

# Weird Tales

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## ADVENTURE OF SOULS by Robert Lee Heiser



**I**T IS a weird tale of love, mystery and sudden death which was told in the Red Lantern Cafe, hard by the waterfront, at the foot of our street, where red-blooded men from the four quarters of the earth come up from the sea in search of wine, woman and song, to bathe in the glare of the white lights and throw their money to the dogs.

Mathew Laucks, second in the black gang, aboard the steamer *Catawac*, just in with a cargo of tinsel and toys from China, his hairy breast exposed to the gaze of other patrons of the place, arms akimbo on a sloppy table, listened to the loose tongues of his companions wagging over a weighty subject.

"Aye, I'm tellin' you, when a man's dead, he's dead!" shouted one of the sailormen whose head was crowned with a skull-cap fashioned from the end of a stocking—a striped stocking, red and yellow, picked up in some far-away port.

Patrons of the Red Lantern, seated about other tables, heard, turned their heads, and some moved nearer that they might hear better.

"Oh, ho, he is, is he? Then, how about th' skipper o' th' *Silver Bell*? Didn't I see him, with my own two eyes, near a month after a lascar had knocked him from the bridge with a marline spike!" roared Chips, pounding the table with a heavy fist.

"A man's body goes back to the dust from which it came," spoke up

a man who stood behind the skull-capped sailor's chair. This was the sky pilot from the Mission House around the corner. He wore a long, black robe and continually fingered a huge cross that dangled from a chain about his neck. His business on the waterfront was to intercept the souls that drifted in on the harbor of missing men.

"But," he continued, his candid eyes centering steadily on the hairy breast of Matt Laucks, "the real man, the unseen soul, never dies—"

"Bah!" broke in a big, broad-shouldered seaman who had looked often down the neck of a bottle since coming to the Red Lantern. "Souls? Men have no souls! I know, I do, for I have not always been mate in the *Catawac*. Once, it has been so long, long ago, I was master of surgery. My great ambition was to find that thing men call their souls. I have opened the breast of a living, breathing, human being and found him ninety per cent belly.

"It is true, I found a wonderful engine inside of man. But, for that matter, there is also a wonderful engine inside the *Catawac*. Feed either one of them fuel and they'll move. Neglect the fires and either one will stop. Bah! Man has no soul! He's mostly belly! And that settles that."

"It does, eh?" blurted Mathew Laucks. "Perhaps you overlooked something—While you were about it, did you see anything of his con-

science? Did you see the thing that loves music? Me, I have not always followed the sea for the slum they feed in the dirty, stinking hookers. I've studied too, and I'm just fool enough to believe that a man has a soul. Listen! Let me tell you an adventure of men and souls—a body with a cowardly soul and a brain that feared nothing, and a cowardly brain with a soul heroic. How I came to the sea at the bidding of the woman I loved, so that I might banish the cowardice of the man she loved—Don't look at me that way! I tell you it was to banish his cowardliness—I didn't kill him, I tell you—"

The sky pilot from the Mission House did not move except to allow his eyes to travel from the hairy, ape-like breast to the upraised fists with which Mathew Laucks threatened him.

"Go on, my man, tell your story; I have said nothing," said the minister, smiling upon the infuriated sailor.

"I thought you did," Matt answered, glaring at the huge cross that dangled from the chain about the minister's neck. His arms relaxed and he lowered himself in his chair again—"Oh, yes, the story, well—"

"**M**ARDEL HAUGH was in love with Edwin Carl in spite of the fact that he was only twenty-two while she was thirty-three. Who can say why, or what made her love him? He, with his silken hair, pink flesh and manicured fingernails, and—and—and his cowardly yellow streak. She knew he was a coward and it hurt her.

"'Matt,' she said to me, once, when we both stood on the pavement before her home—me with a longing to snatch her into my arms and call her mine; for, mind you, Mardel was a beautiful woman. I was more nearly her age, and, surely, I was no coward like the pink-faced boy. But, she knew that—'Matt,' she said, 'you have said you loved me!'

