

***RIDGWELL
CULLUM***



***THE MAN
IN THE TWILIGHT***

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The Man in the Twilight

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Part I

Chapter I—The Crisis

Chapter II—The Man With The Mail

Chapter III—Idepski

Chapter IV—The "Yellow Streak"

Chapter V—Nancy Mcdonald

Chapter VI—Nathaniel Hellbeam

Part II—Eight Years Later

Chapter I—Bull Sternford

Chapter II—Father Adam

Chapter III—Bull Learns Conditions

Chapter IV—Drawing The Net

Chapter V—The Progress Of Nancy

Chapter VI—The Lonely Figure

Chapter VII—The Skandinavia Moves

Chapter VIII—An Affair Of Outposts

Chapter IX—On The Open Sea

Chapter X—In Quebec

Chapter XI—Drawn Swords

Chapter XII—At The Chateau

Chapter XIII—Deepening Waters

Chapter XIV—The Planning Of Campaign

Chapter XV—The Sailing Of The Empress

Chapter XVI—On Board The Empress

Chapter XVII—The Lonely Figure Again

Chapter XVIII—Bull Sternford'S Vision Of Success

[Chapter XIX—The Hold-Up](#)

[Chapter XX—On The Home Trail](#)

[Chapter XXI—The Man In The Twilight](#)

[Chapter XXII—Dawn](#)

[Chapter XXIII—Nancy](#)

[Chapter XXIV—The Coming Of Spring](#)

[Chapter XXV—Nancy's Decision](#)

[Chapter XXVI—The Message](#)

[Chapter XXVII—Lost In The Twilight](#)

Part I

[Table of Contents](#)

Chapter I—The Crisis

[Table of Contents](#)

They sat squarely gazing into each other's eyes. Bat Marker had only one mood to express. It was a mood that suggested determination to fight to a finish, to fight with the last ounce of strength, the last gasp of breath. He was sitting at the desk, opposite his friend and employer, Leslie Standing, and his small grey eyes were shining coldly under his shaggy, black brows. His broad shoulders were squared aggressively.

There was far less display in the eyes of Leslie Standing. They were wide with a deep pre-occupation. But then Standing was of very different type. His pale face, his longish black hair, brushed straight back from an abnormally high forehead, suggested the face of a student, even a priest. Harker was something of the roused bull-dog, strong, rugged, furious; a product of earth's rough places.

"Give us that last bit again."

Bat's tone matched his attitude. It was abrupt, forceful, and he thrust out a hand pointing at the letter from which the other had been reading.

Standing's eyes lit with a shadow of a smile as he turned again to the letter.

"There's just one thing more. It's less pleasant, so I've kept it till the last. Hellbeam is in Quebec. So is his agent—the man Idepski. My informant tells me he saw the latter

leaving the steam-packet office. It suggests things are on the move your way again. However, my man is keeping tab. I'll get warning through at the first sign of danger."

Standing looked up. His half smile had gone. There was doubt in his eyes, and the hand grasping the letter was not quite steady. But when he spoke his tone was a flat denial of the physical sign that Bat had been quick to observe.

"Charlie Nisson's as keen as a needle," Standing said. "His whisper's a sight more than another fellow's shout."

Bat regarded the letter. He watched the other lay it aside on a pile of papers. He was thinking, thinking hard. And his thought was mostly of the man whose shaking hand betrayed him. Suddenly an explosive movement brought his clenched fist down on the table with a thud.

"Hell!" he cried, in a fury of impatience. "What's the use? The danger sign's hoisted. I know it. You know it. Nisson knows it. Well? Say, Hellbeam's been in Quebec a score of times since—since—. That don't worry a thing. No. He's got big finance in the Skandinavia bunch in Quebec. We know all about that. It's Idepski. Idepski ain't visiting the packet office for his health. He ain't figgerin' on a joy trip up the Labrador coast. No. That's the signal, sure. Idepski at the packet office. Their darn mud-scow mostly runs here, to Sachigo, and there ain't a thing along the way to interest Idepski—but Sachigo. We'll be getting word from Charlie Nisson in some hurry."

"Yes, we'll get it in a hurry."

Standing nodded. He was transparently perturbed. Bat watched him closely. Then, in a moment, his mind was made up.

"See right here, Les," he cried, in a tone he vainly endeavoured to restrain. "I've figgered right along this thing would need to happen sometime. You can't beat a feller like Hellbeam all the time and leave him without a kick. It don't need me to tell you that. But I want to get a square eye on the whole darn game. Maybe you don't get all you did to that guy when you cleaned him out of ten million dollars on Wall Street seven years ago.

