

TWICE-A-MONTH

Sea Stories Magazine

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O'Shea Jettisons a Cargo



By
Meigs O. Frost.

We've not had a Gulf of Mexico story on our manifest for some time. However, this one more than makes up for lost time. And, as the title implies, it has a fine type of Irish sailor as a hero. Jettisoning cargo has often been done in an emergency, but we don't think that an entire cargo was ever jettisoned before in quite the fashion described in this story.

UP in one of the small and stifling rooms of that rabbit warren of crowded humanity that New Orleans calls the Old French Quarter—though its residents to-day are chiefly Italians, Syrians, and the human driftwood from a score of Latin-American ports—sat two men.

One was splendidly tailored and barbered. He leaned back, broad-shouldered, in a precariously creaking chair, smoked a cigarette cork tipped and of superlength, and gazed through a window on the mildewed, stone-flagged courtyard beneath.

The other, at a stained and rickety kitchen table of unpainted pine, its top covered with bottles of multicolored inks and an array of pens and small brushes, worked away at a discolored sheet of paper. On the wall in front of him was pinned a section of a United States navy chart.

His long, nervous fingers handled pen

and brush with swift precision. His eyes, deep set in a face on which the cynic evil of many years and many cities was graven for all the world to read, glanced from the chart to paper and back again.

"There," said he at last, pushing back from the table. "That's what I call a good job."

He lifted the discolored sheet of paper. It looked like a roughly drawn chart nearly a century old. Its edges were broken and stained from slightly yellowish to dark brown.

"Any navigator will spot the place, Skee," said he. "It's the north shore of Swan Island all right. There's the bearings, too. The big tree and the big rock and the cross halfway between on the crest of the beach. That clinches it to the average boob. And this, especially."

He pointed to the lower right-hand corner of the sheet.

In the crabbed and shaky hand of the semiliterate man of years long gone, was this inscription:

"D. Chaney. His Chart."

And the date:

"1847."

Skee Wintersohn, he of the splendid tailoring and the supermanicure, reached avidly for the paper.

"Not yet, Skee," quoth the other as with swift and nervous movement he jerked it out of reach. "One hundred berries first. Then she's yours."

"Climb down, Purser; climb down!" expostulated Wintersohn. "You're out on a high limb. Call it twenty fish and here's the sawbuck."

He pulled a bank note, folded, yellow backed, from his waistcoat pocket and held it out.

"Listen, you cheap skate," said Purser. "You said it was worth a century to you. There's the job. It's good. Come across with the hundred."

"Oh, ease off," said Wintersohn. "If it took you a week, that would be another thing. But I've seen you do it in two hours. I'm a square sport about this. Twenty fish for two hours ain't bad money."

"Two hours!" said Purser bitterly. "It took me ten years in hell to be able to do that job in two hours—and to be willing to do it. Come through with the hundred."

"The double sawbuck's all you get, Jim. Don't be a fool. You can't bluff me. Think of the morph that'll get you. And you sure look like you needed it."

Shrewdly he was watching the other's twitching lips, his burning eyes, his fingers ceaselessly moving. Few knew better than he when a man was in grip of desire for morphine.

But there was a streak of Purser's being that just then made bitterness at this petty bilking override even the yearning for the drug that had brought him to this.

"Skee," he said, "I might have known that your kind has to pay in advance. It's the hundred or nothing. And you don't get the chart without the hundred. That's final."

The purple tide of rage rose above Wintersohn's collar.

"If you think you can buck me and get away with it," he rasped, "you're fuller of hop than usual. Suppose I telephone the police that the guy who forged those cotton bills of lading is down here? How long'd you last? And there ain't no hop where they'd take you, either. Hand over that chart before I take it away from you and beat you up for luck. Get me? Hand it over!"

He rose from the creaking chair. His smooth bulk towered above the emaciated wreck in front of him.

With a nervous leap Purser had rounded the corner of the table, placing it between them. In one hand he held the chart. In the other nestled a small automatic, flat and sinister as the head of a rattlesnake.

"Stick 'em up, you double-crossing crook!"

With alacrity almost comic the manicured hands rose high. But there was nothing comic in Purser's hard, metallic voice.

"When a guy gets where I am today," said he bitterly, "a little thing like croaking you means nothing in his young life. Take down your left hand! You can't shoot with that if you have got a gun. Pull out your roll! Toss it on the table!"

His commands crackled like a machine-gun burst. Skee Wintersohn took them.

Still covering his visitor, Purser reached out one of those long-fingered hands to the table. Slowly he stripped five of the twenty-dollar bills that covered the plethoric roll.

"I ought to fine you another hundred for dirty work—or take the whole

works," he grated. "But you wouldn't understand if I told you why I don't."

His voice rose with fury.

"Square sport!" A cootie is one of nature's noblemen alongside you. Now pick up your roll and beat it before I bore you. There's your damned chart, too. I don't know what crooked work you're up to with it. But take it from me, Skee, you're not even a decent crook. You'll try to double cross yourself some time and break your neck falling over your own feet. On your way, you louse!"

His eyes unable to face the blazing contempt of the emaciated wreck half his weight who had called his bluff, Skee Wintersohn hastily stuffed that forged "ancient" chart and the remnants of his roll into his pockets. Down the stairs he went.

"Square sport!" Those were the last two bitter words he heard. He said no word in threat. For Purser was right. Skee Wintersohn, despite his carefully nurtured reputation as one of Gangland's smooth and deadly killers, was yellow from shoes to hat. He knew it. And he knew the little drug addict knew it. The groomed bulk of him was still quivering from the sight of that automatic muzzle and those blazing eyes.

"Well," he meditated, as he walked down the narrow old street, "he'd got the chart, anyway."

Now for the rest of the big plan. Nobody had seen his encounter with Purser. His reputation was still safe. Better steady down now. It took headwork to put across the big stuff he was after.

And this game he was in now was B-I-G—big!—take it from him.

His twisted mind, turned so many years into the corkscrew channels of the underworld, was working at top speed.

"If only that crimp Schweitzer has the right dope on that boat he told me about!" he murmured to himself.

"That crimp Schweitzer," had not failed him.

Down on the New Orleans water front, at the foot of Esplanade Avenue, just past the French Market, where the great gray United States mint broods over its ancient memories and the Mississippi River sweeps past in a seething, mud-brown arc, at that very moment the forty-ton fishing schooner *Patsy* was tugging at her moorings.

She was just back from a trip to the Campeche Banks. It had not been a particularly prosperous trip.

Captain Teddy O'Shea, her master, was a philosopher of parts, however. Also, being as Irish as his name, a poet at heart.

That very afternoon, when, "greased" by the simple process of a change in ownership of a hundred-dollar bank note, Schweitzer, keeper of a disreputable Tchoupitoulas Street sailors' boarding house, had mentioned him to Wintersohn, Captain Teddy had been seated on the hatch coaming of his battered craft, puffing a black brier pipe and chivvying his crew in their preparations for another voyage.

It was a queer combination, that crew. There was Jimmie Cole, who tinkered eternally with the stout little gasoline kicker that supplemented the *Patsy's* dingy sails. There was Jack McKay, cook, steward, all-around man of the craft. There was Curly, the emaciated deck hand. Captain Teddy might swear at the others or chaff them with rough water-front jest, but he went lightly with Curly. One would go a bit easily with a fellow human who had just shaken off the chains of narcotic drugs—whose eyes still showed beneath a doglike gratitude some glimpses of those lower and unmentionable hells into which the human soul can descend—who sat at odd hours, with a worn violin and played heart-breaking harmonies.

And that night, while Wintersohn

was waiting for Purser to complete the chart of "D. Chaney," Captain Teddy was making his way to the "shotgun cottage" where Mother O'Shea ruled as he ruled in his own domain. A "shotgun cottage" in certain New Orleans residential districts is one in which you "look straight down the barrel." From the front door, through a vista of parlor, two bedrooms, and a sitting room, you see the kitchen sink.

But it was a pleasant home, at that.

To it, after every voyage, came Captain Teddy, sure of his welcome, sure of the old-fashioned food, and sure that there'd be anywhere from two to six neighbors' children about the place. The O'Sheas were childless. And about children; as about battle, there were certain chords placed in the heart of Teddy O'Shea some ten or twenty Irish generations back, that started to thrum and gave the same sort of glow as four fingers of his native but now forbidden Bushmills.

"Rotten luck this trip," he called to Mother O'Shea, as he entered the cottage, "but we're sailing in a day or two, and this time we'll mop up."

