

Weird Tales



ALL STORIES NEW — NO REPRINTS

NOVEMBER, 1946

Cover by Boris Dolgov

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Shipmate

HE HAD looked forward for a long time to going back to the sea. The "small boat" sea—harbors and coves and bays—his own yawl, maybe thirty or thirty-five feet. For four years Neil Garrison had thought of the sunlight on the water, the gulls wheeling overhead, the sounds of rigging creaking, of oarlocks, of waves patting a hull, your hull, and now it was true—or about to be.

Garrison stood with his hands thrust deep in his coat pockets, squinting out from the pier across myriad moorings, painfully conscious that to these here he must look citified, a greenhorn.

"Boats?" had expostulated the head of the cove's ship basin. "Boats are as hard to get now as houses and rooms, and you fel-

lows know..." with one look at Neil's discharge button "...how hard *they* are to find."

Garrison wryly admitted the truth of that.

"You mean you haven't a thing?" the young man persisted, disappointment creeping into his voice. "I'll pay anything. Anything at all reasonable, that is."

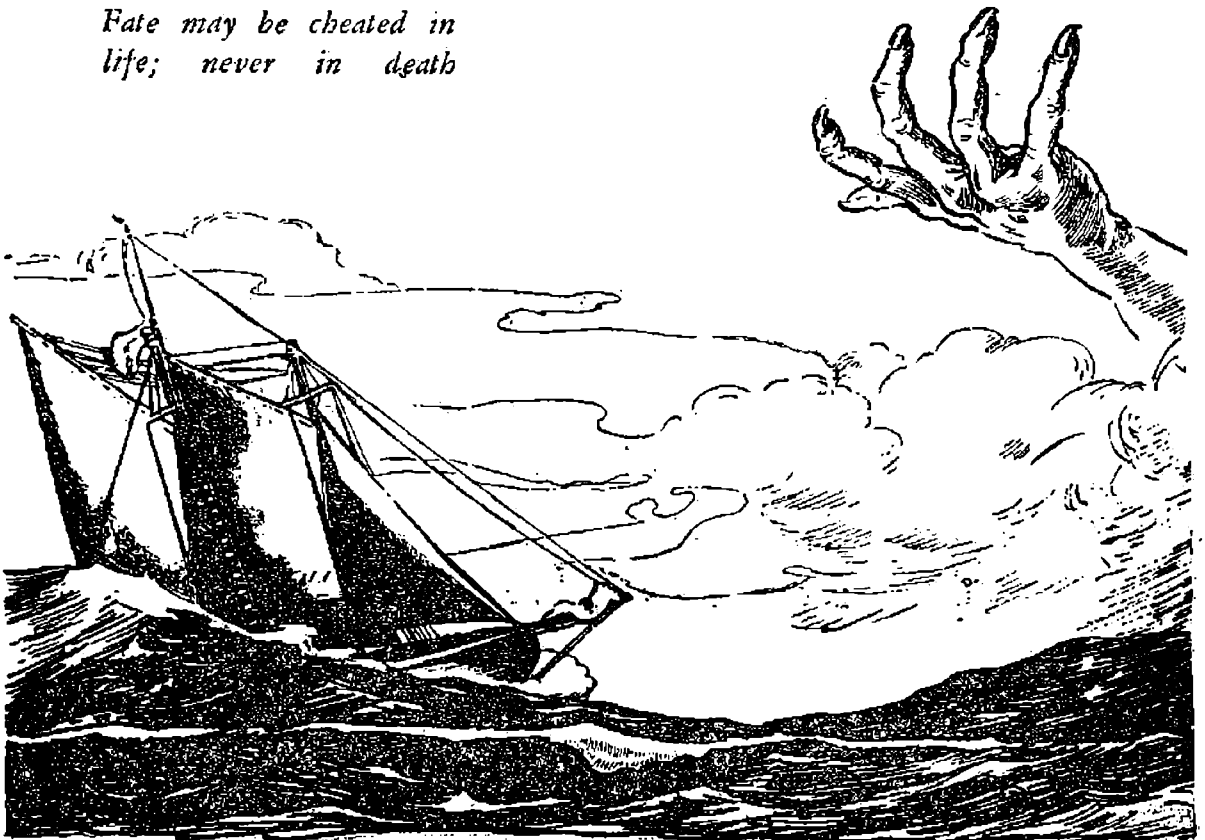
The man he addressed screwed up his eyes, shaded his hand across the sun and looked out over the bay.

"Well, now," he said, "your putting it that way and me wanting to help you. There is one boat. Understand this isn't a recommendation, but you being so anxious—there is one boat, the *Robin*. Thirty-two-foot yawl. Little two-cylinder auxiliary."

"Where is she?" Neil asked eagerly.