"Say, you were a mathematical professor at a Scottish University before you reckoned to buck the game on Wall Street, weren't you?" he went on, more moderately. He forced a grin into eyes that were scarcely accustomed. "One of those guys who mostly make two and two into four, and by no sort of imagination can cypher 'em into five. I know. You figgered out that Persian Oil gamble to suit yourself, and forgot to figger that Hellbeam was at the other end of it. No. The other feller don't cut any ice with you while you're playing around with figgers. It's only afterwards you find that figgers ain't the whole game, and wrostling ten million dollars out of one of the biggest railroad kings and bank presidents in America has something to it liable to hand you nightmare. Well, you got that nightmare. So did I. You've had it for most the whole of the last seven years. But it ain't a nightmare now. It's dead real, which is only a way of sayin' Hellbeam's set his dogs on a hot trail, and we're the poor darn gophers huntin' our holes right up here on the Labrador coast.

"Oh, yes. I know what you'd say. You've said it all before. Hellbeam hasn't a kick comin'. You were both operators on Wall Street. You were both playing the financial game as all

the world knows it. You beat him on a straight financial fight. It was just a matter of the figgers which it's your job to play around with.

"Now I'm just going to say the thing that's in my mind," he went on, his tone changing again to something clumsily persuasive. "You can take it easy from me. You see, you picked me up when I was down and out. You passed me a hand when there wasn't a hope left me but a stretch of penitentiary. I fought that darn lumber-jack to a finish, which is mostly my way in things. And it was plumb bad luck that he went out by accident. Well, it don't matter. It was you who got me clear away when they'd got the penitentiary gates wide open waiting for me, and it's a thing I can't never forget. I'm out for you all the time, and I want you to know it when I'm telling you the things in my mind. Hellbeam's got a mighty big kick coming. It's the biggest kick any feller of his sort can have. He's the money power of Sweden. He's one of the big money powers of the States. He lives for money and the power it hands him. Well? This is how I figger. Just how you played him up I can't say. But it's his job to juggle around with figgers same as it's yours, and if you beat him out of ten million dollars you must have played a slicker hand than him. All of which says you must have got more to windward of the law than him—and he knows it. Why, it's easy. The feller who has the money power to hold the crown jewels of Sweden from falling into the hands of yahoo politicians out to grab the things they haven't the brains to come by honestly, is mostly powerful enough to buy up the justice he needs, or any other old thing. Hellbeam means to get his hands on you. He's going to get

you across the darn American border. And when he's got you there he's going to send you down, by hook or crook, to the worst hell an American penitentiary can show you. It's seven years since you hurt him. But that ain't a circumstance. If it takes him seventy-seven he'll never quit your trail."

Bat paused, and, for a moment, turned from the wide black eyes he had held seemingly fascinated while he was talking. It almost seemed that the emotions stirring in his broad bosom were too overpowering for him, and he needed respite from their pressure. But he came again. He was bound to. It was his nature to drive to the end at whatever cost to himself.

"I'm handing you this stuff, Les, because I got to," he went on. "It ain't because I'm liking it. No, sir. And if you've the horse sense I reckon you have, you'll locate my object easy. Those words of Nisson's have told us plain we got to fight. We got to fight like hell. And the time's right now. Oh, yes, we're going to fight. You an' me, just the same as we've fought a heap of times before. There ain't a feller I know who's got more fight in him than you—when you feel that way. But—well, say, you just need a boost to make you feel like it. You ain't like me who wants to fight most all the time. No. Well—I'm going to hand you that boost."

"How?"

Standing's unruffled interrogation was in sharp contrast with the other's earnestness. There was a calm tolerance in it. The tolerance of a temperament given to philosophy rather than passion. Perhaps it was a mask. Perhaps it was

real. Whatever it was, Bat's next words sent the hot fire of a man's soul leaping into his eyes.

"When your boy's born, what then?"

"Ah!"

Bat's fists clenched at the sound of the other's ejaculation. It was the nervous clenching at a sound that threatened danger. Swift as a shot he followed up his challenge.

"Your pore gal's down there in Quebec hopin' and prayin' to hand you that boy child you reckon Providence is going to send you. Well, when he gets along, and Hellbeam's around—and—"

Bat broke off. Standing had risen from his chair. He had moved swiftly, his lean figure propelled towards the window by long, nervous strides. His voice came back to the man at the table, while his eyes gazed down upon the waters of Farewell Cove, over the widespread roofs of the great groundwood mill, the building of which was the result of his seven years' sojourn on the Labrador coast.

