

***H. B. MARRIOTT
WATSON***

A photograph of a vast blue ocean under a clear, light blue sky. Several sailboats are visible on the horizon. In the foreground, a large sailboat with a dark sail and a blue stripe is prominent. Other smaller sailboats are scattered across the horizon line.

***HURRICANE
ISLAND***

H. B. Marriott Watson

Hurricane Island

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HURRICANE ISLAND

CHAPTER I

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"The Sea Queen"

Pember Street, E., is never very cheerful in appearance, not even in mid-spring, when the dingy lilacs in the forecourts of those grimy houses burgeon and blossom. The shrubs assimilate soon the general air of depression common to the neighbourhood. The smoke catches and turns them; they wilt or wither; and the bunches of flowers are sicklied over with the smuts and blacks of the roaring chimneys. The one open space within reach is the river, and thither I frequently repaired during the three years I practised in the East End. At least it was something to have that wide flood before one, the channel of great winds and the haunt of strange craft. The tide grew turbid under the Tower Bridge and rolled desolately about the barren wilderness of the Isle of Dogs; but it was for all that a breach in the continuity of ugly streets and houses, a wide road itself, on which tramped unknown and curious lives, passing to and fro between London and foreign parts.

Unless a man be in deadly earnest or very young, I cannot conceive a career more distressing to the imagination and crushing to the ambition than the practice of medicine in the East End. The bulk of my cases were club cases which enabled me to be sure of a living, and the rest were for the most part sordid and unpleasant subjects, springing out of the vile life of the district. Alien sailors abounded and quarrelled fiercely. Often and often have I been awakened in the dead hours to find drunken and

foreign-speaking men at my door, with one or more among them suffering from a dangerous knife-wound. And the point of it that came nearly home to me was that this career would not only lead to nothing, but was unprofitable in itself. I had taken the position in the hope that I might make something of it, but I found that it was all I could do to maintain my place. I made no charge for advice in my consultations, but took a little money on the medicine which I made up. Is any position to be conceived more degrading to a professional man? The one bright time in my week was of a Saturday, when I donned my best coat and gloves, took down my silkiest hat, and, discarding the fumes and flavours of the East, set out for Piccadilly. I still remained a member of a decent club, and here I lunched in my glory, talked with some human creatures, exchanged views on the affairs of the world, smoked and lolled in comfortable chairs—in short, took my enjoyment like a man-about-town, and then went back to earn my next week's holiday.

Punctually to a minute I must be in the surgery in Pember Street at six o'clock, and the horrid round must begin to circle again. I will confess that there was a time when I could have loved that career as a saunterer in West End streets. It appealed to me at five-and-twenty almost as a romantic profession. Other young men whom I had known, at school and college, had entered it, and some were, or appeared to be, signal stars in that galaxy of wealth and beauty. My means, however, denied me access, and at thirty I would have been content, after my experience of hardships and poverty, to settle in some comfortable suburb, not too distant from the sphere of radiance. As it was, I was in

chains in the slums of Wapping, and re-visited the glimpses of Piccadilly once a week.

When I rose on an evening in November to go down to the river almost for the last time, it was not a Saturday, but a Thursday, and the West End seemed still a long way off. I had finished my round of cases, and had sat waiting in my dingy surgery for patients. But none had come, and in the enforced meditation that ensued, as I reviewed my past and my prospects, my soul sickened in me. I wanted to breathe more freely—I wanted more air and something more cheerful than the low surgery lamp and the dismal lights that wagged in the street. I put on my hat and passed down to the river.

It was quite dark, and the easterly drift had obscured and dirtied the sky, so that when I came out by a landing which I knew now familiarly, I could see only the lights across the water, and some tall spars and funnels in the foreground. But the river at full tide champed audibly against the wharves, and the various sounds of that restless port assailed my ears—the roar of the unseen traffic behind me, the fluting and screaming of whistles, the mingled shouts, oaths, and orders in the distance, and the drone of that profound water under all.

I had stood for some minutes, drinking in the better air, when there were voices near, suddenly risen out of the flood, and I perceived two men had landed. They paused by me for one to relight his pipe, and in the flash of the match I gathered from the dresses that they were stevedores, newly come, no doubt, from unloading some vessel. But my attention was taken off them unexpectedly by a great flare

that went up into the sky apparently in mid-channel. It made a big bright flame, quite unusual in that resort of silent lights, and one of the stevedores commented on it.

