

# SPEED ADVENTURE STORIES



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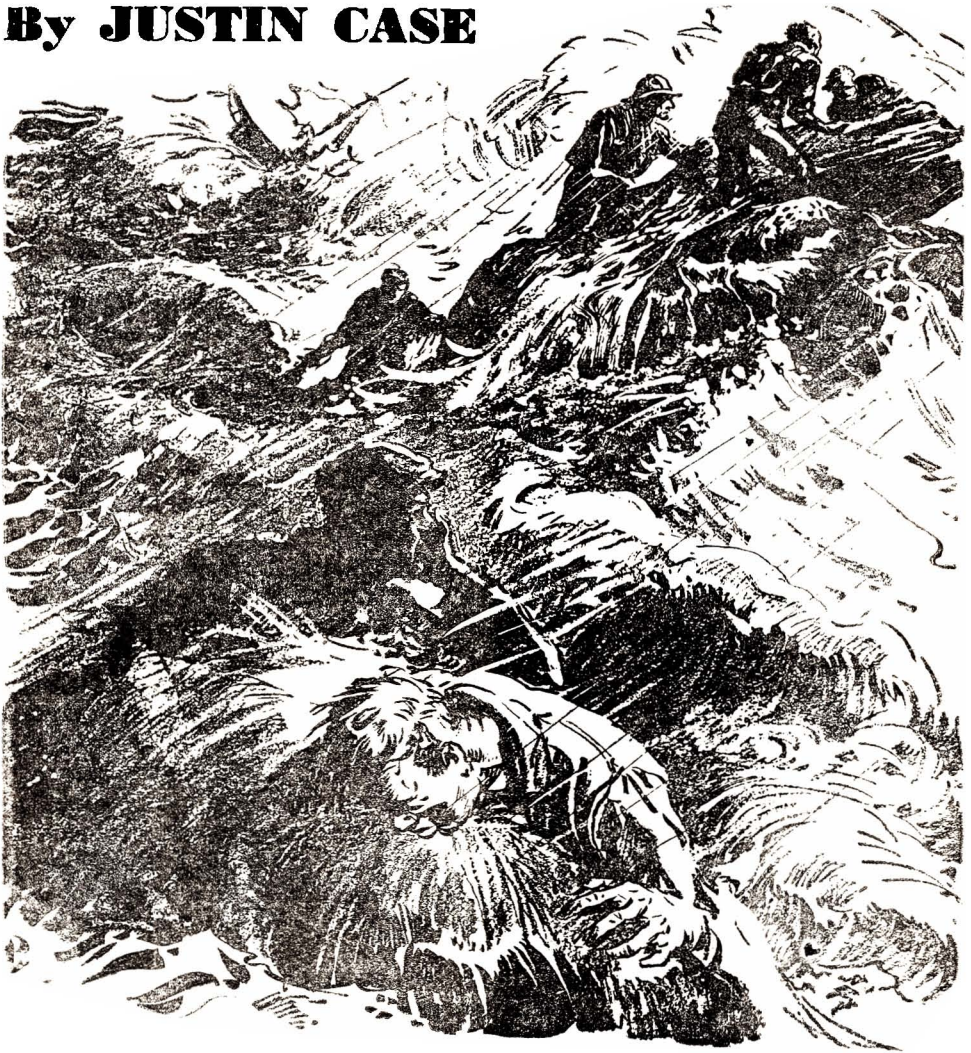
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By **JUSTIN CASE**



## SO LONG,

**T**HE storm howled out of the Arctic icebox, south over the Bering Sea to the backbone of tiny islands bent west from Unalaska. You watched for storms in that restless region of fog and rain. The weather boys on their tight little islands flashed ceaseless warning of the wind-dragons. But sometimes mere knowing was insufficient.

Steve Cannon clearly remembered the frantic few minutes preceding the crack-up: the utter, blasting obliteration of visibility, the screaming jets of wind and rain

that kept his PBM dancing. He clearly recalled the face of Jim Waite, dim and taut in the panel's glow, still handsome but washed of its grin as the plane spun like a cork in a waterspout.

His recollection of the ensuing rush of events was less lucid. There were mountains of sea mixed up in it. There was the fluttering, upstuck wing of his ship, swirling like a shark-fin as it slipped under the sea's surface. Sorry end for an honored bird with two Jap subs to its credit, and the last only four hours cold!