"You've handed it me, Bat," he said, in a quick, nervous way. "I'll fight. I know. You guess I'm scared at Nisson's news. Maybe I am, I don't know. I'm not a man of iron guts. Maybe I never shall be. It's hell to me to feel a shadow dogging my every step. Yes, you're right. It's been a nightmare, and now—why, now it's real. But get your mind at rest. I'm going to fight Hellbeam all I know. And with the thought of Nancy, and the boy she's going to give me, I don't need a thing else. No."

"That's how I figgered."

Bat's delight softened his hard eyes for the moment, and his attitude relaxed as Standing went on.

"You reckon I've no imagination," he said. "You reckon I'm just a calculating machine that can juggle figures better than any other machine." He shook his dark head. "I guess you don't do me full justice. When I quit the university on the other side it was because I had built myself up a big dream. I crossed to the United States with my imagination full of the things I hoped to do. It was the chance I looked for. And I found it in Hellbeam, and the Persian Oils it was his hobby to manipulate. I jumped in and grabbed it with both hands. And, as you say, I beat him at his own game. But that was only part of my dream. The next part you also know, though you choose to think it was only as a refuge from Hellbeam that I came here to Sachigo. I admit circumstances have modified my original dream, but then I dreamed my first dream as a man unmarried. Now I have added to it in the thought of the son my wife's going to present me with. After beating Hellbeam and making the fortune I desired, I didn't flee here to the coast of Labrador as a mere refuge from the man you tell me I robbed. No. This place served its purpose that way, it's true. But it was the place I selected long since for the fulfilment of the second part of my dream.

"Bat—Bat, old friend. It isn't I who lack imagination. It's you, with your bull-dog, fighting nature. Years ago, way back there in my rooms at the university, I took up a study that interested me mightily. It was when the European war was on, and was doing its best to unship the brains of half the world. I took it up to relieve myself of the strain of things.

And it inspired me with a desire to achieve something that looked well-nigh impossible. I was watching the Swedes, the Skandinavians generally, and I saw them getting fat and rich by holding the rest of the world to ransom for paper and wood pulp—the stuff we call here groundwood. It was then that my dream was born. Oh, yes, it's changed a bit since then. But not so much. All I learned at that time told me there was only one country in the world that was due to hold the world's paper industry, and that country was yours—Canada. The illimitable forests of the country are one of the most amazing features of it. The water power—yes, and even the climate. But I saw all Skandinavia's advantage. Hitherto they've had a complete monopoly. Geographically they were in the thick of the world. The whole darn thing was in their lap. But they have a weakness which you could never find in this country. Their forests are being eaten into. Their lumber is receding farther and farther from their mills. Their labour is difficult. Well, I set to work with a map and those figures which you guess are my strong point. I played around with all the information of Quebec and Labrador I could get hold of. Then, after worrying around awhile, I realised that, with only eighteen hundred sea miles dividing Britain from Labrador, given the cheapness of power, sufficiently extensive plant and forest limits and adequate shipping, I could put groundwood on the European market in favourable competition with Skandinavia. By this means I could build up an industry which means the wealth of Canada for the Canadians, and establish the paper industry of the world within the heart of our British Empire. So it was Farewell Cove and Sachigo on the coast of Labrador for me.

And the locality had nothing to do with the man who guesses I robbed him."

It was Bat who was held silent now. He nodded his head at the narrow back that remained turned on him.

"Well, since then," Standing went on, "seven years have passed. Circumstances have forced modifications on my plans. Hellbeam is the circumstance. You say we are the gophers hunting our holes. Maybe you're right. Anyway Hellbeam's shadow is haunting me. It's haunting me in that I know—/ feel—that the fulfilment of this dream is not for me. Why?"

He turned abruptly from the window. His pale face was even paler under the excitement burning in his dark eyes. He thrust out a hand, a delicate, long-fingered hand pointing at his friend and faithful servant.

"Say, you reckon I've no imagination. Listen. I see the time coming when all you say of Hellbeam's purpose will be fulfilled, and my dream shattered and tumbling about my head. If Hellbeam succeeds, can I let this thing happen? Can I sacrifice this great purpose in such a personal disaster? No. My hope is in my little wife, that dear woman who's given herself to me with the full knowledge of the threat hanging over my future. She and I have dreamed a fresh dream. And she's even now fulfilling her part of that dream. Yes, you're right. I'm going to fight for our dream with every ounce that's in me. I know my failings. I'm at heart a coward. But I'm out to fight though the gates of hell are agape waiting for me. And when I'm beaten, and Hellbeam's satisfied his kick, my boy, my little son, will step into my shoes and carry on the work till it's complete. Oh, yes, I say 'my son.' Nancy

will see to it that she gives me a son. And, by God, how I will fight for him!"