"That'll be her," he said; "she was coming up round the Dogs in a la-di-da fashion. Maybe she'll fly rockets in another minute."

"Them steam-yachts are the jockeys to blue the money," responded his companion. "Nothink's good enough for them."

"What is it?" I asked.

"Only a Geordie brig straight from winning the America Cup, sir," said the first man with a facetious smile. "What did they make her out, Bill?"

Bill hesitated. "I think it was the *Sea Queen*," he said doubtfully, and added, in harmony with his companion's mood:

"They don't want to make themselves known, not by a long chalk."

With which, the flare having died down, they tramped away into the night with a civil leave-taking.

I followed them presently, moving along the road in the direction of the docks. When I reached the entrance I paused, and the gatekeeper addressed me.

"Going in, doctor? Got a call?"

I recognised him in the dimness of his lamp as a man whom I had attended for an accident, and I gave him good evening.

"No," said I, "but I want some air. I think I will, if you don't mind."

"Welcome, sir," said he cheerily, and I found myself on the other side of the gateway.

I walked along the vacant stretch of ground, lit only by dull gas-lamps, and, passing the low office buildings and storing sheds, came out by the water-basins. Here was a scene of some bustle and disorder, but it was farther on that the spectators were engaged in a knot, for the caisson was drifting round, and a handsome vessel was floating in, her funnel backed against the grey darkness and her spars in a ghostly silhouette. The name I heard on several sides roused in me a faint curiosity. It was the stranger I had observed, the *Sea Queen*, the subject of the stevedores' pleasantries.

"A pretty boat," said I to my neighbour. "What is she?"

He shook his head. "*Sea Queen* out of Hamburg," he said, "and a pleasure yacht from the look of her. But what she does here beats me."

The caisson closed, and the steam-yacht warped up slowly to the pier. There was little or no noise on her, only a voice raised occasionally in an authoritative command, and the rattling of chains that paid out through the donkey-engine. Idly I moved to the stone quay when the gangway was let down, but only one man descended. The passengers, if there had been any, had long since reached town from Tilbury, saving themselves that uninteresting trudge up the winding river-lane.

I moved on to where a steamer was being loaded under the electric lights, and watched the same for some time with interest; then, taking out my watch, I examined it, and came to the conclusion that if I was to see any patients that

evening at all I must at once get back to my unpalatable rooms. I began to go along the pier, and passed into the shadow of the *Sea Queen*, now sunk in quiet, and drab and dark. As I went, a port-hole in the stern almost on the level of my eyes gleamed like a moon, and of a sudden there was an outbreak of angry voices, one threatening volubly and the other deeper and slower, but equally hostile. It was not that the altercation was anything astonishing in human life, but I think it was the instantaneous flash of that light and those voices in a dead ship that pulled me up. I stared into the port-hole, and as I did so the face of a man passed across it 'twixt the light and me; it passed and vanished; and I walked on. As I turned to go down to the gates I was aware of the approaching fog. I had seen it scores of times in that abominable low-lying part of the town, and I knew the symptoms. There was a faint smell in the air, an odour that bit the nostrils, carrying the reek of that changeless wilderness of factories and houses. The opaque grey sky lost its greyness and was struck to a lurid yellow. Banks of high fog rolled up the east and moved menacingly, almost imperceptibly, upon the town. For a moment there were dim shadows of the wharves and the riverside houses, with a church tower dimmer still behind them, and then the billows of the fog descended and swallowed up all.

I moved now in a blackness, but bore to the right, in which direction I knew were the dock sheds and safety. I seemed to have been feeling my way for a long time—quite ten minutes—and yet I did not come upon anything. I began to be seized with the fear of a blind man who is helpless in vacancy. Had I left the basin in my rear, or had I somehow

wandered back towards it, and would another step take me over into the water? I shrank from the thought of that cold plunge, and, putting out my stick on all sides, tapped and tapped, and went on foot by foot. I was still upon the stone, when I should have reached the sheds, or at least have got upon the earth again, with the roadway running to the gates. Angry at my own folly for lingering so long about the ships, I continued cautiously forward, trying each step of the way. Presently I heard a sound of footsteps before me, and then a voice raised in a stave of song. There followed a loud oath and the splash of a heavy body in water.