"That's the beauty of the sea," philosophized Mother O'Shea. "Ye never know what it'll be next."

She didn't really realize what truth she spoke.

It was a glorious morning in April, soft blue of sky, golden of sun, with air like warm milk, when Captain Teddy strode across the wharf plank-ing. Lightly he stepped over a mass of creosoted piling. Lightly he leaped from wharf apron to the deck of his small craft. Scoured as to wood, burnished as to metal, her galley stocked and her gasoline tanks full, the *Patsy* was ready to leave that day for the Campeche Banks and her redfish rendezvous.

Then it was that Captain Teddy learned his vessel harbored a guest.

A figure clad in tailored garb, sharp contrast to the dungarees of the *Patsy's* crew, leaned idly against the foremast.

The visitor stepped forward, flipping overboard a remnant of cork-tipped cigarette.

"Is this Captain O'Shea?" he asked.

The lips of the *Patsy's* master, pursed in the unconscious whistling of that ancient ditty describing the trouserless condition of one Brian O'Lynn, widened into a grin of sheer friendliness.

"None other," said he, thrusting forth a scarred and hardened hand. "And you?"

"Wintersohn's my name," said the visitor smoothly. "Skee Wintersohn, my friends call me."

"Skee?" Captain Teddy raised quizzical eyebrows.

"Short for Whisky," explained Wintersohn jocularly.

"'Tis a pleasant weakness of some great men," admitted the *Patsy's* captain. "And I've had my share. But I'm neither buyin' nor sellin' nor yet transportin' it, if that's what brings you."

The visitor shook a deprecatory head.

"I used to sell it wholesale in the old days," said he. "But I'm not in the bootlegging game now."

"'Twas a fine business once for them as liked it," opined O'Shea. "But I'm thinkin' th' competition is gettin' too strong for th' health or th' profits, these days, from what I hear along th' water front."

"You're right," confirmed Wintersohn. "But let's get down to business. You're probably wondering what brought me aboard."

"I was that, since you ask me," quoth Captain Teddy. "Not that we're ever sorry to see distinguished visitors, but we're headin' out for th' Campeche Banks to-day and there's much to do."

"Is there some place we can talk privately, captain?"

"Up here in the bow is as good as any."

Hospitably the *Patsy's* master led the way past the foremast, set two buckets upside down, seated himself on one, and indicated the other with a wave of his hand.

"Shoot th' works," said he.

"I've learned on the water front, Captain O'Shea, that you're a pretty square sport," began the visitor.

"'Tis fine to get th' flowers before th' funeral," philosophized the captain. "There's many th' man has never got his bouquets till he was past bein' able to smell 'em."

"So," continued Wintersohn, smiling. "I've come to put a sporting proposition up to you."

"That sounds like th' new oil stocks," observed Captain Teddy. "They used to promise you millions. Now they tell you it's a 'constructive gamble.'"

"It's not oil stock," said Wintersohn. "It's what you can take up to the window of the First National and they take it and thank you."

"The only thing I know like that is money," said O'Shea out of the wisdom of the years.

"It's what I'm talking about."

"Are you offerin' to give it to me?"

"It comes pretty near that."

"Well, what's your proposition?"

"Captain, you could use some money, I take it."

"Always—and then some."

"There you are. You want the money. I want a boat and a captain and a crew that can be trusted. For I know where the money is. I know where there's more than a million dollars in gold, waiting to be dug up. Just waiting for me to come and get it. Here's my proposition: If we put it through and get the money, I'll give you twenty per cent of the gold we get. If anything blows up, I'll guarantee you one thousand dollars and your expenses for the trip, with the distinct under-

standing that I have the *Patsy* under private charter for that trip. Nothing in writing, you understand. This is personal between you and me—and the thousand dollars will be in your hands before we start. Your crew will have some digging to do. But there'll be enough in it for a bonus for 'em if they work and keep their mouths shut."

"Wait a minute," said Captain Teddy. He fished in a pocket and brought out creased envelope and stubby pencil.

"I can get you on this thousand-dollar stuff," said he. "I've handled that much money myself. But when you get-to talkin' by th' million, I want to see th' figures."

He scribbled for a moment. Then he looked up.

"You're paying me something like two hundred thousand dollars for the use of the *Patsy* for one trip?" he asked.

"If we get what we go after, yes," said Wintersohn calmly. "If not, through any accident, then one thousand fish and your expenses."

"It beats th' redfish," announced O'Shea. "But you gotta come through with more dope than this. Are you figgerin' on robbin' a bank at Havana or Vera Cruz?"

"Nothing like that," grinned Wintersohn. "Now listen. I wouldn't have come here to do business with you unless I found you were a square sport. That's me, too. I'm going to put you wise, if I've got your promise the news stops with you if we don't do business. Have I got your word?"

"You have," said Captain Teddy simply. "No man ever called Ted O'Shea a liar yet—and I've dealt with a lot of 'em."

"I know that," said Wintersohn. "I made it my business to find out. Now look here."

From his inner coat pocket he drew out a small packet of oiled silk. From it he produced an ancient, yellowed

sheet of coarse paper. He spread it before Captain Teddy's eyes for a second, and then folded it over so only a corner showed.

"You see what it is?" he asked.

"I see it's a chart of some coast," said the *Patsy's* master. But his eyes were gleaming.

"Then read this."

Captain Teddy read the brief inscription aloud.

"D. Chaney. His Chart. Eighteen-forty-seven."

"Well?" said he, straightening up on his bucket.

"That's the map that leads to a million dollars, if you're with me," said Wintersohn calmly. "The gold is buried at a spot marked on that map. It's been waiting nearly a hundred years for somebody to come and get it."

"Who put it there?" asked Captain Teddy. But the question was needless. His sailor's mind, filled with the tales of the Louisiana south coast and the old Spanish Main he sailed, knew the answer.

"Pirates, of course," said Wintersohn.

"I thought so," said O'Shea. "I've heard the stories before. But never have I seen the original maps. Let's have the story."

"Wait a minute," quoth Skee Wintersohn. "Now you know where I stand. I want to know where you stand. You've heard my proposition. Twenty per cent if we find it. One thousand dollars and expenses if we don't. It ought to take us only a week to bring the stuff to light. Let's allow two weeks at this place on the map, and three weeks sailing for the round trip. You'll not do better than a thousand dollars in five weeks' redfishing, if I know the market."

"Just one thing." Captain Teddy was thinking hard. "You could fit up a boat for a lot less than two hundred thousand dollars. It's a big share.

Why do you want to pay me so much for the job?"

"It's a reasonable question," conceded Wintersohn. "It gets a reasonable answer. To begin, I know you're familiar with the spot where this stuff is buried. I've found out about your outfit before I came to you. Next, the *Patsy* is a regular fishing schooner out of New Orleans. Nobody pays any attention to her going and coming. Next, you're a navigator. I'm not. Figure for yourself whether I could buy or fit out a boat and get a captain and crew for that sort of a trip without the word leaking. We'd have a navy of treasure chasers on our tails."

"Fair enough," said Captain Teddy.

"Also get this: There are some people mighty close to where we're going to dig. The stuff isn't theirs. It belongs to the man who finds it. But we'd best slip in quietly and slip out quietly. We can do it on the *Patsy*. If we're found and any questions asked, we're a fishing schooner on the beach for some emergency repairs. There you are. It's a square sports' proposition. Are you with me?"

Now the water front is a place where swift decisions and astounding events grow commonplace. Not for it are the cynic deliberations of the region of roll-top desks.

"You're on," said Ted O'Shea. He thrust out a hardened hand for the gripping compact of its kind. The Wintersohn handshake, it seemed to him, was a trifle flabby. But if the Wintersohn handshake was flabby, the Wintersohn voice was not.

"Then here's the whole story," said that individual. "This chart shows the north shore of Swan Island. You know the place. The United Fruit Company's got a big wireless station there. In the Caribbean off British Honduras as you go through the Yucatan Straits. About a thousand miles out of New Orleans."

"Sure—I know all about Swan Is-

land," interrupted Captain Teddy. "Know that section like the palm of my hand. The island was named after old Bob Swan, one of the worst of those murderin' pirates they ever had."

"Right you are," said Wintersohn. "Well, I got this chart from old Pete Hansen up in Seattle. Gave it to me before he died. Liquor killed him. He'd always planned to get the money some day, but he was a suspicious old Skowegian, never would take anybody in with him on shares, and never kept sober long enough to save up for the trip.