*While they clung to the rocks, the boat nudged closer.*

*It didn't matter so much to Steve Cannon what happened to him. His thoughts were chiefly of Jim Waite. Of Waite and Joan, the kid from Hollywood, who had been like a time bomb, all ready to explode!*

# SISTER

He had a moment of bleak satisfaction, sharp as the sting of a surgeon's needle, at sight of Jim Waite shouting for help on the crest of a monstrous wave—beyond reach of aid even if help had been handy. Then came the rain and the cramps, the waiting and the interminable hours of darkness. And thoughts of Joan.

**Q**UEER that he should have thought of her, wondered where she was and what she was doing, at such a time. Perhaps it was part of the business of living

life over again while awaiting the curtain. He hadn't thought of her that way in months—not since the first bitterness had dimmed, the first dogged hopes dried up.

But her face floated before him in the storm, her copper hair amazingly not disturbed by the screaming wind-dragons. Her blue eyes glowed with their old gaiety and her red lips laughed with him, not at him as in the days after Jim Waite's intrusion.

She was with him quite a while. They

had lobster together at that inn on the Maine coast where the juke box uncannily played Chopin and Debussy, and she said, "Oh dear, clams and classics!" (Remember that one, Steve? You sprung it proudly on a dozen dazzled hearers until Happy Wilton recalled the book she'd cribbed it from.) They danced in an open-air ballroom where the walls were mirrors, where at every turn he saw twenty of her drifting along in his arms, slim and tantalizing, almost too young to be knowing all she knew of a man's wants and weaknesses.

He was back with Cooperative and she was the grown-up little girl from Hollywood. And he should have known, he supposed. Should have realized, when she first turned up to do the inside stuff for *Woman With Wings*, that a kid of her age, pursued and pedestaled, would be an emotional bomb ready to explode when least expected. With Hollywood males fawning for her attention, she was ready and ripe to tumble for a man-sized test pilot like Stephen Joseph Cannon. He should have known.

Well, she'd fallen. Fast and hard. But, like a kitten, without hurting herself.

He lived the night of their marriage again and wondered whatever had become of Mike and Madge, the pair who had fled from Andy Macklin's party with them and got married with them, just to make it complete. Had Mike, too, made the mistake of bringing home a Jim Waite for his wife to adopt at first meeting?

To hell with them. Marriage for them had been only a lark anyway. But not for Cannon. And not for Joan, he'd thought. But he'd forgotten the chute on that one.

**T**HE night grayed and the mountains of waves rolled him along, half drowned and more than half indifferent. He was not aware of the cold any more. You could be cold only when some part of you remained warm for comparison, and no part of him had escaped the water's numbing bite. He wondered how so fragile a lifebelt could hold him afloat so long. He thought, inevitably, of the day he'd bumped into Jim Waite. The fateful day.

The kid had been a stunter—two long

legs and a grin smeared with freckles, and no more sense than to want, more than anything else in creation, to be a test pilot. At their first meeting, in Sanderson's office, he had gripped Cannon's hand and said, with his grin at full moon, "Cannon, hey? Steve Cannon! Boy, have I come upstairs fast!"

And you couldn't know whether he meant it or was ribbing. You couldn't dissect the grin to get behind it.

"So I fell for him," Cannon thought. "I put him in my pocket."

More than that, he'd put Jim Waite within reach of Joan. Or was it the other way 'round? Anyway, the kid had moved in with them, in the house they'd rented on the side of the mountain, with sky for a yard and lumps of cloud for shade-trees. It was nice to have him around. Cannon liked his chatter, his wild tales of circus stunting and South American flying. If you believed it, the kid had been everywhere. Little brown gals on the Amazon. Eskimo cuties in the Arctic. Fishing, hunting, girling from Thule to Magallanes. All with that grin.

The grin was there in the grayness as the night waned. It faded and Cannon's tension eased with its going. He shook the soaked hair out of his eyes and felt as he had felt the night he dropped the kid's bulging suitcase at his feet, out there on the porch in front of Joan, and said, "Enough's plenty, fella. There are hotels."