Plainly the basin was, then, in front of me, and some one had fallen in. The poor wretch was doomed to drown in that horrid and impenetrable darkness. I shuddered at the thought of that fate, and moved faster under the whip of impulse. The next moment I brought sharply up against a stone post by which ships were warped in and fastened. Below was the water, and now I could hear the sound of splashing, and a voice raised in a cry of terror. Round the post was coiled a heavy rope which I loosened as rapidly as was possible and began to lower over the edge of the basin.

"This way," I called; "make this way. Here is the pier," but the splashing continued, and a smother of sound came to me, as if the swimmer were under water, and his voice stifled. Almost without thinking, I gripped the thick, tarry rope and let myself over the basin, until I had reached the surface of the water.

"This way," I called; "if you can get here, I can save you."

The noise seemed to come from some little distance out, and now I was in the water myself, with the cable in my

hand, striking out feverishly and awkwardly in the direction of the struggling man. I came upon him in a dozen strokes, and the first news I had of him was a kick in the shoulder that almost tore me from my rope. The next moment I had him by the collar and without more ado was retracing my way, towing a violent mass of humanity behind me. It was only by dint of hard work and by propping him in my arms that I at last landed him on the pier, and then I succeeded in following myself, very sore and stiff and cold.

The first words that sprang from the prostrate figure on the quay were some incoherent oaths, which ultimately took form. "Curse Legrand, curse him!"

"Come," said I; "if you are well enough to swear you are well enough to travel, and we are both of us in a case for treatment."

"I can't see you," said a voice, in a grumbling way, "but you saved me. Pull along, and I'll do my best to follow. Where the dickens are we?"

I groped and helped him to his feet. "Give me your arm," said I; "we can't afford to go in again, either of us."

"Were you in too?" he asked stupidly.

"Well, what do *you* think?" I replied with a little laugh, and began to walk, this time, determinately at right angles from the basin.

He said nothing more, but hung on my arm pretty limp, as we struggled through the darkness, and presently we both fell over a bale of goods.

"So far so good," I said, picking him up; "we must be in the neighbourhood of the sheds. Now to find them, and creep along in their protection."

We struck the buildings immediately after, and I had no difficulty in working my way to the end. That took us to dry ground, or, at least, to the sloppy ground at the bottom of the docks. By good fortune we now hit upon the roadway, and it was to me a delight to hear the ring of the hard macadam under our squelching boots. I was now almost cheerful, for I was sure that I could not wander from the road, and, sure enough, we were advertised of our position and heralded all the way by the meagre lamps at intervals. Soon after we reached the gates, which were opened by my friend.

He peered into our faces. "It was a call, sure enough," said I, laughing. "And here's my patient."

When we got into the road the fog had slightly lifted, and I had less difficulty in picking my way home than I had anticipated. Once in the surgery, I turned up the lamp and poked the fire into a blaze, after which I looked at my companion. It was with a sense of familiarity that I recognised his face as that which I had seen flitting across the port-hole of the *Sea Queen*. He sat back in the chair in which I had placed him and stared weakly about the room. The steam went up from both of us.

"Look here," said I, "if we stay so, we are dead or rheumatic men"; and I went into my bedroom, changed myself, and brought him some garments of my own. These he put on, talking now in the garrulous voice I had heard on the yacht, but somewhat disconnectedly.

"It's awfully good of you ... a Good Samaritan," and here a vacant laugh. "I wonder if these things.... How did I go

over? I thought I was going straight. It must have been that infernal fog.... Where the dickens are we?"

"You are in my house," said I, "but you might be at the bottom of the basin."

"Good heavens!" he said, with a laugh. "I feel mighty shivery. Don't you think a drop of something——"

I looked at him closely. "I think it wouldn't be a bad idea in the circumstances," I said.

"Oh, I know I had too much to carry!" he said recklessly. "It made me quarrel with that wretched Legrand, too—a fat-headed fool!"

I rang for water, and mixed two hot jorums of whisky, one of which he sipped contentedly.