"Pete got this map from his uncle when the old man died. The uncle was cabin boy on a merchant ship back in eighteen-forty-seven. They were coming up through the Caribbean when a pirate sailed up and opened fire. But the merchant ship was loaded for bear. She licked the pirate in fair fight."

Captain Teddy was leaning forward, eyes aghast.

"The crew was all pepped up," Wintersohn went on. "They fought like demons. When the scrap was over the only living man on the pirate ship was the cook, a fellow named Daniel Chaney, and he was wounded."

"That's it, is it?" said O'Shea. "'D. Chaney. His Chart.'"

"That's it," said Wintersohn. An inscrutable smile was playing about the corners of his mouth.

"The cook was dying, anyway," he pursued. "All shot up and cut up. So they took him on board the merchantman when he begged them to let him die among honest folks. He told 'em he wasn't really a pirate, anyway. He had been captured by the pirates and forced to cook for 'em or walk the plank. So Pete Hansen's uncle, the cabin boy, gave him water to drink and bathed his wounds. The rest were all too busy to bother about a dying cook, anyway.

"It was lucky for us that they were. For that pirate cook, he was a square

sport. Just before he died he told the cabin boy that the pirate ship had made a lot of fine raids and had buried a lot of gold coin and bullion off on Swan Island beach. He said it took seven men nine trips to carry the stuff ashore. If you figure about sixty pounds of gold to the man, you see that brings it up over a million dollars. Then the ship headed out for a raid on the settlements farther north to capture a lot of women, marry 'em pirate style, and settle down on Swan Island and live happy forever after."

"What did they want to tackle the merchant ship for?" asked Captain Teddy, as Wintersohn paused for breath and lit another supercigarette.

"I was coming to that. The dying cook said that the merchant ship was a bigger, better ship than the pirates'. Besides that, they wanted the papers on her, so they could enter ports without any trouble from port officers, and stay long enough to get their new wives.

"Well, as I said, the cook was a square sport, too. Before he died, he drew this map on a piece of paper they took from the bottom of a ship's biscuit tin. He signed it. You saw the signature. Then he died."

"Let's see the map again," said Captain Teddy.

Silently he studied it for a moment.

"So that's where the treasure is," said he. "At the cross on the crest of the beach between the big tree and the big rock, at the head of this cove on the north shore?"

"That's the place," said Wintersohn.

"The rock is probably what we'll spot it by," said O'Shea. "I doubt me if the tree has lasted since 1847 in all the hurricanes we've had."

He studied the faded, yellowed sheet once more.

"I wonder why th' cabin boy never went after it," he mused.

"You'd not wonder if you'd heard the story Pete Hansen told me," grinned

Wintersohn. "That merchantman wound up at Seattle. There Pete's uncle married one of those women that made the rolling pin famous. She never let him go to sea again, let alone hunt pirate treasure. She caught him young and treated him rough."

Captain Teddy's answering grin flashed out.

"I'm wise," said he. "They sure can boss their own deck, th' ladies."

"Well," said Wintersohn, "there you are."

He reached into his pocket, produced a roll of bank notes, stripped off ten one-hundred-dollar bills, and handed them to O'Shea.

"Render me a bill for the expenses when we get back," said he. "And be sure you don't overlook anything. I'm a square sport and I pride myself on it."

"We could settle when we get back," said Captain Teddy, "but if you wish, I'll take that thousand. Are you coming with us alone?"

"I was about to mention that," said Wintersohn. "I've got three friends I want to take with me. They're rich men—square sports like you and me. They've known about this for some time, and I promised 'em I'd take 'em with me whenever I made the trip. This year's the first time I've been in shape to go. Up to my neck in business up in Seattle. No time for luxuries like hunting pirate treasure. Only two years ago Pete Hansen died and left me the map."

"It'll crowd us a little," said the *Patsy's* master. "But if they don't mind roughing it they can make it."

"They're good sports and square sports," said Wintersohn. "They'll take what's coming. Will to-morrow morning be right for the start?"

"Fine," said Captain Teddy. "I'll have to get some tools to-day, though."

Wintersohn started.

"That's one on me," he said. "I was

so interested in getting the boat that I overlooked it. Get some pickaxes and spades and crowbars—you'll know what we need."

"Sure," said Captain Teddy. "Can you be here at nine in the morning? We'll be ready to cast off then."

"Nine it is," quoth Wintersohn smilingly.

They gripped hands again. That is, Captain Teddy did the gripping.

Over the wharf side stepped the visitor, waved a farewell hand, and started cityward.

Down in the stuffy interior of the *Patsy*, Captain Teddy called his crew about him and broke the news.

"Are you with me?" he asked.

They were. To a man. And from the moment they filed out, pledged to secrecy, the little schooner throbbled with excitement.

Then, as Jimmie Cole and Jack McKay and Curly, with an unexpectedly idle day on their hands, sat on the *Patsy's* deck in the soft April air, dreaming dreams more golden than the sunlight that bathed them, while their cigarette butts flipped into the muddy river, Captain Teddy went below once more and pulled out his chart of the Yucatan Straits.

His trained navigator's memory checked against the faded lines of that stained paper marked: "D. Chaney. His Chart. 1847."

"It's the north shore of Swan Island, all right," said he to himself.

And he, too, lighting that black old brier, relaxed into dreams of what two hundred thousand dollars would mean. To Mother O'Shea. To the lads they had picked up from the streets, now making so splendid a fight for a start in life. To the neighborhood kids he loved—and that loved him. To him and to his crew, veterans of so many cruises after the redfish.

In his heart those chords placed there so many Irish generations back were

thrumming like harp strings plucked by a master hand. No liquor ever distilled could give that glow.

For the tales of pirate gold at which a modern and sophisticated world may scoff still ring with truth to the seafaring men of the Gulf. They may jest. But at heart they believe. Was it not only yesterday that Jean Lafitte and his Baratarian buccaneers swaggered down the Rue Royale in Nouvelle Orleans, scattering the gold they won?

A sudden racket of raised voices floated down the companionway, breaking through the O'Shea meditations. Up the steps he leaped

"What's the row? He called.

"I'm gonna knock Jimmie Cole's block plumb out from under his hat if he don't lay off'n me, skipper," growled Jack McKay. "He tells me I don't know the difference between a limousine and a coupé. He'll damn well find out when he sees me rollin' down Canal Street in me limousine after this trip, the big stiff!"

"Shut up, you blasted fool!" ordered Captain Teddy. "I'll brain the jackass that mentions money till we're out at sea!"

But his eyes were twinkling as his tongue lashed them. It had just struck him that he never had rolled down Canal Street in a limousine.

In a room whose windows gave on the dingy outlook of Rampart Street—dingy by day, though at night it flared with the tawdry glare of one of the Tango Belt's thoroughfares—Skee Wintersohn at that particular moment was talking with three men.

"So you see what a little brains will do," he ended. "You birds stick with me and this is the last time you ever have to raise a finger unless you want to. The poor boob swallowed it, hook, line, and sinker. The boat's ours for the trip. Alcatraz is fixed. Figure for yourself what about a million makes

when you split it five ways. Now you've got your orders. We get aboard at nine o'clock in the morning. Then it's us for the big clean-up."

Distinctly right was Captain Teddy.

"It'll crowd us a little," he had said when first Wintersohn had told him of the three additional passengers.

It did.

To O'Shea and his men, accustomed to the rough life of the trips after the redfish, that crowding meant little. They were the sort with whom one sails or camps or fishes frictionlessly. Each had his jobs to do. Each did them. Not for them was complaint at sleep caught on moss-filled mattresses or on bare planking; at the discomforts of eight men living close on a forty-ton schooner built for four.

But the three who had come on board with Skee Wintersohn had evidently in all their sporting lives of wealth, on which he laid such stress, done little of the living in the open that trains men to get along in camp or afloat.

"Gentlemen, meet Captain O'Shea," Wintersohn had said, when first they had piled overside that morning, their heavy kitbags dumped on the *Patsy's* deck. And by name he had presented them—"Mister Fred Andrus, captain; Mister Joseph Lamantia and Mister Peter Sebastian."

Now Captain Teddy was not strong for most formalities. But he had the average seaman's belief in a man who grips you clean and looks in your eyes when he talks to you. And the greeting of this trio was singularly reminiscent to him of the curiously flabby handclasp of their introducer.

But he had been busy, then. Point by point he had made final check of water, gasoline, stores, and equipment for the two-thousand-mile round trip ahead of them. And at last, to his snappy orders, mooring lines were cast off, the engine that was Jimmie Cole's

especial charge had snorted its customary indignant snorts at being disturbed and had settled down to work—and the *Patsy* was out in mid-stream.