"'Yes, yes, Mardel'—"

"I took a step toward her. She stopped me. For the moment I had misunderstood her meaning.

"'Then you wish to see me happy. Prove it. It will not be news to your ears when I confess to loving Edwin, but oh, how I hate a coward! Do you think we could break him of his one weakness? I have a plan to test him. You must help. Down in Maugin's Hollow, as you know, they once quarried stone. Now there is nothing left of the quarry except a deep, deep hole partially filled with water—how deep do they say it is? Some stories make it without a bottom. If we three are together and I should slip over the edge of the cliff—'

"'Really, it was funny. I laughed—Edwin to the rescue! Ho, ho, what a joke! But I saw the pained look on her face and my merriment changed to concern.

"'Then you will surely drown, unless I come in after you. If you hope to stir Edwin's courage in that manner—'

"'Suddenly I remembered that Edwin could not swim. Suppose he did go to her rescue—Don't look at me that way, you—'

"'Come, come, my good man, I have not interfered—Most surely you would go to Edwin's assistance in that case. On with the story, I'm interested.'"

And the minister moved away from the story teller's claws.

"'No,' I told her, 'Edwin will leave you to drown.'

"'No, no! He loves me and would never leave me to drown like a rat in a cistern. Then, besides, I can swim and you will be there.'

"'So that is how we three happened to be on the edge of the quarry hole down in Maugin's Hollow a few days later.

"'Oh, look, Edwin! What pretty wild flowers!' exclaimed Mardel, reaching far out, to where the blos-

soms hung recklessly over the black water.

"Even I, and I am no coward, trembled a bit and my lips went dry as I watched the daring woman.

"Mardel! Come away! You'll—"

"But Edwin was too late with his warning. He covered his ears with his soft white hands to keep out the woman's screams. For an instant he stood there as though petrified—eyes tightly closed, lips quivering, sweat trickling down at his temples, while the pink of his face gave place to ghastly white.

"Did Edwin rush to the rescue of the woman he loved? Did he? He did not. The young man even forgot that Matt Laucks was there. He became panic-stricken and ran. It is hard to tell who yelled for help the louder, Mardel or her weak-kneed lover.

"To enter the waters of the quarry-hole was simply a repetition of what I had often done as a boy. To me there was no danger. I even knew a footpath that led down the face of the cliff. In this manner I picked my way to the edge of the waters of the quarry.

"Although Mardel could swim she needed help. She was more dead than alive when I brought her out. She did not even thank me before hurrying home.

"Several hours later I came upon her, seated on the front steps, down in our street, and her greetings were: 'Oh, how I hate a coward.' Then, as an afterthought: 'All cowards except—except Edwin.'

"Edwin? The fool was so frightened he forgot my presence,' I told her, 'and he believes you were drowned. He fears to come back to learn the truth. I have been told he is milling about among the jobless, down in the shipping office, trying to buck up courage enough to sign on some ship's articles. Sometimes I believe the man is insane. Why not

forget him, Mardel? Me, I am no coward and I love you—'

"Then, if you really love me, you will do my bidding. Go, follow Edwin—Go to sea with him! Make a man of him, and bring him back to me.'

"And, because there were tears in her eyes, because I did love her, I followed Edwin Carll to the shipping office. From there I followed him down to the sea, always my soul singing to my brain, 'He'll never come back! He'll never come back! Then there will be nothing between you and Mardel!' My brain screamed back, 'No, no! You are going to bring him back! You wish to make Mardel happy.'

"WHEN I entered the shipping office, where the riff-raff of the waterfront crowded before the window of the shipping master's official cubby-hole, I saw Edwin Carll, apparently asleep, chin on breast, legs dangling from a pile of sea chests and dunnage bags.

"I, Matt Laucks, me, who never dreamed of following the sea, asked what ship the pink-faced boy had picked his berth in, and learning, asked to be signed on as fireman.

"My man will take you out to the *Golden Harp* in our launch,' said the shipping master.

"Then followed a discourse, by each and every seaman in the place, as to the rotten food aboard the vessel.