The man was quiet for a moment, then

*Fate may be cheated in
life; never in death*



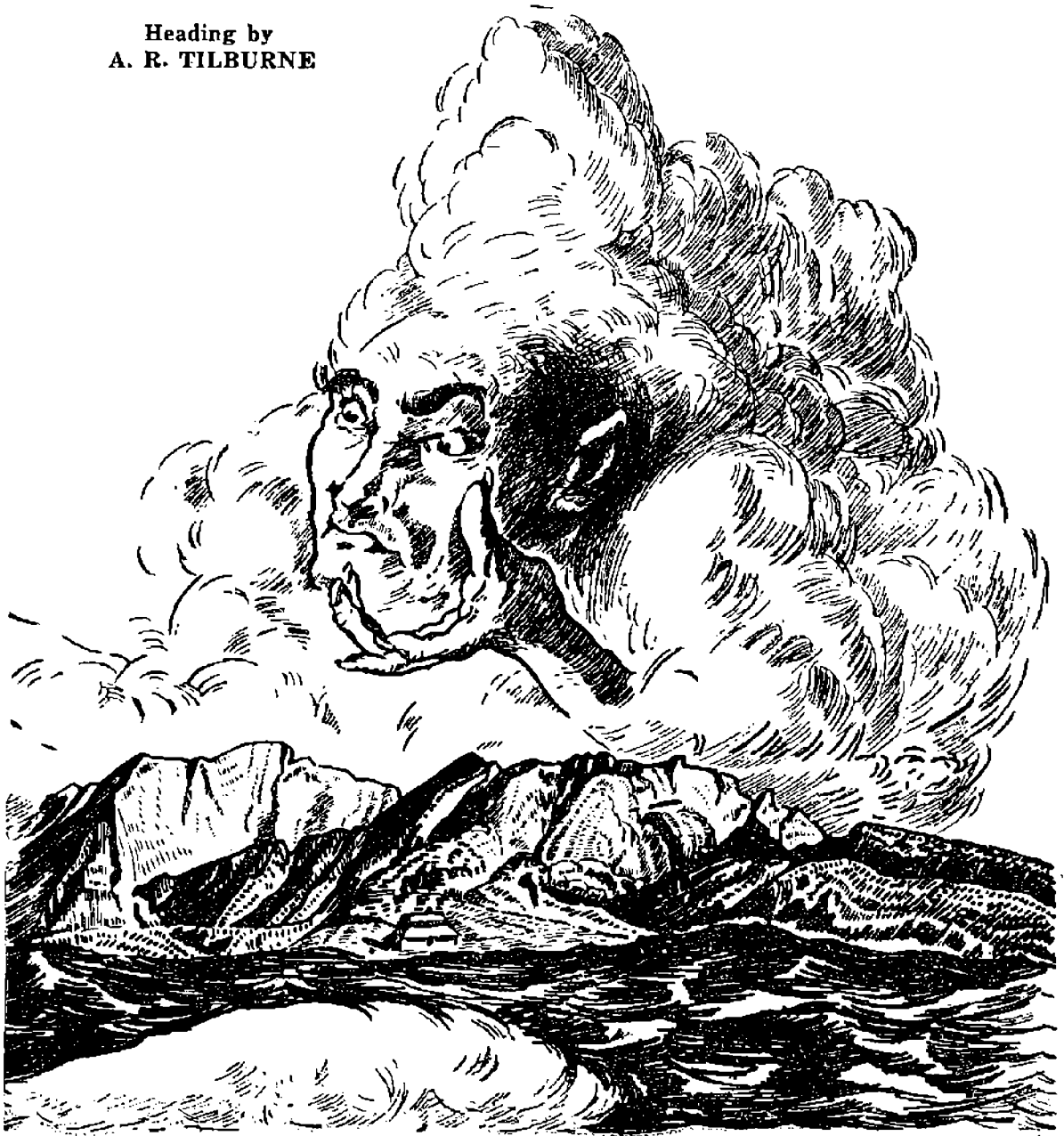
BY ALLISON V. HARDING

he found her, pointed. Garrison looked. Even at this distance she had clean lines, didn't look too badly kept up. He thought to himself, Not bad.
"How much?"

The man thought for a minute. "Let's call it a thousand even."

Neil thought, Oh-oh, to himself. She must be shot through with dry rot. Something's awfully wrong.

Heading by
A. R. TILBURNE



He said, "Can I get out to see her?"

The ship basin head took him to the company launch and they chugged out. Garrison clambered aboard eagerly. She was a neat little piece of boat all right. The hull looked sound. There was no unusual water in the bilges. Why, with a little sandpapering here and there and fresh coats of paint, she'd look mighty sassy. He came on deck from his inspection of the two-bunk cabin. It was then he noticed that the boat basin man had not followed him aboard but was still sitting in the launch. He went back aboard the service craft and sat down in the prow facing the operator. They shoved off and Garrison said, "What's wrong with her?"

The man shook his head, feigned misunderstanding.

"I'm not green at this game. The *Robin* is a good boat. Needs a little work, but she's a good boat. Yawls like her are selling for three thousand and more."

The man said something lamely about wanting to help him, Garrison being a veteran and all. Neil shook his head scornfully. He didn't like the fellow but boats were scarce. Better play along. He prodded his companion tactfully.

"Well, I'll tell you," the other said finally as they neared the pier, "you know how shipboard people are. Mighty superstitious an' all that. The *Robin's* got kind of a bad reputation and everybody goes blabbing. She's a little cantankerous. Seems to have a will of her own."

"Is that all! I like a ship with spirit, like a horse."

"Do you like her?" pushed the broker.

"Sure I do," said Garrison. "I'm going to buy her. Know anything more about her? Who was her last owner?"

WITH the deal in sight, the yacht basin man became more voluble. "She's a darn one for drifting, I'll tell you that much. Always jumping her moorings. No, don't know nothin' about her owner. She's never been claimed." Funny, the way we got her. She just cruised in here one day and one of the boys picked her up in this launch. Of course we advertised and notified the Coast Guard." The man shook his head. It didn't do to tell a prospective thousand dollars of

cash that her owner had been discovered dead, dead from drowning a long way from here.

Ashore Garrison wrote out a check for the amount and the Certificate of Award was filled out for the Coast Guard.

"I'll be around in a day or two," he told the broker.

"Sure, any time," said the man, obviously pleased with the deal. "Tell you what. Just feel free to use one of our dinghys here to take out with you and use when you go sailing."

Garrison nodded. "I'm planning to live on her," he said. "Just going to get my gear together and come out."

The broker turned away and Garrison started towards his car. On the way he passed the machine shop where motors stood on racks and horses being overhauled. He'd noticed the place before and the grimy mechanic who overlorded it. This worthy was standing at the door of the shop as Neil passed, a hunched-up, wizened, sea-beaten old man with skin like worn leather and slitted eyes.