There, deftly threading the mass of river traffic, ducking astern of the big Esplanade Avenue ferryboat with its load of passengers, she had straightened out downstream and headed into her ninety-mile journey to The Passes, where her bow first would feel the lift of the Mexican Gulf's big rollers and the Port Eads light would sink out of sight.

Clustered in the bow as she rounded Algiers Point had stood Wintersohn and his three. They had talked low-voiced among themselves. In their city clothes they were odd contrasts to the *Patsy's* dungaree-clad men.

Jack McKay, as the captain thought it over, had been the only boisterous spirit aboard. He had looked back astern as they rounded the first curve in the river. There, above the crest of the Esplanade Avenue levee, they could barely see the gray outlines of the roof of the ancient mint.

"We overlooked a bet, cap," said Jack to O'Shea at the wheel.

"How come, Jack?"

"Got away without reserving part of that mint to put our gold in, cap."

"Get on wit' you, you levee crayfish," O'Shea had retorted. "Get for'ard and coil up those ropes before I bust you wide open."

"Levee crayfish, is it? Many's the mornin' I've waked up on the levee, watched a crayfish crawl up on it, an' said, 'Good mornin', breakfast!' to him. But after we get back this time, it's me for grapefruit and lamb chops at the Saint Charles, me lord!"

Forward he went to coil the rope, his voice rising in the mournful ballad of his happy hours:

"Frankie went to Albert's mother,
Fell down on her knees;
Says: 'Ah done kill yo' Albert,

Will yo' fo'give me, please?
He was my ma-a-a-an, but he done me
wrong.'"

All this was passing through Captain Teddy's mind as he held to his course for Swan Island down through the Gulf of Mexico.

All was not well aboard ship, he conceded to himself. It needed the feel of his money belt, with that thousand tucked away in it, to comfort him. If these men with Wintersohn were wealthy sportsmen, then he was an aviator, he told himself. There had been times before when the *Patsy* had been chartered for fishing cruises. Captain O'Shea knew a gentleman and a sportsman when he saw one—and, above all, when he sailed with one.

He couldn't place his finger on the wrong spot, just yet. But the wrong spot was there, he knew. Of that he grew surer and surer.

There was the matter of Curly, for instance. Something was distinctly wrong with Curly. Since first Captain Teddy had come upon him on the water front, a cocaine-ridden wreck of a youth, had given him food and shelter and had helped him fight free of the drug, he thought he had grown to understand the youngster.

But the past couple of days, since Wintersohn and his crowd had come aboard, Curly was strangely changed. There was silence where before had been venturings of cheerful talk. There was a look on his face that O'Shea did not like.

"Well," Captain Teddy told himself, "these thing come out in the wash. All there is to do is see this job through and keep both eyes peeled."

Which he proceeded to do.

Nine days out of New Orleans they made their way, through April weather superbly glorious. At last, in the lazy afternoon hours that precede the splen-

dor of a tropical sunset, the palms of Swan Island rose before their eyes like tiny feather dusters upreared against the sky.

Through his glasses Captain Teddy spotted the tall tower that held aloft the wireless antennæ, and pointed it out to Wintersohn.

"Judging from the map," he told him, "the cove we want is some little way down the north shore. We'd best make it after dark so there'll be no more excitement than we can help. I'll skirt the coast and spot the place before sundown."

Slowly they cruised along, paralleling the beach, while Jack McKay held the wheel and Captain Teddy, after prolonged scrutiny of the chart of D. Chaney, searched the shore with his glasses.

"She's full of coves," he said. "It's the big rock I'm watching for. I don't think the tree has lasted all this time."

All eyes aboard followed the unending panorama of the shore as the *Patsy* rocked along at half speed.

And at last—

"There's your rock, I'm thinking," said O'Shea quietly.

There it stood, a great, gray jutting mass of stone to the right of the deep cove that opened out before them. There were a few palm trees of younger growth about the curve of the shore line, but nothing like the big tree marked on the chart of Daniel Chaney.

At a call from Captain Teddy, Jimmie Cole shut off his engine. Silently the *Patsy* swung on the big swells that brought her nearer and nearer while once more they studied the stained and ragged chart. Then the tropical night shut down on them like a curtain that is lowered.

With propeller turning at half speed, and electric torches flashing from the bow, where with line and lead Jack McKay took soundings, they nosed their

way into the bight of the cove. Close by the white sand beach they anchored.

Above them slowly rose the great and gleaming circle of the tropical moon. The palms in silhouette. Jet black in silhouette the *Patsy* against a sea of placid silver. But none on board the little schooner had an eye for this. Excitement pervaded every man. Wintersohn and his men knew what it was that was burning in the thoughts of the *Patsy's* men. But they alone knew what was in their own veins, flaming like a fever.

Hasty was the supper that Jack McKay threw together. And then, after much overhauling of tackle, they stretched out for the night's sleep.

Somehow, as he lay on his moss-stuffed mattress on the *Patsy's* deck, Captain Teddy felt vaguely perturbed.

He would have been more so, had he heard the whispered passage between Skee Wintersohn and Pete Lamantia up in the bow, a short time before.

"I never thought of it before," had trickled from the corner of Lamantia's mouth, "but who th' hell figgered out that big-rock business? How'd yuh know it was there?"

"Shut up, you mush-brained stiff," Wintersohn had answered in the same sibilant undertone. "Jever know me t' sit in on a game I wasn't wise to? That's the rock where Alcatraz is headin' in to meet us. The one he told me about back in New Orleans last time he was there. That's why I had 'Hop' Purser put it on the chart."

Up out of the east a faint and tremulous light pushed its way. Dim and misty against the line where sea and sky met, the vanguard of purple and mauve skirmishers filtered through the dark. A tiny bead, glowing redly as the peephole into a furnace, climbed above the horizon. It heightened—widened—and then with a sudden leap be-

came the upper arc of a round shield of gleaming brass.

But the sunrise did not have the world to itself that morning in that particular cove on Swan Island. Down in the *Patsy's* galley the big, black iron kettle was singing as Jack McKay poured fiercely boiling water into his tall New Orleans coffee dripper. No alarm clock was needed to awaken Jack that morning.

"Come on, you scissor bills," rang his cheery call as he stepped on deck with a big coffee pot steaming in one hand, a rattling collection of aluminum cups, strung by a cord through their handles, jingling from the other. "Wake up! Come on 'n' get it!"

They came and got it.

"Shake a leg," implored Jack. "Tear into this pan of hash I've got for you and get this breakfast over. The cap says I get me a thousand-dollar bonus if I uncover the stuff first. Come on 'n' lead me to it. I got my own pet spade picked out and I'm king of the dirt diggers till we find it."

That breakfast was finished in jig-time. The dishwashing Jack arranged with masterly simplicity. Dumping the array of tin and aluminum into a sack, he tied the neck of it with a rope and swung it overboard.

"We'll let the tide of Yucatan Straits do the housework to-day," said he. "Show me where we start that hole."

They were overside in the skiff before the day was an hour old.

There was a careful survey of the cove. The big rock was not to be questioned. And there might have been a big tree at the other arm of the cove back in 1847 when Daniel Chaney made his chart, conceded Captain Teddy. There certainly was none now. But the "X" on the chart showed at the rise of the beach in the bight of the cove, midway between rock and tree. In the center of that curve, after elaborate pacings and measurements, Skee Winter-

sohn drove a stake. Stringing a cord to it, he marked a great circle, some thirty feet in diameter.

Hardly had that circle been completed when Jack McKay was on the job, digging like a Texas hound at an armadillo hole.

Wintersohn, standing to one side, lit a cigarette and watched for a moment. His smile was that of one amused. Beside him stepped Fred Andrus.

"I'll say you made the hole big enough, boss," said he, low voiced.

"Had to be," murmured Wintersohn. "The way that bird is making dirt fly, there ain't going to be no island if he keeps it up a week."

Jack McKay was certainly making good his boast. His self-annexed title of King of the Dirt Diggers was never in danger after the first score of shovel-fuls.

All that morning the spades delved steadily. When the sun above them proclaimed noon there was a temporary knock-off, and while dinner was being eaten from the stock of tinned goods brought ashore in the skiff, Captain Teddy ranged afar. He returned with a sack of coconuts. These, their tops sliced with a keen machete, provided 'noble drink.

"They tell me they lace 'em with a shot of gin," mourned Jimmie Cole, as he emptied his fifth.