Bat was silent before the tide of his friend's passion. He listened to the strange mixture of clear thinking and unreasoning faith with a feeling of something like awe of a man whom he had long since given up attempting to fathom. He was a rough lumberman, a mill-boss, who, by sheer force, had raised himself from the dregs of a lumber camp to a position where his skill and capacity had full play. And in his utter lack of education it was impossible that he should be able to fathom a nature so complex, so far removed from his sphere of culture.

His devotion to the ex-university professor was based on a splendid gratitude such as only the native generosity of his temper could bestow. The man had once served him in his extremity. Even to this day he never quite realised how the thing had come about, and Leslie Standing refused to talk of it. All he knew was that as mill-boss of an obscure mill, far in the interior of Quebec, away down south of Sachigo, he had fought one of those sudden battles with a lumber-jack which seem to spring up without any apparent reason. And in the desperateness of it, in the fierce height to which his battling temper had arisen, he had killed his man. Even so, these things were sufficiently common for little notice of the matter to have been taken. But it so happened that the dead man was the hero of the workers of the mill, and Bat Harker was their well-hated boss. Forthwith, in their numbers, the workers at once determined that Bat should pay the penalty. They seized and imprisoned

him, while they sent down country to get him duly tried and condemned. It was then the miracle happened.

It happened in the night, with the appearance of a lean, tall man, with a high forehead, and smooth black hair, and the clothes of civilisation to which Bat Harker was little enough accustomed. He entered his prison room seemingly without question. He told Bat that if he cared to get away he had the means awaiting him outside. And the prisoner who had visions of hanging, or at best, a long term of imprisonment, snatched at the helping hand held out. And Leslie Standing had brought him in safety straight to Farewell Cove, where together, with the vast capital which the former had wrung from the Swedish financier, Nathaniel Hellbeam, they had undertaken the creation of the great mill of Sachigo.

Bat, in his wonder at the apparent ease of his rescue, had sought information. But little enough had been forthcoming. Leslie Standing had only smiled in his pensive fashion.

"Money," he had said calmly. "Just money. It can do most things."

That was all. And thenceforward the subject had been taboo. Even after seven years of intimate relations, Bat was still mystified on the subject, he was still guessing.

Now, as he listened to his friend's expressions of faith, so strangely jumbled with calculated purpose, he sat at the table groping helplessly. Suppose—suppose that faith were to be shattered. What then? His mind was concerned, deeply concerned. And he dared not put his fears into words.

Standing came back to his chair.

"Here, we've talked these things enough," he said. "You've got my word. Just don't worry a thing. If Hellbeam's dogs get around, well—we're here first. All I want is news of Nancy. And that'll be along any old time now. When I get that—."

The door of the office was thrust open, and an olive-hued face appeared. It was the clerk who worked in direct contact with the owner of the Sachigo mill. He was one-third nigger, another French Canadian, and the rest of him was Indian. It was a combination that appealed to the man who employed him.

"They've 'phoned it through from the wireless at the headland, Boss," the man said without preamble, pushing a sheet of paper into Leslie Standing's hand.

He had gone as swiftly and silently as he came, and the door was closed softly behind him.

Standing was gazing across at Bat. He had not even glanced at the message.

"I'd like to bet," he cried, his eyes alight with a smiling excitement. Then he shook his head. "No. I wouldn't bet on it. It's too sacred. Nancy—my Nancy—."

He broke off, and glanced down at the paper. In a moment the smile fell from his eyes. When he looked up it was to flash a keen glance at the rugged face beyond the desk.

"Here, listen," he cried, with a sharp intake of breath.

"Watch *Lizzie* for U.G.P. Signed—Nisson."

Bat nodded.

"U.G.P. That's Union Great Peninsular Railroad. That's Hellbeam's. It means—."

"It means Hellbeam's men are aboard. The packet *Lizzie* is due at our quay in less than an hour."

Standing tore the message into small fragments and dropped them into the wastepaper basket beside him. Only was his emotion displayed in the deliberate care with which he reduced the paper to the smallest possible fragments.