"Stranger," croaked the old man. "I hear you're fixin' to buy the *Robin*."

"Yup," said Garrison, "I have. She's mine."

The old man looked around quickly and then beckoned Garrison closer.

"Don't take that boat, young fella."

For the second time in less than a few minutes someone had made disparaging remarks about the *Robin*, his *Robin*. Neil didn't like it. He frowned. "What's wrong?"

"She's a bad one," the mechanic hissed. "She's an evil boat, lad, and all who goes aboard her gets the evil too."

TWO days later Neil Garrison was back, his little coupe loaded with supplies and necessities. The broker nodded to him curtly, a typical case of interest goeth after a deal. Nowhere in sight was the sea-beaten mechanic. Neil rowed one of the company's dinghys out thoughtfully. He unloaded his gear and tied the flatbottom to the mooring, then clambered aboard the *Robin*. On closer inspection his first impression of the boat was confirmed. She was a bit of all right. He planned to sandpaper and re-

paint the cabin, but otherwise, she needed nothing this season.

Below he took inventory of what her former owner had left. A boat hook, some lengths of rope, a few ancient yellowed newspapers and a couple of unreliable-looking round life preservers. Neil stowed away his own stuff and then made a check of the motor. It was a bit rusty but looked in workable condition. He started it up and after a few tries it roared to life. A sailing man at heart, Garrison was a bit contemptuous of power. However, it was useful to have a well-working plant if you needed it. He turned it off and checked the sails and rigging. Okay too. All in all, the whole deal was too good to be true. Anybody could tell you could turn around and sell this thirty-two-footer for at least three times what he'd paid for it.

Then the new skipper of the *Robin* thought of the things he'd been told about his boat. That was the sea for you, he knew from way back. People connected with it even in only a half-hearted Sunday driver way could dream up more wild tales and superstitions per keel inch than any other folks in the world. All he knew was the *Robin* was sound, and he knew ships. He'd been raised around them and on them.

He'd brought aboard a small kerosene stove and cooked himself supper. He'd worked late and most of the light was out of the sky when he finished eating. The water was dead now the way it so often is just before nightfall. He sat on deck for a while and watched other people come in, moot their craft, sailing or power, and row into the wharf to call quits to a day of boating. He was pleased with himself. He'd always thought a boat was a place to live, not just to visit.

Gradually gathering darkness caused the land to fade away into an indistinct blur. Lights sprang up here and there, occasional running reds and blues marked the passage of some late boat or evening cruise. Night settled itself slowly and softly around Neil Garrison and the boat, *Robin*. He puffed through a pipeful more of tobacco then knocked the last glowing coals overside and went below.

He decided to bunk down on the port side berth. It was cozy with his electric lan-

tern hung from the wall bracket he'd fixed at the bunk's head. Outside was the almost inaudible soothing lap of tiny wavelets against his good hull. Garrison felt drowsy almost at once, doused the flash and turned in with a last look at the luminous dial of his wristwatch.

He woke up after about four hours, he figured, the tiny dial showing that it was ten past two. The sea had blown up a little bit more, and for a moment Neil thought that the increased rocking of the boat was what had awakened him. But only for a moment he thought that, for then it was sitting up in his bunk in the pitch black cabin he heard something over the lapping of the waves, louder and nearer. Breathing it was, the heavy rhythmical breathing of someone else. In here. In this cabin. With him.

WITH unsteady fingers Neil fumbled for the electric lamp he'd hung above his bunk. It seemed an interminable time before the flash snapped into being. In reality it could only have been a second or two, and yet in that time, who or whatever had been in the *Robin's* cabin was gone. Neil was out of his bunk quickly, staring around, eyes bulging but there was nothing but emptiness and no sound now but the innocent lapping of water. He went on deck, his flashlight in one hand, and shot its beam across every inch of the thirty-two-foot yawl. He swung the light in a circle around the mooring, and the thin finger of illumination was swallowed up by the empty darkness. Slowly the *Robin's* owner returned to his cabin. He bracketed the electric lamp and then sat on the side of his bunk for a few moments. It was quite obviously one of those so-real dreams. He was ashamed of himself for having reacted so violently.

Neil easily talked himself back into his berth and gradually his thoughts turned to cruising plans for the season. The rest of the night was uneventful. He worked topside on his boat all of the next day. His conviction that he had in the *Robin* at one and the same time a bargain and a very nice little ship was strengthened by every hour aboard her. Garrison had brought aboard supplies enough for a couple of days. When he wanted to eat, he went below and rustled

up some grub on the little kerosene stove.

He was tired his second night aboard and turned in early, lying gingerly on his somewhat sunburned back, his mind filled with many thoughts, mainly of his boat, but it wasn't until he was just about dropping off to sleep that he thought of the previous night's episode. The nightmare, for that it surely was, he now figured, seemed silly to him after twenty-four hours. He doused his flash and in a few moments was rocked to sleep by the gentle motion of the *Robin*.

To wake up in the pitch dark and to lie there for a moment in that state of borderline awareness was dreadfully reminiscent to Neil Garrison. He knew only that it must be very late, or very early, and then lying in the blackness in his bunk, he clenched his fists with the nervous tension that rose up inside him, and struggled with all his might to tell himself that it was wind, it was water on the hull that he heard and not that deep sonorous regular breathing again. This time, as though afraid to startle away the sound-maker, whether human or otherwise; his hand went stealthily towards the light and his finger met and thumbed the light switch.

The cabin was revealed to him. He sat bolt upright, completely awake now. It was empty. His inspection of the deck was as fruitless as it had been the night before. This time Garrison did not slip back again into his bunk. The breathing was no subtle trick of sea and wind. It was too sharp, clear and loud a thing in the night. Neil lay troubled until the morning.