"Kid, we'll come back 'n' lace 'em with champagne when this cruel war is over and we've got the loot," grinned Jack McKay.

He arose, stretched himself, seized spade, and drove at his task once more.

"Come on, you scissor bills," he called to the crowd. "I smell money. Only thing I ever sweated over like this was a levee crap game."

The hole was widening—deepening. Six days had passed. In the glare of the tropical sun, digging in a mixture of limestone-rock dust and sand comes

the nearest known to digging in talcum powder. Even Jack McKay's irrepressible spirits were beginning to lag.

"D'you suppose," asked Captain Teddy, as they paused for dinner that sixth day, "that we've spotted the wrong cove? There's a bunch of 'em along this north shore. It might be worth our time to give 'em the once-over again. That man Chaney may have made some mistake. For we're getting pretty deep now, even allowing for the sand that's washed up in seventy-odd years."

"I'll say we're gettin' deep," quoth Jack McKay wearily. "I heard a sound this mornin' I swear was somebody talkin' Chinese!"

A while they debated. Then it was agreed that the seventh day be spent in resting on board the *Patsy* and that the next day they scout the shore line some more.

The search proved fruitless. There was no cove in all the line of indentations that showed anything as near the great rock of "D. Chaney. His Chart" as the cove in which now yawned the giant hole.

That night they sat by the base of the big rock, to which they had returned, talking it over. The crew of the *Patsy* were frankly disgusted. Wintersohn's crowd loafed about easily, quite unconcerned.

"I'll tell you what," said Captain Teddy. "I don't want to seem a quitter, but we can't dig up all Swan Island, and there's nothing looks better than this cove. I'm for up-anchor and back to New Orleans."

"Not yet," said Wintersohn. "If you'll recall, I paid you a thousand flat for the round trip and two weeks here. We'll fight it out for the rest of that two weeks. If we don't turn up the stuff by then—well, I'm out a thousand fish and it's my funeral."

"We'll stick," said Captain Teddy. "I'm giving each of my boys an extra

hundred for their work. They've earned it.

Two days more the *Patsy's* men fought blazing sun and talcum-powder beach with their spades—and then they had to give it up. The hole was getting too big and deep for further excavation without buckets. They had dug clean from the crest of the beach's highest center to water level—and they were standing nearly knee-deep in water seepage when they quit.

That was the night Juan Alcantraz stepped into the scene.

The moon had been obscured by clouds, or they would have seen him sooner. As it was, the click of his oarlocks brought them up standing, their backs to the little fire they had lit, peering out into the darkness of the cove.

Up on the beach ran the bow of a battered skiff. Three swarthy Mexicans were at the oars. Over the thwarts stepped a small and dapper figure in white, the brown face with a wispy black mustache and swift-moving black eyes making swift circuit of the group of men as he approached.

"Good evening, señors," said he. "Juan Alcantraz is my name. Captain of the schooner *El Isleo*, verree much in distress. Whom have I the honor of meeting?"

The rites of introduction were completed.

"The schooner *Patsee* of New Orleans?" repeated Alcantraz. "Are you by any chance filled with cargo?"

"That we are not," said the *Patsy's* master. "And it's happy I'd be if we had forty tons of redfish under our hatches this holy minute."

"Why, captain?" spoke Wintersohn to the Mexican. "Why are you interested in the *Patsy's* cargo? Do you want to do some business with her? I have the boat under charter."

"That," said Alcantraz, "by the providence of God, seems fortunate."

And he launched into his story.

The *El Isleo*, it seemed, was laden with a cargo precious to science, though commercially valueless. She was out of Puerto Cortez in Spanish Honduras. Certain scientists exploring far into the interior had gathered specimens of great value to them. These, cased, they were shipping to New Orleans on the *El Isleo* because of that schooner's extraordinarily low rate for freights.

"These men of science, señors, as you doubtless know, are rarely men of great funds."

El Capitan Alcantraz, it appeared, had guaranteed delivery at New Orleans wharves at a specified date. There at the seaport would be waiting other men of science to take over the specimens.

But misfortune had followed close upon his heels. Coming up toward the Yucatan Straits the *El Isleo* had known naught but trouble. Trouble with her gasoline engine. Trouble with her seams. Even now in her hull was more water than was comfortable.

Coming to Swan Island, El Capitan Alcantraz had made a decision. He would beach his schooner, with his men he would do the best job of calking that could be done outside a shipyard, and would proceed to New Orleans, taking his loss for late delivery. That was his misfortune. But no capitan worthy the name, solicitous for his men and his craft, would venture from Swan Island crippled as was the *El Isleo*. Men came ever before profits in the heart of the true mariner.

"El Capitan O'Shea, as one mariner to another, will confirm me to a certainty."

El Capitan O'Shea duly confirmed him as to the traditions of the sea in such cases.

However, observed El Capitan Alcantraz, the fates were with him for once. Here on Swan Island he had seen their fire. Here they lay with empty hold.

So, he continued, if the *Patsee* could

only see her way clear to taking on that transshipped cargo and delivering it to those men of science awaiting in New Orleans, his reputation as a mariner who kept agreements would be maintained. Also there would be profit for the *Patsee*. Not much profit. But still some profit. Would El Capitan O'Shea consider such a proposal?

"It's up to Mr. Wintersohn," Captain Teddy informed the Mexican. "He has the *Patsy* under charter for the rest of the week on Swan Island and for the trip back to New Orleans. This transshipping cargo in mid-voyage is a bit irregular, my friend. But I guess it might be handled if you're as full of water as you say you are. You're certainly in distress."

Alcantraz turned to Wintersohn.

"Shall we talk business, señor?" he asked.

"We sure will," said Wintersohn. "This is what you sailors call an act of God, I guess," he added, grinning at Captain Teddy. "Here's where I make a stab at covering part of that thousand I paid you."

"More power to you," said O'Shea, stuffing his pipe.

Side by side, Alcantraz and Wintersohn walked down the beach a short way, talking earnestly. They continued to talk earnestly as they seated themselves on a sea-bleached log. So earnestly that they did not notice a form scetched in the sand a few feet away in the darkness.

Curly, alone in the body as so often he seemed alone in the spirit, had wandered from the fire earlier in the evening. Sprawled on the warm sand, he had been turning over bitter thoughts. Suddenly to his ear came the low voices of Wintersohn and Alcantraz, exchanging staccato sentences in the "talky-talk" Spanish of Gulf port and Mexican border.

It was old stuff to Curly. Familiar stuff. For in the days before "the hop"

had fastened its talons on him, before he had "done his hitch" in San Quentin, Curly had been an active figure in a fantastic world. He had known memorable months by the gateway of Calexico, where the running of drugs across the Mexican line and up the Imperial Valley of California had flourished in a bizarre battle of brains and speed between the drug runners and Uncle Sam's inspectors.

Silent in the sand, Curly lay and listened.

Romance had gilded the flying shovels as that empty-yawning hole on the beach near by had been dug. But there was no gilt of romance about the task of transferring wooden boxes from the *El Isleo's* hold to the *Patsy's*. That was plain work. And they went to it, while Wintersohn and his trio, who had done little labor during the digging, now sweated with the *Patsy's* men at their task.

"And to think," quoth Jack McKay as he labored, "if we'd found that blasted gold we could have sat pretty and watched the rest of the world work a while. If I could only get hands on the lad who drew that chart! I hope he's in a hotter place than this."

But they saw the job through. After two days of labor beneath a searing sun, it was accomplished. Stacked evenly beneath the *Patsy's* hatches was that cargo of scientific specimens. Some were of unusual weight. Others were light. But all were firmly nailed in wooden cases.

Trim and shipshape at last, the *Patsy* was ready for her voyage back across the Gulf. All was set for starting in the morning. There had been little sleep in the nights while the expectations of the *Patsy's* crew had been that every morning would reveal buried gold. But this night, limp from long exertion, they lay about the deck fathoms deep in slumber.

With the dawn they were away. Alcantraz, from the strip of white sand where the *El Isleo* was beached, waved them farewell. A fine full breeze belied taut the foresail and mainsail they spread. And with Jimmie Cole's gasoline kicker working sturdily, the *Patsy* bored into the long, blue rollers, New Orleans bound. There was a nine-day stretch of straight going for her before she would sight the twinkle of Port Eads light, wind in through South Pass, and so make her twisting way up the Mississippi to New Orleans.

Wintersohn stood beside Captain Teddy at the wheel.

"I don't expect we'll have much trouble with the customs men about this transshipment business," said Captain Teddy. "It isn't like a straight commercial cargo."

