company crowded forward, scouting for enemies or friends. It was now the crucial moment of our enterprise; we were now risking liberty and credit; and that for a sum so small to a man in my bankrupt situation, that I could have laughed aloud in bitterness. But the piece had been arranged, and we must play

it to the finish.

For some while, we saw nothing but the dark mountain outline of the island, the torches of native fishermen glittering here and there along the foreshore, and right in the midst that cluster of brave lights with which the town of Honolulu advertises itself to the seaward. Presently a ruddy star appeared inshore of us, and seemed to draw near unsteadily. This was the anticipated signal; and we made haste to show the countersign, lowering a white light from the quarter, extinguishing the two others, and laying the schooner incontinently to. The star approached slowly; the sounds of oars and of men's speech came to us across the water; and then a voice hailed us.

"Is that Mr. Dodd?"

"Yes," I returned. "Is Jim Pinkerton there?"

"No, sir," replied the voice. "But there's one of his crowd here; name of Speedy."

"I'm here, Mr. Dodd," added Speedy himself. "I have letters for you."

"All right," I replied. "Come aboard, gentlemen, and let me see my mail."

A whaleboat accordingly ranged alongside, and three men boarded us: my

old San Francisco friend, the stock-gambler Speedy, a little wizened person of the name of Sharpe, and a big, flourishing, dissipated-looking man called Fowler. The two last (I learned afterward) were frequent partners; Sharpe supplied the capital, and Fowler, who was quite a character in the islands and occupied a considerable station, brought activity, daring, and a private influence, highly necessary in the case. Both seemed to approach the business with a keen sense of romance; and I believe this was the chief attraction, at least with Fowler--for whom I early conceived a sentiment of liking. But in that first moment I had something else to think of than to judge my new acquaintances; and before Speedy had fished out the letters, the full extent of our misfortune was revealed.

"We've rather bad news for you, Mr. Dodd," said Fowler. "Your firm's gone up."

"Already!" I exclaimed.

"Well, it was thought rather a wonder Pinkerton held on as long as he did," was the reply. "The wreck deal was too big for your credit; you were doing a big business, no doubt, but you were doing it on precious little capital; and when the strain came, you were bound to go.

Pinkerton's through all right: seven cents dividend; some remarks made, but nothing to hurt; the press let you down easy--I guess Jim had relations there. The only trouble is, that all this Flying Scud affair got in the papers with the rest; everybody's wide awake in Honolulu, and

the sooner we get the stuff in and the dollars out, the better for all concerned."

"Gentlemen," said I, "you must excuse me. My friend, the captain here, will drink a glass of champagne with you to give you patience; but as for myself, I am unfit even for ordinary conversation till I have read these letters."

They demurred a little: and indeed the danger of delay seemed obvious; but the sight of my distress, which I was unable entirely to control, appealed strongly to their good-nature; and I was suffered at last to get by myself on deck, where, by the light of a lantern smuggled under shelter of the low rail, I read the following wretched correspondence.

"My dear Loudon," ran the first, "this will be handed you by your friend Speedy of the Catamount. His sterling character and loyal devotion to yourself pointed him out as the best man for our purposes in Honolulu--the parties on the spot being difficult to manipulate. A man called Billy Fowler (you must have heard of Billy) is the boss; he is in politics some, and squares the officers. I have hard times before me in the city, but I feel as bright as a dollar and as strong as John L. Sullivan. What with Mamie here, and my partner speeding over the seas, and the bonanza in the wreck, I feel like I could juggle with the Pyramids of Egypt, same as conjurers do with aluminium balls. My earnest prayers follow you, Loudon, that you may feel the way I do--just inspired! My feet don't touch the ground; I kind of swim. Mamie is like

Moses and Aaron that held up the other individual's arms. She carries me along like a horse and buggy. I am beating the record.

"Your true partner,

"J. PINKERTON."

Number two was in a different style:--

"My dearest Loudon, how am I to prepare you for this dire intelligence? O dear me, it will strike you to the earth. The Fiat has gone forth; our firm went bust at a quarter before twelve. It was a bill of Bradley's (for \$200) that brought these vast operations to a close, and evolved liabilities of upwards of two hundred and fifty thousand. O, the shame and pity of it! and you but three weeks gone! Loudon, don't blame your partner: if human hands and brains could have sufficed, I would have held the thing together. But it just slowly crumbled; Bradley was the last kick, but the blamed business just MELTED. I give the liabilities; it's supposed they're all in; for the cowards were waiting, and the claims were filed like taking tickets to hear Patti. I don't quite have the hang of the assets yet, our interests were so extended; but I am at it day and night, and I guess will make a creditable dividend. If the wreck pans out only half the way it ought, we'll turn the laugh still. I am as full of grit and work as ever, and just tower above our troubles. Mamie is a host in herself. Somehow I feel like it was only me that had gone bust, and you and she soared clear of it. Hurry up. That's all you

have to do.