Chapter II—The Man With The Mail

[Table of Contents](#)

The calm waters of Farewell Cove lay a-shimmer under the slanting rays of the sun. A wealth of racing white cloud filled the dome of the summer sky, speeding under the pressure of a strong top wind. Even the harsh world of Labrador was smiling under the beneficence of the brief summer season.

Leslie Standing stood for a moment before passing down the winding woodland trail on his way to the water-front below. The view of it all was irresistible to him in his present mood, and he feasted his eyes hungrily while the resolve he had taken yielded an inflexible hardening.

Bat Harker was less affected by the things spread out before him. He was concerned only for the mood of the man beside him. So he waited with such patience as his hasty nature could summon.

"It's all good, Bat, old friend," Standing said, after a moment's silent contemplation. "It's too good to lose. It's too good for us to stand for interference from—Nathaniel Hellbeam."

Bat grunted some sort of acquiescence. He was gazing steadily out over the spruce belt which covered the lower slopes of the hillside. His keen deep-set eyes were on the shipping lying out in the cove, watching the fussy approach of the bluff packet boat.

It was a scene of amazing natural splendour which the works of man had no power to destroy. Farewell Cove was a perfect natural harbour, deep-set amidst surrounding, lofty, forest-clad hills. It was wide and deep, a veritable sea-lake, backing inland some fifteen miles behind the wide headland gateway to the East, which guarded its entrance from the storming Atlantic. Its shores were of virgin forest, peopled with the delicate-hued spruce, and all the many other varieties of soft, white, long-fibred timber demanded in the manufacture of the groundwood pulp needed for the world's paper industry.

Far as the eye could see, in every direction, it was the same; forest and hill. And, in the heart of it all, the great watercourse of the Beaver River debouched upon the cove which linked it with the ocean beyond. It was a world of forest, seeming of limitless extent.

But the feast that had inspired Leslie Standing's words was less the banquet which Nature had spread than the things which expressed the labours he and his companion had expended during the past seven years. He was concerned for the endless forests. He appreciated the great waterfall to the west, where the Beaver River fell off the highlands of the interior and precipitated itself into the cove below. These were the two things in Nature he had demanded to make his work possible. For the rest, the

rugged immensity of scenery, the mighty contours of the aged land about him, the vastness of the harsh primordial world, so inhospitable, so forbidding under the fierce climate which Nature had imposed, made no appeal. It served, and so it was sufficient. The lights and shades under the summer sunlight were full of splendour. No artist eye could have gazed upon it all and missed its appeal. But these men lived amidst it the year round, and they had learned something of the fear which the ruthless northland inspires. To them the beauty of the open season was a mockery, a sham, the cruel trap of a heartless mistress.

It was on the wide southern foreshore, just below where the falls of the Beaver River thundered into the chasm which the centuries of its flood had hewn in the granite rock, that Standing had founded his great mill. It lay there, in full view from the hillside, amidst a tangle of stoutly made roads, where seven years ago not even a game track had existed. He had set it up beside his water-power, and had given it the name which belonged to the ruined trading post he had found on the southern headland of the cove when first he had explored the region. Sachigo. A native, Labrador word which meant "Storm." The trading post had since been rebuilt into a modern wireless station, and so had become no longer the landmark it once had been. But Standing's whim had demanded the necessity for preserving the name, if only for the sake of its meaning.

In seven years the translation of the wilderness had been well-nigh complete. Its vast desolation remained. That could never change under human effort. It was one of the oldest regions of the earth's land, driven and beaten and desolated

under a climate beyond words in its merciless severity. But now the place was peopled. Now human dwellings dotted the forest foreshore of the cove. And the latter were the homes of the workers who had come at the mill-owner's call to share in his great adventure.

Then there was shipping in the cove. A fleet of merchant shipping awaiting cargoes. There was a built inner harbour, with quays, and warehouses. There were travelling cranes, and every appliance for the loading of the great freighters with all possible dispatch. There were light railways running in every direction. There were sheltering "booms" in the river mouth crammed with logs, and dealt with by an army of river men equipped with their amazing peavys with which they thrust, and rolled, and shepherded the vast mass of hewn timber towards the slaughterhouse of saws. Then, immediately surrounding the mill, there was a veritable town of storehouses and offices and machine shops of every description. There were power-houses, there were buildings in the process of construction, and the laid foundations of others projected. It was a world of active human purpose lost in the heart of an immense solitude which it was nevertheless powerless to disturb.