"No," said Wintersohn, "that'll all be attended to."

He smiled a bit ironically. He had arranged it. It *would* all be attended to. But hardly as Captain Teddy thought.

And then——

"It's a wonder to me there weren't some men from the wireless station around to see us," said O'Shea. "We went in quietly enough. But we were there pretty long to pass unnoticed."

"It's a sizable island, you know," said Wintersohn. "And they stick pretty close to their station. I don't think they knew a soul was on the place."

"Probably you're right," said Captain Teddy. "It sure would have sounded foolish to try to explain that hole to 'em. We'd have got a glorious ha-ha handed us when we quit. The story'd have swept the Gulf in no time."

Probably it was just as good for the contentment of both Captain Teddy and Wintersohn that neither of them knew the message that on that very morning had gone flashing through the open spaces above the Gulf, in the company code.

"Simmons, General Manager, United Fruit Company, New Orleans," ran that message. "Fishing schooner *Patsy*, out New Orleans, slipped into north-shore cove Swan Island two weeks ago. Kept her under observation. Men worked like horses for week digging hole in beach big enough for foundation Woolworth Building. Joined later by schooner *El Isleo*, home port unknown. Transshipped cargo *El Isleo* to *Patsy* in two-day job. *Patsy* sailed north this morning. Suggest you advise customs authorities Gulf ports. *El Isleo* went south four hours after *Patsy* sailed. What shall we do with hole they left?

"FRANK RYAN,
"Chief Wireless Operator,
"Swan Island."

But nobody on the *Patsy* knew of that message. Nor of the answer that flashed back before Swan Island had entirely vanished from the horizon:

"Frank Ryan, Chief Wireless Operator, Swan Island. Thanks for information. Customs authorities Gulf ports advised. In regard hole left in North Cove beach suggest you and rest of station crew fill it up in spare time now devoted to shooting crap. Otherwise pull it up by roots, ship to New York, and sell to some contractor. Use own discretion. If sold, keep profits with company's compliments.

"SIMMONS."

Knowing naught of this, however, the *Patsy* sailed serenely on. There was, however, a puzzled nest of lines growing on Captain Teddy's brow. This episode, ran his hunch, certainly must contain a woodpile with a nigger in it. Or a bug with a chip above it. The thousand dollars in his belt was real. But something was wrong somewhere. He wished that he knew exactly what it was.

It was two days out from Swan Island that light came to him.

Supper had ended—a dull sort of

meal with Wintersohn and his men talking among themselves on topics shrouded with unfamiliar references to the rest; with the *Patsy's* crew still in the slump of reaction from dashed hopes.

There was the hour of cigarettes on deck, the desultory and casual chatter. Presently, save for Captain Teddy at the wheel, the men sought their mattresses. Far forward on the deck Skee Wintersohn and his trio were stretched out in the full sweep of the breeze.

Soon there sounded the mingled chorus of snores that told of heavy sleep.

Then it was that Curly crept back to the wheel, stood close to Captain Teddy with warning finger upheld, and whispered long and earnestly.

"You told us about coming home with a million dollars in gold," he ended. "You're heading home with a million dollars, all right. But it ain't in gold. It's in hop."

"Curly, are you lyin' to me?" asked Captain O'Shea tonelessly, without heat.

"Open up a box below and look. Any box'll do," whispered back Curly. "Only don't let any of those four see you do it. There'll be murder on this boat if you do."

"Why didn't you tell me about this before?" whispered O'Shea hoarsely.

"I've been figuring it out in my own mind," said Curly. "I'll tell you straight, captain, I didn't know whether you were kidding Jack and Jimmie and me, or whether you were being kidded. I told myself I was taking a chance when I came up here to see you this time."

"Are you sure you're right, Curly?"

"Sure?" Curly's tone was bitter. "Captain, I knew him from the minute I saw him step out of that skiff. 'Juan Alcantraz' my eye! He's Rafael Cal y Mayor, with a dozen monakers up and down the border. Back in the old days in Calexico he was one of the busiest

men in the game. You know I've been out of it since you helped me lick the hop. But it looked to me like you'd gone into it."

"Boy, I'm damned if I blame you," admitted Captain Teddy. "But it ain't going to look like that for long, I'm tellin' you. What I can't understand is how they expect to get past the customs with it."

"Get past the customs!" Curly's smile was mirthless. "Didn't I tell you you I got their whole plan when they were talking down on the beach at Swan Island that night? If they weren't such a double-crossing bunch, I'd have known what to do then. Now get this straight.

"Rafael would be a millionaire if he wasn't a nut on gambling. I've heard of his dropping fifty thousand dollars a night—gold, not pesos—in that Juarez keno game alone. Well, here was where he was planning to make his clean-up. That was one of the big drug cargoes he was running up to the Louisiana coast. And he had the thing fixed with Wintersohn in advance. The drug-ring gang were to meet Rafael down near Grand Isle with three big express cruisers and take off his cargo. They know when he left Puerto Cortez. They'll be cruising off shore looking for him. He couldn't take a chance on slipping past 'em. So he and Wintersohn had to get a boat that the cruisers wouldn't recognize when they saw it, and get the *El Isleo's* cargo in that boat. They had a fellow named Hop Purser up in New Orleans fix up that fake map to put it over on you. For they had to have you down here in time to meet Rafael after he left Puerto Cortez. Can't you get it through your thick Irish head? There never was any gold. They're using you as a cat's-paw."

"But how'll they get the stuff past the customs in the *Patsy*?" persisted O'Shea.

Curly looked at him pityingly.

"Why do you suppose he's got those three gunmen with him?" he asked. "By the time the customs crowd get to the *Patsy*, if they take the trouble to look at a fishing schooner they've known for years, she'll be empty and you'll have a fine story to tell. The minute you get up to the coast they're going to round us all up at the point of their guns and take the boat over themselves. And you'll have a hell of a fine time finding the stuff once they get it out of the *Patsy*. Wintersohn has some launches waiting down by Pointe-a-la-hache and when you and the rest of us come to, we'll have nothing but the memory that they've made damned fools out of us. Not that I blame 'em. The opium, cocaine, morphine, and heroin they've got in this cargo is worth enough to drive any dope runner crazy, let alone a double-crossing bunch like Rafael and Wintersohn."

"So that's the game," mused Captain Teddy softly. "I've been wonderin' somewhat, since first we started. And I've been wonderin' more since I first lamped that greaser schooner. They did a poor job getting that water in her. A poor job. And the boy who picked some of the oakum out of her seams was too careless about the marks he left."

"Before you start anything, captain," whispered Curly. "Watch that boy Lamantia. He's the hardest-boiled gunman of the lot. And get this straight, too. I'm not putting you wise to this on account of any reform stuff. That kind of gang was more or less my gang, once—though we weren't quite so good at double crossing—till the stuff got me. That game'll go on long after you and I are dead. But you're the man helped me get on my feet when I hit New Orleans down and out. I don't want you tangled up in anything that ends in the Federal pen. Atlanta's a pretty place, all right, but not when Uncle Sam's paying your board."

"Forget it," said Captain Teddy.

Silent again he sat for a space, his hand gripping the wheel spokes. Headed for New Orleans with a million in drugs aboard! And a double-crossing drug runner and his three gunmen. The *Patsy*! An honest fishing schooner whose captain and crew would be the butts of water-front jest for years to come, if anybody knew. Treasure hunting for pirate gold. Made a fool of by a smooth city slicker of a dope-running crook!

Well, it was six or seven days yet before he'd sight the Port Eads light. The city might be Wintersohn's home grounds. But here was O'Shea's private back yard, out here in the Gulf of Mexico.

Through Captain Teddy's being stole once more the glow that flamed with the dawning of some event beyond life's redfishing routine.

"Hold her as she is, Curly," he whispered.

Softly he slipped off his shoes and socks. Softly he stepped down the aft companionway, where slept Jack McKay. One muscular hand clamped firmly over Jack's mouth, while another gripped his shoulder and a whisper sounded in his ear.

"Not a sound, lad. It's me, the cap. Are ye awake?"

Jack nodded vigorously against the muffling hand.

"We're goin' to give these high-jackin' crooks aboard the time of their young lives, Jack," husked the whisper in his ear again. "It's too long a story to tell you now, but we've been double crossed, me boy. Just you come with me and make no noise and follow your orders."