He made a trip ashore the next day for some more supplies. The old mechanic at the Marine Basin caught his eye as he trudged down the wharf, arms laden. The leathery face cracked into the suggestion of a smile, not humorous as much as knowing and the head wagged sorrowfully from side to side. Neil said nothing, although the old man's actions, originally amusing to him, were now ominous. He continued on to his dinghy. Out of an untroubled blue sky a totally unexpected problem had reared up on Neil Garrison's horizon. He had thought of dry rot, a rust-corroded motor, hull and mast and rigging defects but never—this!

The days passed and the nights too, and with the nights came the mysterious presence

whose being was signalled simply by the heavy rhythmical breathing that came some time in the middle of the night without warning or bidding and remained but with no evidence of its being other than the sound it made.

One thing Neil became sure of as the nights passed. This was no dream. It wasn't that simple. But also obviously there was no one. He began to wonder other thoughts, dangerous and unpleasant to contemplate. Four years is a long time, the kind of four years he'd spent. Other men had had trouble and cracked after those same four years. He wondered vaguely if he should consult someone—who was it you saw about such matters? A psychiatrist? And what would he say? He pictured it, rehearsed it. It would be a hard thing to explain to someone. It was a hard thing to explain to himself. This breathing without a breather!

He thought the thing out and argued it with himself for several more days. It was the Friday night following the thunderstorm that convinced him. He was cleaning up a light supper when the storm struck. The *Robin* rode at her moorings well and he stayed on deck watching the zigzag streaks of lightning cross the evening summer sky until a downpour of rain forced him below deck. Neil waited, enjoying the pitching of the boat, the creaking of its beams and the tattoo of heavy drops above his head. Finally the storm sounds abated and Garrison came on deck. He checked his mooring lines and found them sound and firm. With a final look around he went below again and turned in.

His mysterious, mighty experience, although no less macabre and unpleasant, was at least less unexpected now. He no longer lay awake dreading that dark moment when he would wake up and no longer be alone on the *Robin*. He had rationalized this midnight occurrence. It was obviously some trick, some quirk of his overwrought nerves.

So this night when he woke up and heard, as he became fully awake, the breathing sounds, he was somehow less afraid. He lay for a while in the darkness, resisting the natural impulse to snap on the flashlight. The breathing had a character. Its heaviness was indicative of a large, big-chested

man. It was slow, rhythmical, and the sound of it seemed to move, Garrison noted curiously as he lay in his bunk, the tension rising within him, as though he who did the breathing were changing position in the small cabin or perhaps pacing from one end to the other and then back again.

Concentrating as he had been on this strange phenomenon, it was several minutes before Neil noticed something else, something of much more immediate and material properties. The motion of the boat to one sensitive to the ways of the sea was subtly different. The gentle swaying and rocking was not that of a craft secure at its moorings. There was action about the boat, its timbre against his fingers suggestive of a ship making headway.

Neil snapped on his flash then and sprang to the floor, climbing the companionway in his shorts. He looked first for familiar night landmarks he'd come to recognize—the twinkling all-night lights that flickered at the end of the Marine Basin pier, the airport beacon whose fanwise sweep you could see at fifteen-second intervals to the west of the Marine Basin lights. These were obliterated or gone, and yet as he sniffed the night air and played his flashlight around, there was no trace of fog.

He ran forward then and saw his mooring painter drifting idly in the water. He pulled it in hurriedly. Neil remembered checking and tightening those very knots after the storm. The motion of the water and his memory of tide tables told him that he must be drifting out of the bay towards the open sea. He ran below. A yawl drifting helter-skelter in the night at the mercy of wind and tide was not his idea of sport. The harbor outside was treacherous at best. At night and without power, you could smash yourself and boat to a fare-thee-well on the jagged reefs that jutted out into the bay mouth and the islands of rock that dotted the way on the sea side.

Neil cranked furiously at the auxiliary motor. There were controls topside, but the motor itself had to be started down here. As he struggled with it, he imagined he heard the sound of sea on reefs growing louder. With fear prickling his scalp, he worked harder and finally the motor sputtered to life. Garrison ran on deck again

and seized the tiller. He had no time to look around. He sensed rather than saw the danger off his starboard beam. He put his weight on the tiller and turned her hard aport. He shoved the throttle control all the way forward, and only then with the deck quivering from the motor vibrations and the *Robin* at last minding her helm did Garrison turn around and look.

HE WAS dangerously close to sheer, bleak cliffs fringed by reefs that stuck up out of the sea not more than a few yards astern, like razor blades. Garrison felt horror clutch at his throat, not only at his narrow escape but at the utter desolation and sinister aspect of the scene.

He forced his eyes away then and hunched shuddering shoulders thankfully as the sea took his attention. The water had kicked up and he felt the tug of its action in his hands that gripped the tiller. It was almost as though the *Robin* had become hypnotized by her near doom, as though she wanted to turn around and head back toward that barren shore to seek the ship's death that so surely waited there.

Neil forced himself to keep eyes straight out ahead and he counted off the seconds and the minutes. Finally, reaching the smooth water of the bay, Garrison allowed himself a backward glance. He almost sighed outright with relief when he found that night had closed down, shrouding that sinister island in its dark distance. He took the *Robin* to her mooring, made the yawl secure, then he sat on deck to think. It was too late and Neil too troubled to think seriously of sleep that night. Try as he might, Garrison could not convince himself that his rope to the buoy had somehow slipped loose.

He was positive of this because he'd checked it so carefully just after the thunderstorm, and what had just happened reassured him on another point. The breathing—that was a nebulous phenomenon to consider. It had no healthy explanation—seemingly, and inevitably Neil had begun to wonder more and more until finally he had suspected himself, had suspected the integrity of his own mind, even questioned his own sanity.