"The next second every sailorman lowered his voice. Johnny, the dope, cook for the *Golden Harp*, held his hand above his head, batting his eyes and biting a curse off close to his lips. The shipping master leaned from his window, mouth hanging open, eyes wide with wonderment. Each man caught unspoken questions from the eye of his neighbor.

"Me, I was dumfounded, but like the others I stood there listening to someone singing, clear and beautiful

like the tones of a glass bell. 'Aloha Oe' was the song and I recognized the voice. It was Mardel Haugh. I wondered how, and why, Mardel had come to this place.

"My head turned, slowly, slowly, as though I feared the movement would stop the singing, and—it was Edwin Carl, the pink-faced boy, singing the song. I never knew he could sing like that, and wondered why I should mistake it for Mardel's voice.

"Just as suddenly as the song had broken forth it stopped, and Edwin Carl slid from his perch, reached for his dunnage bag, heaved it to his shoulder and started for the door."

"'God,' whimpered the dope, drawing the back of his hand across his eyes, "'Aloha Oe"—it always makes me homesick. When a ship is bound out for the home port and you hear the strum of stringed instruments wailing that tune, it's just like saying good-bye when you know you'll never be back. Who'd a thought you could sing that way!"

"'Whom are you talking to?' muttered Edwin in an irritable manner, brushing the dope's trembling fingers from his arm and scowling on the other sailors who jostled him."

"'You, he means you, Edwin,' I told him. 'What a wonderful song—you are, why, that song you—'

"'You fool!' he screamed, shaking a fist in my face, a soft, pink bunch of knuckles that would never frighten anyone, 'I can't sing! I was asleep!'

"'Was Edwin Carl insane? I wondered. I did not ponder long on the thought because it was necessary to hurry, and we, four of us, Edwin, myself, the cook and a sailor who dangled heavy, brass rings from the lobes of his dark ears, went out to the *Golden Harp* in the shipping master's launch.

"'Matt! Matt!' suddenly whimpered the pink-faced boy, 'Do you see her! She's coaxing me to my death!

God! I want to go back—Take me back, Matt, I'm terribly frightened!'

"'Terribly frightened, eh? You're crazy, that's what you are, and, damn me, you can bawl all you want; we're going aboard that big iron wagon, and you'll not be a coward when you come back. You hear me? Don't hug my legs that way!'

"'I'm sorry, but I kicked him, and he took it like a whipped dog groveling at my feet.

"'But, Matt,' he whined, 'I can see her, out there, smiling, holding her arms out to me! She knows how frightened I am. She sees you mistreating me and there is a tear in her eye—Matt, Matt! I remember now, you were there, why did you not save her? Can you see her, Matt? She's coaxing—But I dare not step into the water; if I try to go to her I'll drown!'

"'Crazy, I think, like ze marmoset,' opined the half-breed, showing his teeth and causing his brass rings to tinkle musically as he shook his head in wonderment.

"'No; I'm not insane,' answered Edwin. 'I'm simply terrified in my heart and brain. I know that I am going into the arms of death and I'm doubtful as to what I shall find there.'

"'From then until long after the *Golden Harp* had gone plowing down the bay for the open sea I lost track of Edwin. It may have been because of the much work in preparation of starting. I know, now, that had the crew known what the ill-fated vessel was headed for, every last one of them would have plunged overboard. It was when we were three nights out-bound that things started to happen.

"'QUEER sort of a chap, that mess boy who came aboard with you,' said the second engineer as I passed him on the winding stairs on my way up from the bowels of the ship. 'He's made friends with the mascot dog. The deck force is crowded before sailors' quarters listening to

the addlepatet fool sing the dog to sleep.'

'I guess he's a bit queer about singing,' I answered. 'But who can blame a seaman for singing, even though his audience be only a dog, on the long, lonesome nights at sea?'

'The second was too far down the stairs to make reply. His voice was drowned by the clatter from below.