"You see, we had a rousing time coming over," he observed, as if in apology. I looked my question, and he answered it. "Hamburg, in the *Sea Queen*. The old man skipped at Tilbury, and Barraclough's a real blazer."

"Which accounts for the blaze I saw," I remarked drily.

"Oh, you saw that. Yes, it was that that made Legrand mad. He's particular. But what's the odds? The boss has to pay."

His eyes roamed about the shabby room—shabby from the wretched pictures on the walls to the threadbare carpet underfoot, and, though he was not a gentleman, I felt some feeling of irritation. Perhaps if he had been a gentleman I should not have been put out at this scrutiny of my poverty.

"You saved me, and that's certain," he began again. "Say, are you a doctor?"

I admitted it.

"Well, can you recommend another glass of toddy?" he asked, smiling, and his smile was pleasant.

"In the circumstances again—perhaps," I said.

"Oh, I know I played the fool," he conceded. "But it isn't often I do. I must have gone off in the fog. How did you get at me?"

I told him.

"That was plucky," he said admiringly. "I don't know two folks I'd risk the same for."

"There wasn't much risk," I answered. "It was only a question of taking a cold bath out of season."

"Well!" he said, and whistled. "There's white people everywhere, I guess. Business good?"

The question was abrupt, and I could not avoid it. "You have your answer," I replied, with a gesture at the room, and taking out my cigar-case I offered him one.

He accepted it, bit off the end, and spat it on the floor, as if preoccupied. His brow wrinkled, as if the mental exercise were unusual and difficult.

"The *Sea Queen* is a rum bird," he said presently, "but there's plenty of money behind. And she wants a doctor."

"Well," said I, smiling at him.

"We left a Scotch chap sick at Hamburg," he continued. "The boss is a secret beggar, with pots of money, they say. We chartered out of the Clyde, and picked him up at Hamburg—him and others."

"A pleasure yacht?" I inquired.

"You may call it that. If it ain't that I don't know what it is, and I ought to know, seeing I am purser. We've all signed on for twelve months, anyway. Now, doctor, we want a doctor."

He laughed, as if this had been a joke, and I stared at him. "You mean," said I slowly, "that I might apply."

"If it's worth your while," said he. "You know best."

"Well, I don't know about that," I replied. "It depends on a good many things."

All the same I knew that I did know best. The whole of my discontent, latent and seething for years, surged up in me. Here was the wretched practice by which I earned a miserable pittance, bad food, and low company. On the pleasure yacht I should at least walk among equals, and feel myself a civilised being. I could dispose of my goodwill for a small sum, and after twelve months—well, something might turn up. At any rate, I should have a year's respite, a year's holiday.

I looked across at the purser of the *Sea Queen*, with his good-looking, easy-natured face, his sleek black hair, and his rather flabby white face, and still I hesitated.

"I can make it a dead bird," he said, wagging his head, "and you'll find it pretty comfortable."

"Where are you going? The Mediterranean?" I asked.

"I haven't the least idea," he said with a frank yawn. "But if your tickets are all right you can bet on the place."

"I'm agreeable," I said, in a matter-of-fact voice.

"Good man!" said he, with some of his former sparkle of interest. "And now we'll have another to toast it, and then I must be off."

"Don't you think you'd better stay here the night?" I asked. "I can put you up. And the fog's thicker."

"Thanks, old man," he replied with easy familiarity, "I would like a roost, only I've got an engagement. I wired to

some one, you know." And he winked at me wickedly.

"Very well," said I. "If you have an appointment, I would suggest that we leave over the toast."

"You're right," he said ingenuously. "But it was a nasty bath. All serene. I'll fix that up. By the way," he paused on his road to the door, "I haven't your name."

"Nor I yours," I answered. "Mine's Richard Phillimore."

"Mine's Lane," he said. "Qualified?"

"M.B. London," I replied.

"Good for you. That'll make it easier. I suppose I can go in your togs."

"You're welcome," I said, "though they don't fit you very well."

"Oh, I'm a bit smaller than you, I know, but all cats are grey in the dark, and it's infernally dark to-night! Well, so long, and I'm much obliged to you, I'm sure."

He swung out of the door with his free gait, and I stopped him.

"One word more. Who's your owner?"