This now changed all that, didn't it?

His thoughts tumbled one after another. He wondered wildly if there was any sharp scheme afoot to force him into a resale of the boat. After all, the broker at the Marine Basin here made his living from commissions on such transactions. Obviously, to build up the myth of a haunted boat and then proceed to *haunt* it by some tomfoolery could be a very profitable enterprise.

IN THE morning Garrison went ashore and found his way into the little machine shop. Above the clatter of lathes and drills turning, he made known to the old mechanic that he'd like a word with him. The oldster's name was Chris. He worked on drilling a hole for a cotter pin in a propeller shaft, acting as if he hadn't heard Garrison's request. After waiting a few minutes Neil leaned forward. He tried another tack.

"It's about the *Robin*, he murmured in the old man's ear. "I want to know about her," and he held a bill between thumb and forefinger enticingly.

Old Chris killed his lathe machine, and with the noise gone from the shop, the two men stood in the sudden shocking silence looking at each other. The old fellow finally spoke.

"And what was it you were wanting to know?"

"Who owned her?" snapped Garrison, pushing his theory of a greedy buy-and-sell broker. "How many owners did she have before me?"

The mechanic considered the question, then his mouth worked.

"Only one owner before you, Mister."

One owner! That blasted Neil's theory. "Elwood Collins, his name was. Regular harbor man."

"What'd he do? What'd he use the *Robin* for."

"Transporting." Just that single word. Uncommunicative old cuss—that could mean anything.

"What transporting?"

Laconically. "Things and people."

"Oh, sort of pleasure-sailing stuff."

"Nope."

Garrison's brow wrinkled perplexedly. "I don't get it. Where did he take these people?"

Old Chris gestured seaward. "Out to the island. Doctor Jisrow's island."

"Kind of like some sort of ferry service," Neil rushed on, still not too interested. He was trying to draw the old man out. What had been the meaning of those grimaces? Everything sounded all right to him.

"Well, that sounds harmless enough," the *Robin's* new owner exclaimed cheerfully. "Taking people out and back to an island sounds like a reasonable way of making a living."

"Some people didn't come back," said Chris.

"Didn't come back? I don't get it."

"It was kind of a one-way business," the old man went on.

The aged fellow was obviously touched. Garrison straightened to leave. At least he had another lead on the boat.

"Wonder where I'd find this fellow, Elwood Collins?"

"Elwood Collins?" said the mechanic giving him a queer look. "You'd have to be some shakes to find him, Matey. Seems he fell overboard from the *Robin* and drowned not so long ago."

The two stood in silence for several minutes. Garrison wanted to turn and walk away. He felt old Chris' eyes upon him.

"Having trouble with the ship, lad?"

Garrison mumbled something.

"She's not a happy ship," wagged the old man. "She's got ill-luck with her everywhere she goes," and the ancient leaned forward, looking first from side to side, almost as though a wraith itself might overhear him. "There's a dead man's hand at the tiller," he hissed.

Garrison stumbled out of the shop, wanting the fresh air, wanting to get away from the ominous old man and his sinister tales. Behind him he heard the shrill cackle of laughter.

He saw the broker later in the morning and cornered him on the subject.

"You must have been talking to old Chris," said the Marine Basin agent. "He's got a lot of strange ideas. Yes, it was owned by Captain Elwood Collins. He did have an accident, fell overside and drowned in a quick storm that came up before he could beat it into the bay. He used to run errands for Professor Jisrow out on North

Island. Experimental fellow. Maybe you read about him. But don't go listening to any of Chris' wild tales, mister."

BUT Garrison noticed the broker's shifty eyes avoided his own. On sudden impulse Neil decided to spend the day in town. He hied himself to the village library and got a file of old papers. Sure enough, here were references to Dr. Aaron Jisrow, famous physicist and experimentalist. The sole inhabitant of North Island, a wedge of gray, bleak rock set out in the sea beyond the mouth of the bay.

Garrison mulled over all the references. He talked with the librarian and town old codgers that he found here and there. In his mind the picture of Jisrow took form, and then there was Captain Collins with his little boat, the *Robin*, running errands between the mainland and that other world, North Island.

Much that he read and that was said to him was intriguing and sinister, but the implications were even deeper, were even more macabre. Garrison hurried back to his boat but not before stopping at the village hardware store and picking up several yards of heavy chain and a padlock. When he got back to the Marine Basin, the pier was nearly deserted. It was a gray day and most of the sailing parties had returned, beating the storm that seemed imminent coming out of the east.

As Garrison walked down the gangway to the dinghy float, he saw a familiar figure standing on the dock. It was old Chris. The mechanic spied him as he drew near, laden with the chain and some provisions. The ancient eyed him in an inquisitive, almost insolent way, and Neil was angry at it as he loaded his boat.

"See you got a length of chain there," the old man finally observed.

Garrison did not reply.

"Usually ghosts supply their own," Chris cackled immoderately at his own joke.

Garrison pulled his dinghy into the water, sat her and put out his oars. He noticed the broker looking down disapprovingly at them from the pier head. The Marine Basin agent hailed old Chris irritably and the old man saluted mockingly and headed up the gangway.

Neil bent to his oars and headed toward his ship. It was his home now and he meant to fight for it. He was angered at that last remark of Chris' about "ghosts supplying their own chains." He was annoyed and irritated as he climbed aboard the *Robin* and he started immediately with his preparations for outwitting whomever or whatever was badgering him and the good ship *Robin*.

Neil fussed around securing his rigging and with other odd jobs above and below deck until the light drew out of the sky. It was a good oarsman's ten-minute row to the shore, but he still thought he could make out Chris' figure on the pier. For some reason, the exact point of which was obscure to him, Garrison decided it would be just as well to hide his mooring precautions as best he could. Finally, when gathering dusk had placed a wall between him and the shipyard, he went to work with his flashlight and the chain, looping one end through the top of the anchorage buoy and then securing it around a stout stanchion on his own deck. Neil then fastened together the ends of the chain with the heavy padlock he'd bought for that purpose.