'I hurried to the deck to see what was going on. Just outside the iron swinging doors of the galley, on a pile of ashes that had come up from the engine room, Edwin was seated. At his feet was a dog, his head between his paws, tail thumping the deck, jowls twitching. In the upper half of the galley doorway the light from a smoking lantern lit up the face of the cook. Cooney stood there, looking at nothing, a pan in one hand and a dirty rag in the other, his mouth hanging open—and Edwin Carll was strumming a mandolin. I never knew the pink-faced boy could play a musical instrument of any kind. He was singing and his very soul was in the song.

'As I approached him he leaped to his feet. The song was hushed. The pink-faced boy spread his arms and took three steps toward the rail. The dog, too, twitched his ears and barked furiously at something he seemed to see far out there under the moonlight.

'Suddenly, just as I was about to catch him before he went overboard, Edwin looked at the mandolin in a puzzled sort of way, glanced at the dog, frowned, then turning his face to me, a face now deathly white, he shouted:

'Matt, she came very near getting me! I awakened just in time to save myself.'

'He seemed to have remembered something.

'You were with us when Mardel fell into the quarry hole! Did you save her?'

'Do you think I am as yellow as you are? I promised her, half an hour before I found you in the shipping office, that I would break you of your cowardliness. That is why I'm signed on in the black gang—that I might be near you.'

'Yes, you think I'm crazy, eh?' Edwin laughed, and his laugh was not pleasant to hear. 'Always, all of my life, I have been able to see and hear things. I did not tell others—they would have only laughed, and, like the sailors back aft, called me a fool. I am just a bit doubtful, myself, sometimes. If I were sure that what I see was not simply the imaginings of a disordered brain, I'd accept Mardel's challenge and walk into the sea. But I'm afraid, Matt — I'm terribly afraid!'

'Even as we talked, the moonlight was blotted out and a light gust of wind, burdened with dampness, snatched up a loose corner of the canvas hatch-cover and snapped it loudly. Had I been more experienced there is no doubt that I could have read the warning of an approaching storm.

'Now, if I were just sure—'

'Edwin had taken a step toward the rail. I grasped him by the slack of his shirt, hard up under the throat, shook him and gave him a staggering start aft toward his bunk. I had hoped that this would anger him to the point of fight. But no, Edwin took it.

'Sparks came from his cabin, looked toward the sky where the moon was drifting in and out among the clouds, glanced down, saw me and called:

'Statie's sure bad. Storm brewin' and th' air'll be full o' S O S before long. Picked up warnings from Arlington and passed 'em along to th' old man. Reckon I'll be slidin' back and forth th' length o' my table tryin' to find something to hold on to in a few hours.'

"Even as he talked I saw the clouds racing before the wind, rolling and tumbling like smoke from a factory chimney. The wireless antennae began to whine as the wind used the wires as strings for nature's guitar.

"Some one called from the bridge an order that put the signal bells down in the engine room, to work. I saw the first mate come down from the bridge, brace himself against the wind and start aft, walking unsteadily with the sway of the ship.

"Oh ho!" I thought, 'here's where Edwin is put to the test.'

"I followed the first back to sailors' quarters. The deck force was tumbling from their bunks; shirts were being drawn over naked shoulders and belts pulled fast to the tune of many a curse from leather throats.

"Hi don't blame anyone but myself. It's me own bloody fault for comin' to th' sea for my bread and butter when I should o' known bloom-in' well right that th' only thing the ocean is fit for is—fish! Hif I ever make th' port o' Liverpool again that's where I stay—swipe me pink hif I don't!" grumbled a big, light-haired Englishman as he ducked into the companionway.

"Aye, I teenk we're in for some weather," joined the half-breed, lurching toward the door to follow the Englishman.

"Orders had gone forth to stretch the life lines. Who knew but that they would be needed before the *Golden Harp* poked her nose into the sunshine again?

"I LOOKED about among the hurrying seamen for some sign of my charge. Eventually I located him. He was in his bunk with the one dirty blanket pulled up over his face. He was unable to stand because of the trembling of his legs when I pulled him from his hiding place. His tongue was thick with the fear that was upon him and he would only grunt in re-

ply to the first officer's commands. He was a thing, not a man.