"The boss? Oh, Morland—Morland, a regular millionaire."
With that he was gone.

CHAPTER II

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In the "Three Tuns"

The next day I had a full round of visits to make, so that I had little time to think over the adventure of the previous evening. On Saturday I made my way, as usual, to the West End, and spent the afternoon in luxury, basking in the renewal of my self-respect. I had leisure then to reflect, and, although the more I considered the less appeared the likelihood of any advantage to myself derivable out of Lane's promise, yet I allowed myself the satisfaction of certain inquiries. No one in the club had heard of Morland, the millionaire, and the *Sea Queen* was unknown to my yachting friends. Moreover, no Morland appeared in the "Court Guide." Still, it was quite possible, even probable, that he was an American; so that omission did not abash me. It was only when I rehearsed the circumstances in bald terms that I doubted to the point of incredulity. I had fished up a tipsy fellow, of a loose good-nature, who, under the stimulus of more whisky, had probably at the best offered more than he was entitled to do, and who, at the worst, had long since forgotten all about his Good Samaritan. The situation seemed easy of interpretation, and in the warmth of my pleasant intercourse with my companions I presently ceased to ponder it.

Yet, when I arrived at my house and opened the letter that awaited me, I will confess that I experienced a thrill of hope. It was from Hills, a firm of solicitors in Lincoln's Inn Fields, and, premising that I was a candidate for the post of

doctor in the SS. *Sea Queen*, requested me to call on Monday at three o'clock. This looked, so to speak, like business, and I attended at the address with my mind made up and clear. If I was offered the position I would take it, and so cut my cable.

I had to wait some time in an ante-room, but presently was ushered into the presence of one of the partners, an amiable, business-like man, with the air of a country squire.

"Dr. Phillimore?" he queried introductively, and I assented.

"Please sit down, will you. You are anxious to take position of doctor on the *Sea Queen*." He consulted some note before him. "I see. Your name has been mentioned to my client in this connection. I assume you are fully qualified?"

I told him the facts and referred him to the "Medical Year-Book." "Moreover," I added, "I have no doubt, if a recommendation were necessary, Sir John Wemyss, of Harley Street, would be willing to write to you."

"Sir John Wemyss," he echoed reflectively. "Oh, yes, the cancer man. Let me see, he was President, wasn't he, of the College of Surgeons?"

"Yes, some years ago," I answered.

"A good man," he declared with a friendly air of patronage. "Well, I don't suppose there would be any difficulty on that score if Sir John will write. My client is a prudent man, and would naturally like to have the best advice available. Moreover, he is quite willing to pay for it. There is, of course, that question," and he looked at me as if inviting my suggestion.

I laughed. "Really I have no views, only that naturally I should like as large a salary as is compatible with the circumstances."

"Very well, Dr. Phillimore," said he, nodding. "I daresay we can arrange that too. You are young yet, and the position might lead——" He broke off, as the baize door on his left opened noiselessly. "What is it, Pye?"

The clerk bent down and whispered to him. "Oh, very well! It's opportune in a way. Will you ask Mr. Morland to be good enough to come in?"

The little clerk went out with his neat walk, and the solicitor rose. "I shall be able to introduce you to my client, who is the owner of the *Sea Queen*," he said, with a certain change of voice, and quickly went forward to the outer door.

"How do you do, Mr. Morland?" he exclaimed, with a cheerful deference, such as was due to the presence of wealth. "I was just engaged on a little matter of yours. I hope you came right up. These dull offices go so much by routine. It was the question of a doctor, sir."

As he spoke he indicated me, and for the first time I saw Mr. Morland.

He was a man of thirty-five, of middle height, slightly disposed to stoutness, but with a fine carriage, and with a bronzed, good-looking face, rendered heavier for the dull expression of his blue eyes. His hair, which was short and worn *en brosse*, after a foreign fashion, was straw-yellow.

"Is it the doctor?" he asked, after a glance at me, and though he spoke excellent English, there was also something a little foreign in his accent.

"Well, sir, we haven't reached that point yet," said the lawyer, smiling. "This is Dr. Phillimore, whom you wished me to——"

"Ah, yes," said Mr. Morland, and he put out a hand mechanically. "You will arrange it," he said to the other, with an air of command.