He went below deck and tried to pass the hours by reading, but his eyes would wander from the page. There was very slight motion tonight on the water and even the eternal lapping of wavelets against the hull around him was but a small muted noise.

FINALLY, despite his tension and anticipation, fatigue overcame him. He forced himself topside to examine the chain once again, then satisfied that it was as he'd left it previously, Neil came below again and tumbled into his bunk.

It could not have been many minutes later that he fell asleep. His dreams were full of wind and sailing, canvases full, the *Robin* standing almost on beam's end. It was a sailor's dream even down to the noise of the rigging, the squeal and whine of stays and stanchions, or could it more nearly be described as a *clattering* or a *clanking*? And so Garrison became suddenly awake, the dream fading in his mind, but the sounds . . . the sounds were very real. They were small and cautious, but unmistakable, as though the two strands of his chain to

the mooring buoy were being gently rubbed together. There was a louder clank and then silence.

Neil unhooked his flashlight from its place at his head and swung to his feet, pattering toward the companionway on silent, bare soles. Just then the silence was broken by the sound of a soft tapping thud at the boat's side as though some denizen of the deep had reached out a long forefinger and poked the *Robin's* hull with it. Neil came on deck inch by inch, came to eye-level and peered. At first, he saw nothing, and then as his pupils dilated with concentration to compensate for the blackness, he saw startlingly close the shadow of something or someone. Why, it was so close that he could almost—he did!

Garrison sprung forward at the shape so near. Although such physical action implied a belief in a physical opponent, it was with considerable relief that the *Robin's* owner felt solidity and substance underneath his encircling arms. The force of his attack carried his wholly surprised and now sputtering opponent to the deck. Garrison sat on the man's chest—for so he proved to be by the baritone curses—and brought the flashlight up against the face.

It was Neil's turn to be surprised, for the face that blinked back at him in the ray of light was none other than that of old Chris, the eccentric mechanic. Garrison rose to his feet, pulling the other man erect.

"What're you up to, sneaking aboard me in the middle of the night?" He still had a tight grasp on the ancient's coat.

CHRIS shook his head but said nothing. Neil walked the other man forward on a tour of inspection. Sure enough, forward where the chain to the mooring was connected lay a metal cutter's saw, and against the starboard side of the *Robin* the rowboat the mechanic had used nuzzled against the hull. Silently, Garrison led his captive down into the cabin. He sat him down, put the flashlight between them on the table.

"So you're the fellow who's been tampering with my moorings. Guess this isn't the first time you've boarded the *Robin* since I've taken her over."

"S'help me, guvner," said the old man, "this's the first time I've been aboard since

ya took this ship, and I didn't wanna come tonight!" Chris cast an uneasy glance over his shoulder up the companionway that led into the darkness.

"I suppose you know I can have you arrested for this," Garrison said.

"Now, mister," the old man's face was pleading, almost pathetic, "you don't wanna do that. I only tried to do ma duty. What I had to."

"Is it your duty to board ships in the dead of night and cut them loose from their anchorage? I had some trouble in that storm the other night. Found myself drifting out toward North Island. Could have lost the *Robin* and my own life. What about that?"

Chris paled perceptibly. "Hones', I didn't do that. It was *him* that did it!" He whispered the last as though afraid of being overheard.

"Him?" said Neil. "What do you mean, him?"

"The old skipper of this ship. He's bound to take her over again, I tell ya. You should never have bought her, mister. Leave her to him, I says!" The old man's eyes dilated with fear, and Garrison realized with shocking suddenness that he was dealing with a person who was not sane.

"You still haven't told me why you sneaked aboard this boat," Garrison insisted firmly, but the mechanic merely mumbled in reply over and over, "Leave it to him, I says. Leave it to him. It's the devil's ship now!"

Garrison stood up abruptly. "I'm taking you ashore," he stated. "We'll see what the sheriff has to say to this!"

That seemed to shock Chris back into the sphere of reality. He almost went down on his knees before the *Robin's* skipper.

"Please, mister! I'm only doin' like he's whispered to me. Wouldn'ta had to but you put that steel chain on your mooring. It's easier for me ta get a metal saw, working like I do in a machine shop than for him. I just do what he whispers to me."

"Who!" fairly yelled Garrison.

"Skipper Collins," replied the old man in a faint voice.

"But he's dead!"

"He's dead and he isn't," wagged the old fellow. "You know, son, in this world

there's some things dead that shouldn't be; and there's some things alive that should be dead!" He laughed that high-pitched cackling laugh of his; the laughter of a man who has seen things not of this world, and who, himself, is no longer entirely of this world.

"You don't wanna make trouble for me, son," said Chris. "I'm tryin' to be friend to you when I tell you to leave this accursed ship. I'll stay away, sure, but sooner or later, he'll come ta you. Not only you'll hear him but you'll see him! He means ta get this ship to sail where he's got ta!"

The two men stood facing each other now, Garrison undecided. After all, he didn't want to cause the old crackpot any undue trouble.

"How come you're in on this?" he queried. "How do you know so much about Skipper Collins? Elwood Collins, wasn't it?"

Chris chuckled. "Why, mister, didn't ya know? I'm Collins. Skipper of your boat here was my son. Isn't it kinda natural that he comes to his old father ta get things done more easily when he's on the Other Side?" The old man waved a fist into the darkness eloquently.