"Come, damn you!" I shouted into his ear. It was necessary to scream now, for the wind was howling like a million vengeful demons. 'Come, brace up, you're going on deck to help make things fast. Within half an hour the seas will be smashing about your ears. What are you doing?'

"Edwin was down on his knees, his arms across an old sea chest, his face buried from sight, so terrified that he could not regain his feet. The mate's face went purple with rage as he looked upon the coward.

"Aye, it's no time to say your prayers, you fellow skunk!" howled the mate, twining his fingers in the hapless man's neckband.

"Jerking Edwin to his feet, the mate drew back a heavy ham of a fist and sent it smashing against the coward's face. He heaped vile oaths, oaths that only the lips of a hard man, in hard places, can utter, upon the trembling wretch, called him names that make all white men fight, even though they see quick and sudden death as a result. But Edwin simply allowed his trembling body to slump to the floor and covered his face with his arms.

"We could not wait longer. The mate and I fought our way through the wind and water to the open deck. The big ship was climbing to the top of towering waves and sliding down into valleys where she seemed to stand still, momentarily, to allow nature's sledge-hammer of tons of water to crash, down on her decks and about the seamen clinging to the life lines.

"Aye, I teenk she be gonna storm," grunted the half-breed as he brought up against the starboard rail where the mate and I held on grimly, awaiting the vessel's arrival at the top of a wave.

"The mate, hugging the rail, hard by my side, laughed — actually laughed at the words of the dark-

skinned, beringed sailor. I wondered at these men who could laugh in the face of death. They knew much that I, with my inexperience, did not know.

"Not only does she storm, Pete," yelled the mate as the ship went crashing, broadside, against a wall of water, 'but we've lost our rudder.'

"Mebbe so we rig a jury, eh, what?"

"Our three heads were close together. Otherwise the words would have been carried away before they reached our ears. Now and then lightning cut the darkness and the thunder seemed to be drumming just over our heads.

"Rig hell!" roared the mate. 'She's sprung a leak and the black gang is foundering about in water. The engine room will be flooded within the next few minutes—besides, we are hard by a rock-pile of a coast and if we don't go sliding to Davy Jones we're bound to be smashed to kindling and twisted steel on the rocks. Say your prayers, Pete!'

"Bah!" yelled Pete, the half-breed, making a dash for the life-line.

"We followed and managed to make our way to where the most of the seamen were congregated on the second deck close under the bridge, where the only life boat was being cared for. The others had gone when the smashing seas carried away the ventilators and tore the metal doors from the cabins in the officers' quarters.

"Is there no chance of some other vessel coming to our rescue?" I asked, somewhat timidly. I had heard tales of other ships coming to the rescue when called to the scene by wireless.

"The water's put me out of business," came a voice at my elbow, and I turned to find the operator talking. 'Th' engine-room's a steamin' hell and th' black gang's swarmin' up out o' th' bowels o' th' old hooker like rats scamperin' for safety. Before the water reached the engines I spoke

the government cutters and they are coming. We'll all be in Davy Jones' locker when they arrive.'

"DURING the excitement that followed I forgot Edwin entirely. It became each man for himself. Many went to a wet grave that night. A white streak of lightning went zig-zagging through the blackness, lighting the face of the storm-lashed coast for a moment, and in that moment the lookout, lashed to the bridge, saw and realized that the end had come.

"Rocks!" he screamed. 'Rocks, dead ahead!'

"He might as well not have called the warning for all the good that could come of it. Crash! There was a terrific shock, a grinding and groaning of crushed steel and splintering wood.

"Me? I believed none of us would live longer than the few moments it takes for water to snuff out a man's life. It is strange, but fully five minutes later I found myself wondering if, when the arms of death embraced me, I should continue to exist in a new life and whether I would still have Edwin Carll, the coward, as a charge. Then I decided that it was taking the reaper a long while to collect toll—perhaps he would not get me, after all.

"My thoughts were interrupted by the skipper's voice.