"Yours ever,

"J. PINKERTON."

The third was yet more altered:--

"My poor Loudon," it began, "I labour far into the night getting our affairs in order; you could not believe their vastness and complexity. Douglas B. Longhurst said humorously that the receiver's work would be cut out for him. I cannot deny that some of them have a speculative look. God forbid a sensitive, refined spirit like yours should ever come face to face with a Commissioner in Bankruptcy; these men get all the sweetness knocked right out of them. But I could bear up better if it weren't for press comments. Often and often, Loudon, I recall to mind your most legitimate critiques of the press system. They published an interview with me, not the least like what I said, and with JEERING comments; it would make your blood boil, it was literally INHUMANE; I wouldn't have written it about a yellow dog that was in trouble like what I am. Mamie just winced, the first time she has turned a hair right through the whole catastrophe. How wonderfully true was what you said long ago in Paris, about touching on people's personal appearance! The fellow said--" And then these words had been scored through; and my distressed friend turned to another subject. "I cannot bear to dwell upon our assets. They simply don't show up. Even Thirteen Star, as sound

a line as can be produced upon this coast, goes begging. The wreck has thrown a blight on all we ever touched. And where's the use? God never made a wreck big enough to fill our deficit. I am haunted by the thought that you may blame me; I know how I despised your remonstrances. O, Loudon, don't be hard on your miserable partner. The funny-dog business is what kills. I fear your stern rectitude of mind like the eye of God.

I cannot think but what some of my books seem mixed up; otherwise, I don't seem to see my way as plain as I could wish to. Or else my brain is gone soft. Loudon, if there should be any unpleasantness, you can trust me to do the right thing and keep you clear. I've been telling them already, how you had no business grip and never saw the books. O, I trust I have done right in this! I knew it was a liberty; I know you may justly complain; but it was some things that were said. And mind you, all legitimate business! Not even your shrinking sensitiveness could find fault with the first look of one of them, if they had panned out right. And you know, the Flying Scud was the biggest gamble of the crowd, and that was your own idea. Mamie says she never could bear to look you in the face, if that idea had been mine, she is SO conscientious!

"Your broken-hearted

"JIM."

The last began without formality:--



"This is the end of me commercially. I give up; my nerve is gone. I suppose I ought to be glad; for we're through the court. I don't know as ever I knew how, and I'm sure I don't remember. If it pans out--the wreck, I mean--we'll go to Europe, and live on the interest of our money. No more work for me. I shake when people speak to me. I have gone on, hoping and hoping, and working and working, and the lead has pinched right out. I want to lie on my back in a garden and read Shakespeare and E. P. Roe. Don't suppose it's cowardice, Loudon. I'm a sick man. Rest is what I must have. I've worked hard all my life; I never spared myself; every dollar I ever made, I've coined my brains for it. I've never done a mean thing; I've lived respectable, and given to the poor. Who has a better right to a holiday than I have? And I mean to have a year of it straight out; and if I don't, I shall lie right down here in my tracks, and die of worry and brain trouble. Don't mistake. That's so. If there are any pickings at all, TRUST SPEEDY; don't let the creditors get wind of what there is. I helped you when you were down; help me now. Don't deceive yourself; you've got to help me right now, or never. I am clerking, and NOT FIT TO CYPHER. Mamie's typewriting at the Phoenix Guano Exchange, down town. The light is right out of my life. I know you'll not like to do what I propose. Think only of this; that it's life or death for

"JIM PINKERTON.

"P.S. Our figure was seven per cent. O, what a fall was there! Well, well, it's past mending; I don't want to whine. But, Loudon, I do want

to live. No more ambition; all I ask is life. I have so much to make it sweet to me! I am clerking, and USELESS AT THAT. I know I would have fired such a clerk inside of forty minutes, in MY time. But my time's over. I can only cling on to you. Don't fail

"JIM PINKERTON."

There was yet one more postscript, yet one more outburst of self-pity and pathetic adjuration; and a doctor's opinion, unpromising enough, was besides enclosed. I pass them both in silence. I think shame to have shown, at so great length, the half-baked virtues of my friend dissolving in the crucible of sickness and distress; and the effect upon my spirits can be judged already. I got to my feet when I had done, drew a deep breath, and stared hard at Honolulu. One moment the world seemed at an end; the next, I was conscious of a rush of independent energy. On Jim I could rely no longer; I must now take hold myself. I must decide and act on my own better thoughts.