"Yes, it's all too good to have things happen, Bat," Standing went on presently. "Hark at the roar of the falls. What is it? Five hundred thousand horsepower of water, summer and winter. Listen to the drone of the grinders." He shook his head. "It's a great song, boy, and they never get tired of singing it. There's only thirty-six of 'em at present. Thirty-six. We'll have a hundred and thirty-six some day. Look down there at the booms." He stood pointing, a tall,

lean figure on the hillside. "Tens of thousands of logs, and hundreds of men. We'll multiply those again and again—one day. It's fine. The freighters lying at anchor awaiting their cargoes. Some day we'll have our own ships—a big fleet of 'em. See the smoke pennants floating from our smoke stacks. They're the triumphant pennants of successful industry, eh? We can't have too many such flags flying. One day we'll have trolley cars running along the shores of the cove to bring the workers in to the mill. It'll be like a veritable Atlantic City. Oh, it's a great big dream. There's nothing amiss. No."

"Only the *Lizzie* getting in."

Bat was without apparent appreciation. He was thinking only of the message they had received, and the threat it contained.

Standing glanced round at the sturdy figure beside him. A half smile lit his sallow features. Then he turned again and sought out the tubby vessel approaching the wharf below. But it was only for a moment. Some subtle thought impelled him, and he glanced back at the house on the hillside he had just left, the house he had erected for the woman whose devotion had taught him the real meaning of life.

It was a long, low, rambling, gabled building. It was an extensive timber-built home with a wide verandah and those many vanities and conceits of building that would never have been permitted had it been intended for bachelordom. He remembered how Nancy and he had designed it together. He remembered the delight with which they had looked forward to its completion, and ultimately their boundless joy in the task of its furnishing. He remembered

how Nancy had insisted that it should contain not only their home, but his own private office, from which he could control the great work he had set his hand to. It had been her ardent desire to be always near him, always there to support him under the burden of his immense labours. And remembering these things a fierce desire leapt within him, and he turned again to the man at his side.

"Yes, she's getting in, Bat," he said. "But I just wanted to get a peek at things. Well, I've seen all I want, old friend. Now I'm ready. Fight? Oh, yes, I'm ready to fight. Come on." And he laughed as he hurried down the woodland trail to the water-side.

* * * * *

The two men had reached the quay-side, which was lined with bales of wood-pulp stacked ready for shipment. Farther down its length the cranes were rattling their chains, swinging their burdens out over the holds of the vessel taking in its moist cargo. The stevedores were vociferously busy, working against time. For, in the brief open season, time was the very essence of the success demanded for the mills. The noise, the babel of it all was usually the choicest music to Standing and his manager.

But just now they were less heeding. Their eyes were turned upon the small steamer plugging its deliberate way over the water towards them. It was a small, heavily-built tub of a vessel calculated to survive the worst Atlantic storms.

Bat's face was without any expression of undue emotion. But the hard lines about his clean-shaven mouth were sharply set. Standing was asurged with an excitement that

fired his dark eyes. His wide-brimmed hat was thrust back from his forehead, and he stood with his hands thrust deeply in the pockets of his moleskin trousers. His nervous fingers were playing with loose coins and keys which they found irresistible.

The *Lizzie* came steadily on.

"We'll know the whole game in minutes now."

Standing could keep silent no longer. Bat nodded.

"Yep."

Orders from the bridge of the packet boat rang out over the water. Then Standing went on.

"I want to find Idepski aboard," he said. He was scarcely addressing his companion. "It would be good to get Master Walter here, fifty-three degrees north." A short, hard laugh punctuated his words. Then he turned abruptly. "Who's running No. 10 camp?"

Just for an instant Bat withdrew his gaze from the approaching vessel. He flashed a keen look of enquiry into the eyes of the questioner.

"Ole Porson," he said.

"I thought so. He's a good boy. He'll do."

Standing nodded. The cold significance of his tone was not lost on his companion. Maybe Bat understood the thing that was passing in the other's mind. At any rate he turned again to the broad-beamed tub steaming so busily towards them.

"I see old Hardy on the bridge," Standing went on a moment later. Then he added: "Fancy navigating the Labrador coast for forty years. No, I couldn't do it. I wouldn't have the—guts."

Bat still remained silent. He understood. The other was talking because it was impossible for him to refrain.