"Most certainly, sir, but I thought you would like to see, being on the spot——"

"No, there is only one thing. You know anything of throats?" he asked suddenly.

I told him I had studied under a specialist at the hospital, as it happened. In these days we doctors are compelled to take special courses in order to keep march with the times.

"That is right," he said, nodding, and the smile that came upon his face turned the eyes bluer. He looked quite handsome. "We must all keep step with the times. I will look to you to arrange it," he added again to the lawyer, and seemed to wait for my dismissal. The solicitor bowed me sharply from the room, for was not his millionaire client in waiting? And I went down the stairs.

It was now past four, and as I came out into the Square I saw before me the little lawyer's clerk who had entered the room and had been called Pye. He was talking amiably to another man, and as I passed smiled at me through his pince-nez.

"You saw Mr. Morland?" he asked in a friendly way.

"Yes," I said, and looked at the stranger. There seemed no necessity to say more.

"It is odd that you should encounter here, gentlemen," said Pye, adjusting his glasses, "and yet I suppose it isn't.

Mr. Holgate, this gentleman is the future doctor of the *Sea Queen*."

"Oh, dear me, it isn't settled," said I, with a laugh.

Pye beamed at me. "I think I know my chief's face," he said. "It's my business to interpret him, particularly when he can't interpret himself."

The other man laughed lazily. He was a man with a big body, and a face round and gross in proportion, heavy-lidded eyes, and an imperturbable expression.

"This is Mr. Holgate, the third officer," said Pye, by way of introduction, and somehow or other we began to walk in the direction of Holborn. When we had threaded the Great Turnstile the little clerk hesitated and swung round. "I was going to drink a glass of wine with Mr. Holgate. Perhaps you would join us, sir?"

"Gladly," said I, for I had made up my mind to take tea before returning to Wapping, and somehow my interview had inspirited me. I took a sanguine view of my chances, for all my words to Pye. Moreover, I have always been interested in my fellow-creatures, and, finally, I was in the mood for a glass of something. Enters this trio, then, into the "Three Tuns" presently, and sits to a table in comfortable chairs, with the clatter of the street falling, like rain, on the senses, and the bright flare of gas among the dark barrels. There was about the place an odour of good-fellowship and of peace that pleased me who had not visited these haunts for years.

Little Pye turned his pince-nez on me as the attendant advanced.

"What'll you have, doctor?" he asked.

I hesitated.

"I suppose it must be port," said I; "port is more palatable and no more noxious in such places than any other wine."

"Any port in a storm, in fact," said the little man, looking at me quizzically.

"For my part——" said Holgate, in his stuffy, fat voice.

"Port, you should say," interposed Pye with brisk wit. He smiled at his smartness and his eyes seemed to challenge me to respond.

"There's nothing to beat spirits—and sound rum for choice, but as they won't have it here, I'll take brandy," continued the third officer.

He lighted a cigar and began to smoke, examining everything within eyeshot attentively but with indifference. I think, except for the first glance he had bestowed upon me, that he had completely ignored my presence.

Little Pye put up his glass. "I drink," said he, "to a prosperous voyage, Mr. Holgate, and to pleasant companions."

"Prosperous voyage," said the third officer wheezily, and I murmured something to the same effect.

"You say the old man's velvet," said Holgate, resuming his puffing.

"Well," said Pye, beaming through his glasses, "I wouldn't go so far as to say it, but he looks it. He looks kid-glove."

"I hate 'em," growled Holgate. "I've seen that kind on the ferry—all airs and aitches, and frosty as a berg."

"Well, of course, it would be much more satisfactory to be sailing under a real Tartar," remarked the little man with mild pleasantry.

Holgate cast him a glance which inquired, but was indifferent. "What's your idea, doctor?" he asked.

"I have none," said I, smiling. "I am much more interested in third officers."

His masklike face relaxed, and he stroked his black moustaches, and took a long pull of his cigar.

"That was very nice of you, doctor," he said, nodding with more cordiality.

Pye drew an apple from his pocket, and carefully bit into it. I don't know why, but it struck me as comical to see him at this schoolboy business, his ears alert, his glasses shining, and his white teeth going to and fro. He reminded me of a squirrel, a fancy to which the little tufts of whiskers by his ears lent themselves. He eyed both of us brightly.