The word was easy to say; the thing, at the first blush, was undiscoverable. I was overwhelmed with miserable, womanish pity for my broken friend; his outcries grieved my spirit; I saw him then and now--then, so invincible; now, brought so low--and knew neither how to refuse, nor how to consent to his proposal. The remembrance of my father, who had fallen in the same field unstained, the image of his monument incongruously rising, a fear of the law, a chill air that seemed to blow upon my fancy from the doors of prisons, and the

imaginary clank of fetters, recalled me to a different resolve. And then again, the wails of my sick partner intervened. So I stood hesitating, and yet with a strong sense of capacity behind: sure, if I could but choose my path, that I should walk in it with resolution.

Then I remembered that I had a friend on board, and stepped to the companion.

"Gentlemen," said I, "only a few moments more: but these, I regret to say, I must make more tedious still by removing your companion. It is indispensable that I should have a word or two with Captain Nares."

Both the smugglers were afoot at once, protesting. The business, they declared, must be despatched at once; they had run risk enough, with a conscience; and they must either finish now, or go.

"The choice is yours, gentlemen," said I, "and, I believe, the eagerness. I am not yet sure that I have anything in your way; even if I have, there are a hundred things to be considered; and I assure you it is not at all my habit to do business with a pistol to my head."

"That is all very proper, Mr. Dodd; there is no wish to coerce you, believe me," said Fowler; "only, please consider our position. It is really dangerous; we were not the only people to see your schooner off Waimanolo."

"Mr. Fowler," I replied, "I was not born yesterday. Will you allow me to express an opinion, in which I may be quite wrong, but to which I am entirely wedded? If the custom-house officers had been coming, they would have been here now. In other words, somebody is working the oracle, and (for a good guess) his name is Fowler."

Both men laughed loud and long; and being supplied with another bottle of Longhurst's champagne, suffered the captain and myself to leave them without further word.

I gave Nares the correspondence, and he skimmed it through.

"Now, captain," said I, "I want a fresh mind on this. What does it mean?"

"It's large enough text," replied the captain. "It means you're to stake your pile on Speedy, hand him over all you can, and hold your tongue. I almost wish you hadn't shown it me," he added wearily. "What with the specie from the wreck and the opium money, it comes to a biggish deal."

"That's supposing that I do it?" said I.

"Exactly," said he, "supposing you do it."

"And there are pros and cons to that," I observed.

"There's San Quentin, to start in with," said the captain; "and suppose you clear the penitentiary, there's the nasty taste in the mouth. The figure's big enough to make bad trouble, but it's not big enough to be picturesque; and I should guess a man always feels kind of small who has sold himself under six cyphers. That would be my way, at least; there's an excitement about a million that might carry me on; but the other way, I should feel kind of lonely when I woke in bed. Then there's Speedy. Do you know him well?"

"No, I do not," said I.

"Well, of course he can vamoose with the entire speculation, if he chooses," pursued the captain, "and if he don't I can't see but what you've got to support and bed and board with him to the end of time. I guess it would weary me. Then there's Mr. Pinkerton, of course. He's been a good friend to you, hasn't he? Stood by you, and all that? and pulled you through for all he was worth?"

"That he has," I cried; "I could never begin telling you my debt to him!"

"Well, and that's a consideration," said the captain. "As a matter of principle, I wouldn't look at this business at the money. 'Not good enough,' would be my word. But even principle goes under when it comes to friends--the right sort, I mean. This Pinkerton is frightened, and

he seems sick; the medico don't seem to care a cent about his state of health; and you've got to figure how you would like it if he came to die. Remember, the risk of this little swindle is all yours; it's no sort of risk to Mr. Pinkerton. Well, you've got to put it that way plainly, and see how you like the sound of it: my friend Pinkerton is in danger of the New Jerusalem, I am in danger of San Quentin; which risk do I propose to run?"

"That's an ugly way to put it," I objected, "and perhaps hardly fair. There's right and wrong to be considered."

"Don't know the parties," replied Nares; "and I'm coming to them, anyway. For it strikes me, when it came to smuggling opium, you walked right up?"

"So I did," I said; "sick I am to have to say it!"

"All the same," continued Nares, "you went into the opium-smuggling with your head down; and a good deal of fussing I've listened to, that you hadn't more of it to smuggle. Now, maybe your partner's not quite fixed the same as you are; maybe he sees precious little difference between the one thing and the other."

"You could not say truer: he sees none, I do believe," cried I; "and though I see one, I could never tell you how."