"They're standing ready to make fast," Standing said sharply. He drew a quick breath. Then his manner changed and his words came pensively. "Say, it's a queer life—a hell of a life. The sea folk, I mean. It's about the worst on earth. Think of it, cooped within those timbers that are never easy till they lie at anchor in the shelter of a harbour. I'd just hate it. Their life? What is it? It's not life at all. Hard work, hard food, hard times, and hard drinking—when they're ashore—most of them. I think I can understand. They surely need something to drown the memory of the threat they're always living under. No, they don't live. They exist. Here, let's stand clear. They're coming right in."

* * * * *

The bustle of landing was in full swing. Even with so small a craft as the *Lizzie* there was commotion. Orders flew from lip to lip. Creaking cables strained at unyielding bollards. Gangways clattered out from deck, and ran down on to the quay with a crash. Hatches were flung open and the steam winches rattled incessantly.

Standing and Harker were looking on from a vantage point well clear of the work of unloading. The captain of the vessel, "Old Man" Hardy, was with them. The seaman was beaming with that satisfaction which belongs to the master when his vessel is safely in port.

"Oh, I guess it ain't been too bad a trip," he was saying. "Takin' the 'ins' with the 'outs,' I'd say it was a fairish passage, which is mostly as it should be, seein' it's my last voyage in the old barge. Y'see, you folks are kind of robbing

me of this blessed old kettle," he explained, with a grin that lit up the whole of his mahogany features. "Y'see we're loaded well-nigh rail under with stuff for your mill, which don't leave a dog's chance for the other folks along the coast. The Company guesses they got to put on a two thousand tonner. The *Myra*. I haven't a kick comin'. She's all a seaboat. Still, I'm kind of sorry, don't you know. I've known the *Lizzie* since she came off the stocks, which is mostly forty years, and we're mighty good friends, which ain't allus the way. I'd say, too, I'm getting old for a change. Still—."

Standing shook his head.

"What do they say? 'Hardy' by name, 'Hardy' by nature. The toughest and best sailorman on the Labrador coast! Well, I'm sorry you don't feel good about it. But," he added with a smile, "it means a good deal to us getting a bigger packet."

Captain Hardy nodded.

"Thankee kindly. It's good to know folks reckon a fellow something more than just part of a kettle of scrap like this old packet. But I'd have been glad to finish my job with her. Still, times don't stand around even in Labrador." He finished up with something in the nature of a sigh.

The work going forward was full of interest. But it was not the work that held Standing, or the watchful eyes of Bat Harker. Their sole interest was in the personality of the crew and the five passengers, mostly "drummers," from the great business houses of Quebec and Montreal, who were struggling to land their trunks of samples and get them off to the offices of the mill so as to complete their trade before

the *Lizzie* put to sea again. Not one of these escaped their observation.

"You seem to keep much the same crew right along, Hardy," Standing said pleasantly. "I suppose they like shipping with a good skipper. I seem to recognise most of their faces."

"Oh, yes. They're mostly the same boys," Hardy agreed, obviously appreciating the compliment. "But I guess I lost four boys this trip. They skipped half an hour before putting to sea. It happens that way now and then, if they're only soused enough when they get aboard. They're a crazy lot with rye under their belts. I just had to replace 'em with some dockside loafers, or lie alongside another day."

Standing nodded. A man was moving down the gangway bearing a large, grey, official-looking sack on his shoulders. He was a slight, dark man with a curiously foreign cast about his features.

"The mail?" he enquired. And a curious sharpness flavoured his demand. Then he added, with studied indifference. "One of your—dockside loafers?"

Captain Hardy laughed. He continued to laugh as he watched the unhandiness of the man staggering down the gangway under his burden.

"Yep. The mail," he said. "And I'd hate to set that feller to work on a seaman's job. He's about as unhandy as a doped Chinaman. I'd say Masters is playing safe keeping him from messing up the running gear while we're discharging. Say, get a look at it."

A great laugh accompanied the old man's words as the foreign-looking creature tripped on the gangway, and only

saved himself from a bad fall by precipitating his burden upon the quay. There was no responsive laughter in Standing. And Bat Harker's features remained rigidly unsmiling. Standing turned sharply.

"Maybe you can spare that boy to run those mails up to my office," he said. "It's a good healthy pull up the hill for him, and my folks are full to the neck with things. I'd be glad."

"Sure he can." Captain Hardy was only too delighted to be able to oblige so important a customer of his company. He promptly shouted at the landing officer.

"Ho, you! Masters! Just let that darn Dago tote them mails right up to Mr. Standing's office. He ain't no sort of use out of hell down here—anyway."

The mate's reply came back with an appreciative grin.

"Ay, sir," he cried, and forthwith hurled the order at the mail carrier with a plentiful accompaniment of appropriate adjectives.