"After all," said the third officer heavily, "it's more important in the end to know your owner, let alone his travelling with you. I wouldn't give two straws for the old man, velvet or iron, so long as I could get the lug of my owner."

"You'll find them both all right," said Pye reassuringly. "Captain Day I have seen and Mr. Morland I know."

"He is very rich?" I asked.

"I'll trouble you for a two and a half commission on it," said the clerk cheerfully, "and then I'd live like a fighting-cock. At least, that's what we all believe. There's no knowing."

The shadows of the November afternoon had gathered in the streets without, and a thin scant rain was flying. Into the area of warmth and brightness entered more customers, and shook the water from the umbrellas. They stood at the

bar and drank and talked noisily. Round about us in the loom of the great barrels the shadows lurched from the wagging gas-flames. The clerk had finished his apple.

"We will have another," said Holgate.

"This is mine," I said. He shook his head. I protested.

"Doctor, you confess you live in doubt," he said, "whereas I have my appointment in my pocket. Plainly it is my right."

"I think that's a fair argument, doctor," said Pye.

"I am in both your debt," said I lightly. "For company and wine."

"I'm sure we shall owe you both many a time yet," said the third officer civilly.

At the table near us two men had sat and were talking even as we, but one had a half-penny paper, and turned the flimsy thing about, I fancy in search of racing news.

"You see there is no doubt about you——," began Pye amiably, and suddenly dropped his sentence.

In the unexpected silence I caught some words from the other table.

"Well, it's good pluck of him if he wants to marry her. What's the odds if he is a Prince? Live and let live, I say."

Pye's little squirrel head turned round and he stared for a moment at the speaker, then it came back again.

"You are uncommonly polite," said Holgate irritably.

"I'm sorry. I thought I recognised that voice," said the little man sweetly. "One gets echoes everywhere. I was going to say we took you for granted, doctor."

"It's good of you," said I. "But will Mr. Morland?"

"I can practically answer for my employer; I can't say anything about Mr. Morland, who has, however, authorised us to appoint."

"The yacht is from Hamburg?" said I.

"I believe so," said he.

"And its destination?"

"That knowledge is quite out of my province," said the squirrel briefly.

When one came to think of it, it was almost a snub, and I had never any patience for these legal silences. As he shut his jaws he looked a man who could keep a secret, and knew his own mind. Yet he had been so easily familiar that I flushed with resentment. Confound these little professional tricks and solemnities! We were meeting on another ground than lawyer and client.

"I dare say it will be within the cabin-boy's province to-morrow," said I, somewhat sharply.

"Very likely," he assented, and Holgate, who had turned at my tone, exchanged a glance with him.

"Mr. Pye is fond of keeping his own counsel," said the third officer in his slow voice, "and I'm not sure he isn't right, being a lawyer."

"But he isn't a lawyer here," I protested.

Pye smiled. "No; I'm not," he said, "and please don't remind me of it"; at which we all laughed and grew friendly again. "Well, this is a funny sort of tea for me," said the clerk presently. "I generally patronise the A.B.C.," and he rose to go.

Holgate did not move, but sat staring at the fire, which shone on his broad placid face. "I knew a man once," he

observed, "who kept his own counsel."

"I hope he was a lawyer," said Pye humourously.

"No; he was a steward—the steward of an estate in the North. In the hills was the wealth of a millionaire; coal, doctor," Holgate looked at me. "And he kept his counsel and held his tongue."

"With what object?" I asked.

"Oh, a little syndicate succeeded in buying it from the owner, and now it's a seven-figure affair."

His face had no expression of inquiry or of inviting comment. He had simply stated history, but I was moved to say flippantly,

"What luck!"

"The steward got it?" asked Pye.

"He romped in," said the third officer.

"And will presently be a baronet," said I lightly.

"Stranger things have happened," he remarked, and began to smile. I fancy we all smiled, though it was not, of course, altogether humorous.

"Is that called robbery?" asked Holgate.

"I doubt if the law covers it," said Pye. "No; it's quite an innocent transaction."

"What is robbery?" I asked cynically. "Lawyers may feel their way amid the intricacies, but no one else can hope to. I'm stealing now when I take these matches."