"She's poked her nose into a mountain of rock, a scant quarter of a mile off a rocky coast. Before morning she will be tugged off by her shifting cargo of pig iron to go scooting for—for—"

"Look! Look!" yelled someone.

"Raising my head above the iron railing, just beneath the bridge, where I had been clinging while the seas raised and lowered the ship in their wash, I looked aft from eyes that must have showed as much terror as the heart of Edwin Carll ever felt.



"The repeated flashes of lightning, playing over the heaving deck below, showed me Edwin Carll, the coward, working his way toward us along a life line, the water breaking over the deck threatening to wash him overboard.

"I thought this had brought the exclamation. But no—the voice of the half-breed indicated otherwise.

"The vampire of the sea! She lures ze poor sailorman to hees death, I teenk!"

"Following the direction in which those near me were looking, toward the coast, where a huge, flat-surfaced rock projected, I saw, when the lightning flashed, a woman—aye, grin, you fools! I saw her with my own eyes, arms outstretched, her long hair streaming over her shoulders. I could not see her features, simply her form, in a white gown that was all too thin for the flare of the penetrating lightning. Every member of the *Golden Harp's* crew, all left clinging to the wreckage, saw her.

"Men," said the skipper, "if we could get a light line to that rock, then draw a heavy hawser ashore with the lighter line, make it fast—"

"Oh, ho! That would be fine! But who's going to take the light line ashore?" said the mate.

"I know," answered the old man. "There is not one chance in a million of a human being weathering that water—still I have seen worse—"

"It was not that the men were afraid to try. It was the simple fact that each one realized that it was sure suicide with nothing to be gained. The suggestion was foolish. The lifeboat had slithered out of its blocks and was bobbing over the side to reappear and go crashing inboard. Chains had been made fast to the boat when the storm first broke.

"Matt! Matt! Where are you?"

"It was Edwin Carll, his clothing in rags, a smear of red across one

cheek, working his way along the iron railing of the stairs.

"Will we sink?" he asked when he reached my side.

"Probably will, unless a miracle is performed. Now, if you had nerve enough to fight your way to that rock with a line—"

"At that moment the lightning flashed and Edwin Carll, looking in the direction my trembling finger pointed, saw the woman on the rock.

"Mardel!" he shrieked. "Mardel!"

"Look out!" came a shout from the skipper, which was joined by the curses of shipwrecked sailors who saw their last lifeboat going to destruction. The chain had either broken or become unhooked from the small boat. The little craft was slithering inboard—now the wash of the seas was bringing it back.

"Some one take a chance—our last chance!" called the captain. "Some one take the line, leap in as the boat washes past and either sink with it or save the crew."

"Even as he said it the lifeboat slid close by him. The half-breed reached out for the line but changed his mind and the boat passed him—Now, I'm no coward, I tell you! I'm no coward! Don't you dare laugh! It was because I could not make up my mind quick enough—the boat swept by me and was gone—no!"

"Mardel! Mardel!" called Edwin. "I'm coming, Mardel, I'm coming!"

"And as the boat passed him, the last chance, Edwin Carll, the coward, leaped in and the darkness swallowed him.

"For a long while the rattle of the small line paying out behind the lifeboat could be heard. As it went out, the skipper, realizing what Edwin was doing, hoping against hope that the daredevil would succeed in reaching the rock, made the end fast to the splintered bridge.

"Suddenly the line drew taut. It twanged and sang under a terrific

strain. It was hours later when the lightning flares showed us Edwin Carll on the rock. The heavier line was sent ashore and then we waited.

"From time to time the flat rock was lighted to show us Edwin Carll motioning, beckoning us to come ashore. I do not know how it was possible. We toiled, each man for himself, along the hawser. At times I thought my lungs would burst my breast when the water buried me too long, but always I came gasping to the top.

"Before we had managed to reach the rock the storm died away, although it left the thrashing waters behind. Daylight broke as the last man, the captain, came over the edge of the rock to safety. As he crawled out of reach of the sea's tongue, which lapped greedily at the rock, there was a loud snap. The hawser had broken!