Garrison let him go then. He could not find it in his heart to take Chris ashore and make trouble for him with the sheriff. The oldster was obviously touched. Neil shooed him onto the deck and overboard into his rowboat. Rather than being grateful, the old man, as soon as he stroked away from the *Robin's* side, sounded a warning note:

"If I know 'im, he'll be back, mister. You'll wish you'd never set foot on that craft!"

GARRISON watched, and when the rowboat was swallowed up in the darkness he listened to the creak of oarlocks growing fainter until finally inaudible. He waited a short time more on deck and then went below.

Sleep was the farthest thing from his mind. He checked his mooring lines and everything was shipshape, but a sense of chill anticipation was within him. Whatever Fate had in store for him this night, he meant to meet it awake and on his two feet. To save his torch batteries, he lit a

thick storm candle and set it on the platform fixture by his bunk, at the same time turning off the flashlight.

Below deck here, the motion of the *Robin* became more perceptible. There was the sighing of wind suddenly springing up out of the night in the stanchions and rigging. There'd been reports earlier that a bit of a blow was expected. The increasing rollers rocked the ship, and try as he would, Garrison found the desire to close his eyes for just a second or a minute almost irresistible. He was being lulled to sleep, he knew, and yet his senses fought against the overpowering drowsiness.

He tried walking briskly around the cramped cabin but he always ended up sitting on the edge of his bunk, and after a little time passed, his head would nod again. The hour was late. After one, his watch told him, and he'd had none too much sleep recently, anyway. Finally he gave in to the heavy fingers that plucked down his eyelids and soothed his still anxious mind. The dim interior of the cabin faded from his conscious eye and he saw instead one of those strange fantasies that come in troubled sleep.

The images were somewhat kaleidoscopic. First he would be aboard his ship, sitting in the cramped, dim-lit cabin, and opposite him there would be a shadowy figure. Then forward where the companionway should be leading to the deck, there stretched out endless distances of maze, and it was as though his mind followed these. A depression settled over his soul even in sleep, for were these not the long, dim corridors of Time that led irrevocably to that last shrouded door we deny until it opens some day before each one of us?

Garrison must have tossed and turned fitfully, or perhaps the increased rocking of the boat did it. He woke up shockingly sprawled on the mahogany floorboards. The shock of the fall brought him his full senses. As he tried to get to his feet in the dimly lit cabin, he noticed that the night candle was out—and yet he could see it. His wide, staring eyes traced the eerie luminosity.

THERE in the corner (his fingers bit deeply into the palms of his hands) a figure huddled in a worn blue peajacket, the

face averted, sitting there motionless—just breathing in and out, heavily, rhythmically: Neil tried to scream then and he was sure no sound came forth. He crouched against his bunk, his back bumping against the soft mattress as the *Robin* rolled, his mind numb with an unspeakable, nameless dread. For the figure with all its immobility, for all that it was faceless, had an *outré* boundless terror about it that chilled and stiffened his fingers and hands and legs and brain.

This brooding menace became a wholly positive thing, though when two or three or maybe four wallowing rolls of the *Robin* later, the figure in the corner very slowly, very methodically, rose and stood at full length, a broad, heavy man, the face still downcast under the soiled white skipper's cap. The spectral figure strode forward then purposefully, but if there were the sounds of walking and of the heightening of sea, Neil heard them not, only that breathing coming closer and heavier.

For a moment Garrison recoiled and then instinctively he stepped between the intruder and the companionway door, his fist closed around his sheath knife, and he drew the blade free. He ordered the seafarer to stop, but the man came on, lumberingly, relentlessly. As he drew closer, the sound of the breathing and the figure's luminosity confused Garrison. He felt his wrist seized with an overpowering strength. He wrenched with his knife and thought he reached an arm but then knew he must have been mistaken. His opponent's strength was not of this world. He was flung sideways like a rag doll, landing sickeningly on all fours. The figure disappeared up the companionway, drawing with it the luminance, leaving the cabin in darkness.

Then graciously, the reassuring thought came to Garrison that this was one of those most realistic nightmares, a continuation of his earlier dream. He fell upon the bunk, and ever-widening black spots blotted out the images where the form of Garrison's nightmare changed or blessed unconsciousness swept over him.

It was an immeasurable time later that he again became aware of himself and the cabin. This time again he was not alone. The luminous figure was sitting huddled in

the corner. But this time above the breathing there was a voice, heavy and rumbling like the thunder of doom on far-away cliffs. The story the voice told was a strange one. It came to Garrison in his fitful state by words and images. The teller—of course—was his mysterious companion, Skipper Elwood Collins, long-dead but recalled now for a final duty.

Collins had been the lifeline between Professor Aaron Jisrow on bleak North Island and the shore. Jisrow, wound up in his ambitious experiments, needed someone he could count on to ply between his desolate island laboratory and the shore. Collins was that man, for many months and years. There were extra jobs, the voice and the story went on. After a while there was a need for live things for the experiments, cats, dogs, chickens. Jisrow explained to Collins that he was on the verge of a great discovery, the secret of the reclamation of life, as well as its denial. Collins, of no great scientific turn of mind, nevertheless had enough common sense to realize from what he saw around him on the mysterious island that the professor had stumbled on something which could bring a clever man (like Collins) a tidy sum of money, for had not Collins seen Jisrow transform a lifeless cat or dog into a living creature of immeasurable propensities?

SO THE day came that Collins began to think for himself. He was always pestering Jisrow to try his "treatments" on real human beings. The unscrupulous skipper learned the rudimentary principles of operating Jisrow's machines. He would learn all he could and then at the proper time Aaron Jisrow would have an "accident" and he, Collins, would own the machines that could make life out of death.

In his eagerness to get along with the experiments, Collins brought a young boy and girl to the island. Jisrow was angry but allowed himself to be persuaded to use them as human guinea pigs. The youngsters were enchanted but wholly skeptical. Jisrow set his controls, explaining that to take no chances, he would merely experiment with low voltage. After the professor had gone to the control chamber, Collins had quickly turned the mechanism to maxi-

mum. The young people, still laughing and joking in the experimental room, died horribly before Jisrow ascertained Collins' treachery.