From brackets above the bunk Captain Teddy softly slipped the pump shotgun of his winter duck-hunting forays down the coast. Always he kept it aboard, oiled and loaded, for pot-shots

at sundry floating targets that were his delight. From the shelf near by he took an electric torch. Then, his bare feet and Jack McKay's making no sound, they went up the companionway like twin shadows of a dream.

Forward they made their way.

A sudden flare of light bathed the faces of the four who slept on the forward deck.

"Wake up, you crooks! Sit up and stick your hands up!" rang Captain Teddy's call.

Through the mists of sleep of three of them it penetrated. The four figures stretched on the mattresses snapped up like marionettes at the jerk of a string. But one had stayed awake —by order.

From the mattress that had held Lamantia stabbed a flash of flame. He had lain with his automatic by his side. He sat up, shooting.

One with the crack of the pistol was the roar of the shotgun as Captain Teddy pulled trigger, while a searing pain of a steel-jacketed forty-five's passage racked his ribs. Lamantia's howl rose high. His pistol clattered to the deck from a mutilated hand.

"Th' next man gets it in th' bread basket," roared O'Shea. "Who's startin' somethin'? Come on!"

But nobody was answering his plea. Nobody else was starting anything, just then.

"Over there by the bulwark, Jack," ordered Captain Teddy. "Frisk 'em, one at a time. You, Wintersohn, step over first. Keep your hands up! Shut up your trap! You're lucky you're alive."

Wintersohn stepped over.

Leaping to the deck at the sound of the shots came Jimmie Cole, flash light and pistol in hand.

"Keep your light on 'em, Jimmie," called O'Shea. "You can chuck your gun overboard as far's it's needed. All it takes is one fightin' Irishman an' a

popgun t' handle these cross-bred double-crossin' hard guys. Watch 'em step lively."

While the converging beams of the two torches kept the quartet in sharp relief, Jack McKay went happily about his job of frisking. Eight heavy automatics he brought to light in hip and shoulder holster, and three knives of vicious point and length of blade.

"It's a fine bunch of gentleman sportsmen we have with us," quoted Captain O'Shea bitterly. "Get a length of rope, Jimmie. Tie up the three of 'em while I keep 'em covered. Jack, dig out a first-aid kit and bandage th' hand of that yelpin' yellow street cur."

Triced up with expert hand, Wintersohn, Andrus, and Sebastian lay presently on the forward deck. Beside them, his wounded hand bandaged and his feet tied by a rope that looped up around his uninjured wrist, sat Lamentia.

Their positions remained unchanged throughout the night. Captain Teddy, Jack McKay, Jimmie Cole, and Curly took their turns at standing guard.

Thus the morning found them.

Through the breakfast hour Captain Teddy was ominously silent. His silence held while the four were fed, as the *Patsy* surged ahead through a sunlit sea. Then, with the ending of their meal, he went forward to give a look-see to the prisoners.

"Captain O'Shea, I've got a proposition to make you, that's worth the whole two hundred thousand I first offered you," said Wintersohn as their eyes met.

"You have, have you?" O'Shea's tone was low and bitter. "You're in a hell of a fine position to be makin' propositions to me now, ain't you? You're through wit' makin' any kind of a proposition till we're through wit' you, me bucko."

And then he called his own men aft around the wheel. While the *Patsy*

forged steadily ahead, the four of them held counsel.

"Bring up a case of those 'scientific specimens' from below, Jack," ordered O'Shea.

It was on deck a few moments later. Ax and crowbar worked on the wood. The lid came off. There, packed in orderly array, lay tin after tin of those "five-tael" cans of the poppy's gum that every narcotic-squad man knows.

"Look at it, lads," said Captain Teddy. "Here we stand with a cargo of hell's own dope aboard, fit to ruin a few thousand good men. Curly can tell you what it did for him before we took him aboard and he broke loose from it. From all I can find, it's worth about as much as the gold we came to get, chasing with a forged chart that's made a fool of me. I've got me own ideas of what to do. But we've sailed the *Patsy* on shares a long time. I'm not talking as a captain. I'm talking as a man to man. I want to know if you're wit' me to th' limit an' willin' to let me have my own way in this?"

"Are you goin' t' turn 'em over to th' police, cap?" asked Jack McKay.

"That I am not, if you're wit' me sight unseen," said O'Shea. "Th' only use an O'Shea ever had for th' police was to join 'em or fight 'em."

Up spoke Jimmie Cole.

"Play the game your own way, cap. We're with you to the finish."

"And then some," said Jack McKay.

"It's your show, captain," said Curly. "Go to it."

"Fine," said Captain Teddy. "Jimmie, your engine's runnin' sweet enough. She'll go without attention for a while. Curly, you keep the wheel. Jimmie and Jack are comin' for'ard with me."

Forward they went.

"Unfasten that Wintersohn rat's ropes, boys," said O'Shea. In a moment the job was done, and the prisoner stood on deck.

"I hope you're willing to listen to reason, captain," said he.

"There's no reason in me this mornin'," grated O'Shea. "It's pure sentiment I'm talkin' now. I've shaken hands wit' you, you dirty scum. I've talked to you like a friend. You've made a fool of me and double crossed me in a dirty trade. Now I've got to do somethin' t' take th' bad taste out of me mouth."

"What's that?" asked Wintersohn, paling suddenly. There was a gleam in the little Irishman's eyes that looked like bad news.

"You've got forty pounds on me," said Captain Teddy calmly, "if you've got an ounce. You've got the shoulders of a stevedore. You call yourself a square sport. It seems to me you advertise it a bit too much, but that's your business."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"It's got *this* to do wit' it, you dirty crook: I'm goin' to take a chance wit' you. We're goin' to mix it right here on deck, you and me. If you lick me, the cargo's yours an' th' boat's yours to run it in wit', if you can get away wit' it. My men won't butt in. They've given me their word. It's good, even if yours ain't. But if you don't lick me, you slimy whelp, you an' your gang are tossin' every box of this cargo overside with your own hands five minutes after the fight is over. There's good odds for you, me 'square sport'—and the biting contempt of Captain Teddy's voice would have left its mark on rhinoceros hide—"an' I'm ready when you are. Hop to it."

Stark fear shone in Wintersohn's eyes. Big as he was, the streak of yellow in the core of his being shivered at the sight of the little fighting Irishman with the blazing berserker eyes, standing there calmly, offering him a chance at a million dollars—a fortune placed at the mercy of a few minutes' fight on a fishing schooner.

His share of a million dollars! All it would give of the freedom of the cities of the world; the fawning of the men—and the women—of the only life he knew or wanted.

Suddenly the rage of the terrified and cornered rat surged through him. And the craft of one.

"See here, captain," he began placatingly, as he stepped forward, hands hanging loosely at his side, "can't you and I get together on——"

In mid-sentence he struck.

Had that uppercut landed with the snapping weight of the man behind it, a knock-out had been the only answer. But even ahead of Jack McKay's shout of warning, Captain Teddy's eye had seen the tensing of the man as he advanced.

Wintersohn's fist barely brushed his chin as the little seaman's head snapped back. Before the bigger man had recovered his balance from the blow, O'Shea was on top of him.

There was little science of the ring about Captain Teddy. But he was hard from heart to hide. And the bundle of steel wires that was his tough little body was white hot with the flaming spirit of battle. Only one strategy he knew—to keep at his man, to hit and hit and hit again without let-up—never to let his foe get set. He went to it like a whirlwind.

One wild swing to the body Wintersohn got home. The sheer impact of it felled O'Shea to the deck. Like a rubber ball he bounced to his feet again. Like a blazing comet he shot in once more, beneath the bigger man's guard.

The belt of fat that soft living in cities had placed about Wintersohn was the target for his driving punches. Home he hammered at it, again and again and again.

And then Wintersohn, panting, in distress, seized him about the body in the grip that precedes the foul and deadly drive of swift-raised knee.

"Watch it, cap!" roared Jack McKay, himself a veteran of water-front rough-and-tumble, who saw what was coming.

There is only one defense for that smash of knee at close quarters—and it must be lightning quick. Captain Teddy swung into it automatically. His own hands gripped the shoulders of his foe. With tensing muscle he jerked his body to one side, free from foothold. The twisting pull of his weight as Winter-sohn's knee rose threw them both to the deck.

Up like a striking snake whipped Captain Teddy's fist, a knot of wire. Squarely it cracked against Winter-sohn's jaw, once, twice, thrice. The big body relaxed.

To his feet scrambled Captain Teddy.

Before him danced Jack McKay, his arm rising and falling, as in mockery of an invisible referee he counted the "ten" of the ring's knock-out. But no count was necessary.