"We never can," said the oracular Nares; "taste is all a matter of opinion. But the point is, how will your friend take it? You refuse a favour, and you take the high horse at the same time; you disappoint him, and you rap him over the knuckles. It won't do, Mr. Dodd; no friendship can stand that. You must be as good as your friend, or as bad as your friend, or start on a fresh deal without him."

"I don't see it!" said I. "You don't know Jim!"

"Well, you WILL see," said Nares. "And now, here's another point. This bit of money looks mighty big to Mr. Pinkerton; it may spell life or health to him; but among all your creditors, I don't see that it amounts to a hill of beans--I don't believe it'll pay their car-fares all round. And don't you think you'll ever get thanked. You were known to pay a long price for the chance of rummaging that wreck; you do the rummaging, you come home, and you hand over ten thousand--or twenty, if you like--a part of which you'll have to own up you made by smuggling; and, mind! you'll never get Billy Fowler to stick his name to a receipt. Now just glance at the transaction from the outside, and see what a clear case it makes. Your ten thousand is a sop; and people will only wonder you were so damned impudent as to offer such a small one! Whichever way you take it, Mr. Dodd, the bottom's out of your character; so there's one thing less to be considered."

"I daresay you'll scarce believe me," said I, "but I feel that a positive relief."

"You must be made some way different from me, then," returned Nares. "And, talking about me, I might just mention how I stand. You'll have no trouble from me--you've trouble enough of your own; and I'm friend enough, when a friend's in need, to shut my eyes and go right where he tells me. All the same, I'm rather queerly fixed. My owners'll have to rank with the rest on their charter-party. Here am I, their representative! and I have to look over the ship's side while the bankrupt walks his assets ashore in Mr. Speedy's hat-box. It's a thing I wouldn't do for James G. Blaine; but I'll do it for you, Mr. Dodd, and only sorry I can't do more."

"Thank you, captain; my mind is made up," said I. "I'll go straight, RUAT COELUM! I never understood that old tag before to-night."

"I hope it isn't my business that decides you?" asked the captain.

"I'll never deny it was an element," said I. "I hope, I hope I'm not cowardly; I hope I could steal for Jim myself; but when it comes to dragging in you and Speedy, and this one and the other, why, Jim has got to die, and there's an end. I'll try and work for him when I get to 'Frisco, I suppose; and I suppose I'll fail, and look on at his death, and kick myself: it can't be helped--I'll fight it on this line."

"I don't say as you're wrong," replied Nares, "and I'll be hanged if



I know if you're right. It suits me anyway. And look here--hadn't you better just show our friends over the side?" he added; "no good of being at the risk and worry of smuggling for the benefit of creditors."

"I don't think of the creditors," said I. "But I've kept this pair so long, I haven't got the brass to fire them now."

Indeed, I believe that was my only reason for entering upon a transaction which was now outside my interest, but which (as it chanced) repaid me fifty-fold in entertainment. Fowler and Sharpe were both preternaturally sharp; they did me the honour in the beginning to attribute to myself their proper vices; and before we were done had grown to regard me with an esteem akin to worship. This proud position I attained by no more recondite arts, than telling the mere truth and unaffectedly displaying my indifference to the result. I have doubtless stated the essentials of all good diplomacy, which may be rather regarded, therefore, as a grace of state, than the effect of management. For to tell the truth is not in itself diplomatic, and to have no care for the result a thing involuntary. When I mentioned, for instance, that I had but two hundred and forty pounds of drug, my smugglers exchanged meaning glances, as who should say, "Here is a foeman worthy of our steel!" But when I carelessly proposed thirty-five dollars a pound, as an amendment to their offered twenty, and wound up with the remark: "The whole thing is a matter of moonshine to me, gentlemen. Take it or want it, and fill your glasses"--I had the indescribable gratification to see Sharpe nudge Fowler warningly, and Fowler choke down the jovial

acceptance that stood ready on his lips, and lamely substitute a "No--no more wine, please, Mr. Dodd!" Nor was this all: for when the affair was settled at fifty dollars a pound--a shrewd stroke of business for my creditors--and our friends had got on board their whaleboat and shoved off, it appeared they were imperfectly acquainted with the conveyance of sound upon still water, and I had the joy to overhear the following testimonial.

"Deep man, that Dodd," said Sharpe.

And the bass-toned Fowler echoed, "Damned if I understand his game."

Thus we were left once more alone upon the *Norah Creina*; and the news of the night, and the lamentations of Pinkerton, and the thought of my own harsh decision, returned and besieged me in the dark. According to all the rubbish I had read, I should have been sustained by the warm consciousness of virtue. Alas, I had but the one feeling: that I had sacrificed my sick friend to the fear of prison-cells and stupid starers. And no moralist has yet advanced so far as to number cowardice amongst the things that are their own reward.