Their physical, nervous and psychical selves were so completely destroyed by the voltage cortexes that all attempts to resuscitate the two victims failed. Jisrow in a frenzy had accused Collins. The seafarer, surly, had turned on the old man, beaten him and left him for dead. As he was making his way aboard the *Robin* at the cliffs' foot, the old professor had appeared above him and cursed him for his infidelity. He would die some day, the professor swore, not just body but his soul and his whole being, in the precise way he had slaughtered the two youngsters. Collins had sailed off, smug in the knowledge that Jisrow, for his own protection, would conceal the bodies. After all, no one had seen them transported to the island.

Months passed, and occasionally rumors came from North Island. Jisrow, it seemed, had gone quite mad and lived exclusively off wild berries and vegetation on his island. Not many months afterward the *Robin* was caught in a sudden squall. She'd turned over, and Elwood Collins had been drowned, his body recovered weeks later. It was some satisfaction to his old father that Elwood, who for all his knowledge of the ways of the water, had feared the sea, had not died hard. He was laid to rest with few mourners come to mark the passing of the sullen, taciturn skipper.

But then the trouble had only begun. Jisrow still claimed him, even in the grave. To fulfill his destiny which had been cheated in life, Skipper Elwood Collins must come back even in death and return to North Island. . . .

Garrison sat bolt upright, hitting his head hard on the cross-beam above his bunk. The pitching and creaking of the beams was preposterous. He leaped to his feet, shaking the last cobwebs of sleep from him. The *Robin* was off her mooring again, surely. He raced on deck and found the boat heeled well over under full sail, making into the teeth of a gale. Water came over the bow and drenched him. He turned then and looked sternwards towards where the tiller was, deathly afraid and yet knowing what

he would see—the inexorable figure of Skipper Collins, soiled visored hat down over his eyes, the blue peajacket and the dungarees.

The *Robin* was riding he knew not where. All familiar landmarks were out of sight, seemingly somewhere thousands of miles away beyond the storm and the darkness. And then out of the gloom dead ahead over the screaming of the sea and the wind and the crying canvas, Garrison heard a sound like a voice calling in words and a language not of this world. The spectral figure at the tiller stiffened, stood erect. The wind caught the full expanse of canvas and drove the ship faster, standing almost on her beam ends.

GARRISON screamed again and again but his voice was thrust back in his throat by the wind. He turned forward holding a stanchion to keep from being swept away. There was something looming up out of the dimness, a greater blackness. Then his own earlier experience came flooding back on him as the sinister shadow grew as though to engulf them. Ahead there were the bleak knifelike rocks and cliffs of North Island with a dead man driving the *Robin* to her doom.

Garrison gained the tiller laboriously and screamed at the again hunched figure still with its face downcast. He tore at the man's arms; they were as steel, but for the first time the face rolled upward to look into his own, and at the sight, Neil lost all sanity. The eyes were dead pieces of glass with the skin a purple molding whiteness, the lips shrunken over decaying, snagged teeth. Over his shoulder and through the night, Garrison saw and felt North Island hovering back there, reaching out as though with sinuous black arms to envelop them.

He reached lower then for the belaying pin he kept to lock the tiller on a set course. The pin came in his hands and he struck with all his force squarely at the evil, impossible face before him. The cheek bones splintered and the pin went in, *actually into the rotting globe of a head*. It stuck there with pieces of fractured yellow-white bone like teeth around it. But still the hand on the tiller was firm, the form unmoving, driving the ship relentlessly forward.

Garrison ran away screaming, then. Better death in the sea than this prolonged horror with dead things that will not die. He flung himself into the turbulent water, and as the *Robin* flashed by he caught a last glimpse of Skipper Collins, his bashed-in face still dissected squarely by the belaying pin imbedded in it. In a moment, the ship had passed and was beyond sight in the storm.

Garrison tried to quiet his pounding heart and conserve his strength. He swam strongly, trying to concentrate on the strokes that were necessary for survival. Later, he thought he heard the unmistakable crashing of a ship going on the rocks and the high-pitched voice from the cliffs above seemed to rise and become a part of the howling wind if it had not been that from the beginning.

Garrison swam. And swam. And when the gray light of dawn lifted the mantle of gloom from the eastern sky, he saw ahead of him the point of the harbor and splashed and staggered his way up on the beach to collapse there more dead than alive.

A fisherman found him, and a week in bed resuscitated his physical exhaustion. But there was now a gnawing unquenchable obsession that knifed at his mind and heart that forced Neil Garrison to go to Chris Collins at the boat yard and make inquiries as subtly as possible. The old father was in-

clined to be lenient with Garrison since his "unfortunate experience in the storm" and his ship hammering itself to death against the North Island rocks. No, he revealed, his son had died easily the way drowning people do. "Why, there weren't even a mark on the boy," as though that fact was a great redeeming factor.

Garrison went away with heavier hands of dread about his heart, and one night for the sake of his sanity, he found himself in the small town graveyard. It was a desolate out-of-the-way place and he did what he had to do with pick and shovel without fear of intrusion. It was a distasteful thing, an abhorrent thing, but it was not as impossible as going through a lifetime without knowing.

He forced open the cheap casket and feared for a moment to shine his hooded flashlight, but then determination took hold of his fingers and he flicked the beam on. It was almost as if an acquaintance lay here, the soiled dungarees and the peajacket, and there imbedded in the garishly white decaying face was the belaying pin. Garrison lowered the casket top with a sigh and a prayer. He undid his vandalism and walked off, at last a free man to go towards another and free ship which would know no debt to fate or the Beyond.