"Looking out toward where the *Golden Harp* was being battered we saw nothing but the foam-capped cones of the waves. The *Golden Harp* had slid off for the floor of the ocean.

"Who said that chap was a coward? Where is he?" shouted the captain, looking about for Edwin.

"Gone—I teenk, mebbe so, the vampire of the sea she take him to Davy Jones," answered the half-breed, shaking his head and causing the metal rings to clank merrily on the lobes of his ears. "On ship he always chatter like ze fool marmoset and teenk he see ghosts. But, aye, I talk wiz him, flowers, books, poetry, music, politics. On ze long dark nights on watch and in ze bunk, I learn mebbe he—aye, I learn surely he no crazy. Also, I learn he no got ze guts to do ze teeng he did."

"But he did it," replied the skipper angrily.

"Pete only shook his head. Me, I was all mixed up in my thoughts. I was thankful that I still lived. I was both sorry and glad that Edwin had gone to his death so bravely—glad

because he was no coward and sorry because—because—because a dead coward was not going to be of much use to the woman I loved. Then a warm flush came over my body as I remembered that nothing stood between myself and Mardel.

"I was glad that it was dark and that my companions could not see the look in my eyes when I clung to the wreckage, out there with the seas smashing about my ears, when I looked aft and saw Edwin coming along the lifeline. . . . Don't look at me that way, you fools! I tell you I'm no coward! I simply could not think fast enough and let the boat go by so that—so that—so that Edwin could have his chance!"

THE sky pilot, from the mission house around the corner, still fingered the huge cross that dangled from the chain about his neck. He looked about him at the interested faces of the Red Lantern's patrons, who formed Matt Lauck's audience.

"This proves what I have always taught in the mission; a man might kill his brother man and escape the law, but he cannot escape his own conscience."

"Do you mean to say that I murdered Edwin Carll?" screamed Matt, leaping to his feet to face the black-gowned minister.

Half a dozen men caught Matt's upraised arms before he could strike.

"You know best, my man. Perhaps you can find comfort in the thought that you did not shove him overboard, that you did not shoot him. Were you afraid to do it that way? Of course not, you were no coward. But, in that case, the law would have to be reckoned with, eh? You probably forgot that higher law—your conscience.

"You called Edwin Carll a coward? You told yourself, always, that Edwin must risk his life to prove that

he was not a coward, and always your heart sang to your brain that it would be well for you if Edwin would lose his life. Your brother man could not blame you for murder. You can fool your brother man but you cannot fool your conscience."

"What has that to do with proof of a future life? The thing men call their souls? It tends to disprove the whole theory," interrupted the first mate of the *Catawac*. "Edwin, and the whole ship's crew, saw the spirit of Mardel, who was still on this side of the border. Edwin was simply crazy—insane with brooding over the fact that he had deserted Mardel and the belief that she was dead."

"Shut up! Let the man finish his story. Go ahead, Matt, let's have the rest," urged Chips. "Did you collect your reward when you returned? How did Mardel take it?"

"It's about done," continued Matt when he had gained control over his feelings. "A cutter gathered us up from the rock, several days later, and brought us back, here, to the foot of our street, where the *Catawac* now tugs at her lines.

"I felt much better. In fact I was almost happy, for now Mardel was mine. Of course I dreaded telling her that Edwin was dead, but—

"I walked up our street, stopped at Mardel's door, eased my dunnage bag to the steps and knocked—a bit timidly, I'll admit.

"Her brother, Jack Haugh, opened the door. He was puzzled to place me immediately, then suddenly he grasped my hand.

"Well, well, of all things, it's Mathew Laucks. How's the world been treating you, Matt?"

"Not so well, Jack, not so well. Where's Mardel?"

"The smile on the lips of Jack Haugh disappeared. He looked at me in a thoughtful manner.

"I had forgotten, you do not get the local newspapers aboard ship. Certainly you could not have known. Ten minutes after you left Mardel, on your way to the shipping office, she was run down and killed by an automobile."

"Aye, laugh, damn you! Laugh!"