"Thanks," Standing turned away. His smiling luminous eyes were shining. "I'll get right along up, Captain. There's liable to be things need seeing to in that mail before you pull out. You'd best come along, too, Bat," he added pointedly.

Standing hurried away. A sudden fierce passion was surging through his veins. Nisson was right. He knew it—now. And in a fever of impatience he was yearning to come to grips with those who would rob him of the hopes in which his whole being was bound up.

Chapter III—Idepski

Table of Contents

The two men reached the office on the hillside minutes before the mail carrier. They took the hill direct, passing hurriedly through the aisles of scented woods which shadowed its face. The other, the stranger, was left with no alternative but the roadway, zigzagging at an easier incline.

Standing passed into the house. His confidential man of many races looked up from his work. The quick, black eyes were questioning. He was perhaps startled at the swift return of the man whom he regarded above all others.

Standing spoke coldly, emphatically.

"There's a man coming along up. He's a sailorman, and he's dressed in dirty dungaree, and he's carrying a sack of mail. Now see and get this clearly, Loale. It's important. It's so important I can't stand for any sort of mistake. When he comes you've got to send him right into my room with the mail-bag. I want him to take it in *himself*. You get that?"

The half-breed's eyes blinked. It was rather the curious attitude of an attentive dog. But that was always his way when the master of the Sachigo Mill spoke to him.

Pete Loale was quite an unusual creature. He looked unkempt and unclean, with his yellow, pock-marked skin, and his clothes that would have disgraced a second-hand dealer's stores of waste. But for all his lack in these directions there was that in the man which was more than worth while. Out of his black eyes looked a world of intelligence. There was also a resource and initiative in him that Standing fully appreciated.

"Sure I get that," he said simply. Then he repeated in the manner of a child determined to make no mistake. "He's to take that mail-bag right into your office—*himself*."

"That's it. Don't knock on my door. Don't let him think there's a soul inside that room. Just boost him right in. You get that?"

The half-breed nodded.

"I'll just say: 'Here you! Just push that darn truck right inside that room, an' don't worry me with it, I'm busy.' That how?" The man hunched his slim shoulders into a shrug.

"See you do it—just that way," Standing said. Then he turned to Bat. "We'll get inside," he went on. "He'll be right along."

They passed into the office. The door closed behind them and Standing moved over to his seat at the crowded desk.

"Wal?"

Bat was still standing. He failed to grasp his friend's purpose. His wit was unequal to the rapid process of the other's swiftly calculating mind.

Standing littered his writing-pad with papers. He picked up a pen and jabbed it in the inkwell. Then he flung it aside and adopted a fountain-pen which he drew from his waistcoat pocket. His eyes lit with a half-smile as he finally raised them to the rugged face before him.

"You sit right over there by that window, Bat," he said easily. "If you get a look out of it you'll be amazed at the number of things to interest you." He nodded as Bat moved away with a grin and took the chair indicated. "That's it. Just sit around, and you won't see or even hear the fellow with the mail fall in through the door. And maybe, sitting there,

you'll want to smoke your foul old pipe. Sort of pipe of peaceful meditation. Yes, I'd smoke that pipe, old friend, but you can cut out the peaceful meditation. You need to be ready to act quick when I pass the word. It's going to be easy. So easy I almost feel sorry for—Idepski."

"It *is*—Idepski?" Bat filled and lit his pipe.

"It surely is. No other. And—I'm glad. Now we'll quit talk, old friend. Just smoke, and look out of that window, and—think like hell."

Bat's understanding of his friend was well founded. The extreme nervous tension in Standing was obvious. It was in the wide, dark eyes. It was in the constant shifting of the feet which the table revealed. For the time, at least, the cowardice Standing claimed for himself was entirely swamped. He was stirred by the headlong excitement of battle in a manner that left Bat more than satisfied.

Once Bat turned from his contemplation of the piled-up country beyond the valley. It was at the sound of Standing's fiercely scratching pen. And his quick gaze took in the luxury of the setting for the little drama he felt was about to be enacted.

It was a wide, pleasant room, built wholly of red pine, and polished as only red pine will polish. There was a thick oriental carpet on the floor, and all the mahogany furniture was upholstered in red morocco. There were a few carefully selected pictures upon the walls, hung with an eye to the light upon each. But it was not an extravagant room. It suggested the homeland of Scotland, from which the owner of it all hailed. The Canadian atmosphere only found expression in the great steel stove which stood in one