"I will follow your example," said Holgate, and did so.

"I'm not sure that that's not perks," said little Pye with his quizzical glance.

"Well, is it perks if I buy a picture from you for ten bob which I know to be worth £1,000?" inquired Holgate.

Pye considered. "I give it up," he said.

"Which only proves," said I, continuing my mood, "that it takes a good capercutter to move in and out moral sanctions."

"I don't believe I know what that means quite," said Holgate, giving me the full charge of his steady eyes.

I stooped and warmed my fingers, for the cold blast of the streets was forbidding. "Well, the most famous people have been those who have successfully performed the egg dance between commandments," I remarked.

"I suppose they have," said Holgate thoughtfully.

I rose abruptly, and in the glass above the mantelpiece the two figures behind me came into vision. The little clerk's eyebrows were elevated in a question, and the men faced each other. Holgate's lips were pursed and he nodded. I saw this in the flash of rising, and then I turned about.

"I shall get a wiggling," said Pye, seizing his umbrella.

We walked out and I bade them good-bye after a civil exchange of amenities; then I took an omnibus down Chancery Lane and made for the Underground. As I travelled back, my thoughts circled about the situation; I was glad to have made the acquaintance of one or more of my shipmates, if, of course, I was to join the company. Holgate puzzled me for a third officer, until I reflected that in these days every officer had a master's licence. Yet that this man should not by the force of his evident individuality take higher rank in life surprised me. What, however, was of most immediate concern to me was the extreme friendliness of my two companions. Lane was well enough in his way, and certainly had shown his goodwill; but Holgate

was more than this to a lonely man with an appetite for society. Holgate was intelligent.

I found a few patients waiting, and disposed of them by eight o'clock, after which I strolled down to the docks, in spite of the drizzle. I have said that I am interested in my fellows, and, in addition, I confess to a certain forethought. I walked down to the docks with the deliberate intention of acquiring some information about the *Sea Queen*, if that were possible. I knew the name of the owner, or at least of the man who had chartered her; I had the name and acquaintance of one or two of the company; but I knew nothing as to her destination, her properties as a boat, or her time of sailing. Some of this ignorance I hoped to remedy by my visit. And it seemed that I was in the way to do so from the start. For no sooner was I on the quay in the neighbourhood of the yacht than I came upon a handsome young man in the dress of a superior sailor, with whom I fell into talk. He was outspoken as a child, but volunteered nothing of his own initiative—an amiable, sluggish, respectful fellow who was, as he stated, quartermaster on the *Sea Queen*.

I confessed my interest in her, at which he indulgently supplied me with information.

"I signed on at Glasgow, sir—and most of us too—and we picked up Mr. Morland at Hamburg—him and the ladies."

"The ladies!" I echoed, for here was a surprise.

"Yes; two ladies what came with him—Miss Morland and another lady, a dark one," said my friend.

"Oh!" said I. "Then you're off for a pleasure cruise."

"I hardly know, sir," said he. "They do say New York, but I haven't heard definite."

That looked in favour of my theory of Mr. Morland as an American. He was perhaps a Trust King, and Miss Morland a vivacious "beauty" from Chicago.

Here my companion suggested that I might care to have a look at the yacht.

"My friend," said I, "you mustn't let me take you on false pretences. I may be your doctor, and I may be not."

"Oh, that's all right, sir," said he easily. "It can't do no harm. We're only loading up with provisions, and there's no mess about."

We ascended the gangway, and entered the dark ship, which was singularly silent. He had already the sailor's affection for his floating home, and pointed me out one or two points for admiration which I understood but ill, as they were technical. As we were peeping into the saloon, a man passed us and stopped sharply.

"That you, Ellison?" he asked in a harsh voice. "Who's that?"

"Only a gentleman having a look round. He's to be doctor," said the quartermaster.

The man made no reply, but stared at me, and then went on swiftly.

"Rather abrupt," I commented, smiling.

"Oh, that's nothing. It is only his way," said the good-natured fellow. "He's the boatswain."

"Is Mr. Morland an American?" I asked.

"I don't know, sir. I've hardly seen him. We signed on at Glasgow with a little slip of a fellow representing Mr. Morland