A moment O'Shea stood there, gulping great breaths of salt air. Then—

"Sluice a bucket of water on him," he ordered. "He's got some work to do."

With a grin of sheer boyishness he looked at Jack McKay.

"'Twas a fine fight while it lasted, was it not?" he asked.

"I'll tell the cock-eyed world it was!" whooped Jack. "Will you give *me* the other three, cap? I'll take 'em one at a time."

His face fell.

"No," said he. "Only two. But I might tie a hand behind me to even it with the guy you shot."

"Not a chance, Jack. They're just the hired men. We've handled the boss," said O'Shea.

And then he shook himself, tucked in a flapping shirt, and drank hugely at the water butt.

"I feel cleaner," said the *Patsy's* master.

Not a hull was in sight in the whole

circle of the blue horizon. Which was just as well. For there would be maritime curiosity at the sight of three sweating men, shotgun guarded, breaking out the cargo of a forty-ton schooner in mid-Gulf and pitching it overside in a day of calm and sunshine.

One by one those cases of "scientific specimens" splashed into the Gulf of Mexico. Hundreds on hundreds of those five-tael tins of opium, those cartons of tablets of morphine, cocaine, and heroin, came to light as with ax and crowbar the lids of wooden cases were pried open.

Driving his gang to their task, with a look of calm and holy joy on his face, stood Jack McKay. With fist and boot and happy oath he sped them to their work.

"And you're the babies who stood around soldierin' and watched me dig halfway to China on a fake chart," he scoffed. "Sweat, you terriers! Sweat!" They sweated.

At last the final case splashed overside.

Empty as she left, the *Patsy* was coming home.

Amidships Captain Teddy lined up the quartet. Into the western horizon the sun was sinking, the sky a riot of splendor.

"I'm minded to be far more decent to ye than ye'd ever be to me," said he. "Presently we'll be sightin' the Louisiana coast. I'm puttin' ye into the skiff, wit' food and water for a couple of days. And ye can row for land. Ye'll find some fishin' village or a boat somewhere. Tell 'em you're city fishermen if they ask questions. I'm thinkin' ye'll not be wantin' any more publicity than most crooks."

He stood for a moment, stuffing and lighting his pipe.

"Ye're a fine lot of the scum of the earth," said he. "The dirtiest fo'c's'le ever I saw would be insulted t' have ye dumped in it. Up for'ard, the lot of

ye. Jack McKay, tie 'em up. We'll feed 'em and give 'em water—but we ought to use an ax on 'em and let 'em give the sharks indigestion."

Over the Gulf the *Patsy* plowed her way that night. Below, worn out with his battle, slept Captain Teddy. The snores of Jack McKay and Jimmie Cole rose high. At the wheel was Curly, sleepless as so often was his wont.

Thick scud sped across the sky, obscuring the moon for long periods. But now and then, through a rift in the clouds, the long, bright shafts of radiance poured down on the heaving waters. Sharp black shadows they etched, touched with silver splendor, along the *Patsy's* deck, from Curly's station aft at the wheel to the huddle of figures forward, where, bound hand and foot, Wintersohn and his three gunmen lay on deck.

It was in one of these intervals of clear light that Curly saw movement forward. One of the bound men was struggling to sit up.

Hastily he lashed the wheel and made his way toward the bow. It was Lamantia who was trying to raise himself.

"Curly," he said, speaking low, "can't you ease up this cord on my right arm? It's hurtin' like the devil with that wound in my hand."

For a moment Curly considered. Should he awaken Captain O'Shea?

From the lips of the gunman came a feverish plea. Only loosen that bond for a little while. That was all he asked. What could he do with one hand practically shot to pieces? He'd go crazy if there wasn't some relief soon.

And at last Curly consented. For a moment he worked at the knots Jimmie Cole and Jack McKay had tied. Lamantia lay back with a deep sigh of relief. Curly resumed the wheel. He'd keep an eye on them, he told himself.

But even Curly's vigilant eye was not

proof against the moments when those flying banks of cloud temporarily overcast the moon. In those moments he could not see the efforts Lamantia was putting forth. The sweat of sheer agony stood out on the gunman's forehead as he stretched and reached with the wounded hand. But at last he made it. He reached a weapon the searchers had overlooked.

Hung by a thin leather thong about his neck and down his back, beneath his undershirt, lying flat between his shoulder blades, was a slender knife. For the man who wields and throws one of those deadly blades, that position for a weapon was supreme strategy. It could be reached without suspicion of movement for weapon, even by those who watched. It rests concealed, undreamed, when all other possible places of concealment have been searched.

And at last Lamantia worked it free, though at the price of agony incalculable.

For a space he rested, while the moon, peering out through a rift in the cloud banks, bathed the whole scene with light. But hardly had the scud once more obscured the deck when he was feverishly at work. And at last the four lay there, all cords that bound them severed.

"Curly!"

Lamantia's call was not loud. But it reached to where the steersman stood. Curly went forward, his wheel lashed again.

"Can you get me a drink of water?" Lamantia asked. "I'm getting fever from this shot in my hand."

And in that he spoke no more than truth.

To the water butt by the mainmast went Curly, filled a tin cup, brought it back to Lamantia, and stooped to raise his head.

An arm curved stranglingly around his neck. Three figures leaped upon him.

"I'll take his gun," he heard, as fingers fumbled at his waistband, where protruded the butt of one of the captured automatics. Captain Teddy had given him when he went below.

One strangling cry choked in his throat—and then things went black for Curly.

He did not see what followed.

He lay limp on the deck as the towed head of Teddy O'Shea thrust cautiously above the hatch coaming. He did not hear the little Irishman's rasping command: "Stick 'em up, you dirty murderers!" He did not hear the crack of the automatic pistol in Wintersohn's hand that followed, or the thud of the bullet that splintered the coaming a few inches from O'Shea's head.

Nor did he hear the roar as Captain Teddy's pump gun swept the deck with whistling charges of lead.

Seconds was all it lasted—that series of stuttering explosions. But they were hot seconds, when streaks of flame belched forth and curses and shrieks rose high.

It was ended before Jack McKay and Jimmie Cole came tumbling out on deck, pistols in hand. They had no need for weapons.

"Have they hurt you, lad?" shouted O'Shea as he rushed forward. Disregarding the four figures sprawled in crumpled awkwardness where they fell, he swooped down upon Curly. And his joyous oaths of praise rang as under sluicing water his deck hand came back to consciousness. Beyond a black and swollen throat, where the garotter's grip had bruised the flesh, and a fine assortment of bruises, Curly was uninjured.

But about him lay grim tragedy.

Poor Hop Purser, back in New Orleans, had made true prediction. Skee Wintersohn had tried one double cross too many.

Awakened by Curly's strangled cry,

leaping to the hatchway, shotgun in hand, Teddy O'Shea had written the last chapter in the life of that crook and his three gunmen—and the little Irishman had written it in red.

By the light of electric torches the captain and crew of the *Patsy* labored the night through, in those intervals when the moonlight was obscured by the rack of flying clouds. By dawn the deck was decently clean. And in the bow, where they had slept on the voyage, covered now by a sheet of canvas, the four of the underworld slept their last sleep.

"There's no keeping it quiet from the authorities now," said Captain Teddy. "It's me for the custom house the minute we land."

But he did not have to wait for arrival at the custom house, that repository of so many strange tales in the years its gray walls have risen at the head of Canal Street.

Entering South Pass soon after, the *Patsy* was boarded by the men in blue and gold.

And there the story was told in fullest detail.

It was too much for any inspector to handle.

"This goes before the chief," he said.

To authority, enthroned on swivel chair behind a broad, flat-topped desk, the tale was told again, with Jimmie Cole, Jack McKay, and Curly, questioned separately, confirming the last detail.

Even authority can be human.

"My hat's off to you, Captain O'Shea," spoke the chief, "even if you're the most quixotic damned hero I've ever met. You've mopped up a gang the narcotic division has been battling a long time. I wish we could dump all the dope that Wintersohn has brought into the United States where you dumped that last cargo of his. If it was war time I'd decorate you. Be-

yond seeing you through the legal complications of these four dead crooks you've brought into port, is there anything I can do for you."

"There is," said Teddy O'Shea. "There's two things, for that matter. You can come home with me this night and explain matters to my wife. If I

told her this, she'd never believe me in a million years. And you can make it clear to me what's the meanin' of that word quix—quix—whatever it was—you just called me. I'm good at cussin', myself, and it sounds like a two-dollar word to me."

And the chief did both.