He remembered Joan's face, her blue eyes concrete-gray as she watched Jim Waite step into his car. He saw again the kid's insolent wave and refelt his own relief as the car slipped from sight around the bend of the down-trail. Joan would get over Jim Waite; sure she would. With the kid out of the way, everything would fall in line again. (You really believed it, Steve; remember?)

The sea lulled him. Each endless swell caught him up, embraced him, passed him on to the next. He lay in bed, in a white, warm bed, watching his wife. He watched the slim, bright-nailed fingers tucking the copper hair into place, and grinned at the powdery patter of her slippers as she

rose from the dressing-table and came toward him.

He put out the lamp, called softly, "Over here, honey, right over here."

The wind screamed derisively and he watched her melt into Jim Waite's arms instead, as if she'd been waiting all her life for that moment. As if nothing else had ever mattered or ever would.

She did not come back after that. He



*The sea rolled in to smother them, but still they clung together.*

was alone with the sea and the rain, the cramps and the cold. And finally the fear, the numbing fear that all the world must be ocean. Even Jim Waite was better off than he.

"Damn him, he always wins!"

Then he thought of The Plan.

**I**T was hazy at first. Just something to work on, to keep alive the fading hope he might not die. He liked his thoughts and played around with them. There'd

been so little time for this slow, easy sort of thinking since his jump from civilian flying to a job with the Navy's air arm.

He let his mind go on it, back and forth, patiently. Like sanding nicks from an oak plank. He was going to be rescued. He was going to go on living, with Jim Waite permanently out of the picture. Half the score would then be settled, half the hurt rubbed out.

There was still Joan's half. Waite's death wouldn't jolt her enough to tie the

score. Ah, no. She'd gloat on the glory of his going. Her mind was the type to seize on that and mold it into moonlight and kisses. She'd eat it, sleep with it, subsist on it.

Cannon pondered the possibilities. His mind tinkered with the stray ends of the Big Idea, and it seemed less crazy. Waite was dead. Long live Waite.

"That's it," he thought. "That's all there is to it. Simple."

He was tired after that. He wanted sleep, and as the wind died and the sea lost some of its drive, his mind slipped off into shadows. The waves rolled him through assorted smooth rocks to a patch of beach and he lay there, dimly sensing the stillness, the lack of motion. The rain stopped and the sun baked his upturned face, and a cloud of noisy, white-winged birds discovered him. And later, though unaware of it, he was discovered by something else.

He waked under layers of blankets and gazed at a wooden ceiling, at bare board walls. A shelf above the end of the cot on which he lay was littered with pipes, tobacco tins, shaving tools, and there was a vacant cot against the opposite wall. An oil-stove sent out warmth.

From an adjoining room came a spatter of whistling, a quick little run of melody that fluttered in space, thinned like a stretched rubber band and was gone.

Well, he was alive. He'd made it. And Jim Waite hadn't.

"Your luck changed, kid," he thought with satisfaction.

He could have called out to let the whistler know he was awake, but preferred to lie still. He felt strong enough, well enough, but was drowsy. And the Big Idea occupied his thoughts.

A bearded man stepped from the adjoining room, glanced toward Cannon's cot, and went out. Cannon looked into the room he had come from. Instruments on a table there told him where he was. Their gleaming bright-work winked at his thoughts, reminding him he must be precise, as attentive too detail as they were, or his scheme would collapse from shapelessness. His mind rushed along, sorting out details.

It was a cinch. He'd be taken to Dutch Harbor or Kodiak and would be given at least a brief leave to recuperate. A chance to go home. Home by navy plane or Alaska Clipper, to Seattle. After that, oblivion.

Only one thing worried him. There were men at this end of the one-way road who knew him. Not many, but a few. He'd fished Alaskan waters, gunned for Alaskan big game, before the war. If he encountered any of those men—outfitters and guides—between now and Seattle, there was danger of recognition. A chance he had to take.

The door opened. The bearded man entered with a companion, and they came to Cannon's cot. "Feel better, do you?" the bearded one asked.

"I don't know how I feel. Where am I?"

"On an island," the fellow said, pulling up a chair. "Dutch Harbor isn't too far off." He thrust his long legs out, grinning. "I'm Daniels. This is the rest of the community—Fred Carleton."

They were young, both of them. Cannon held his hand out from the cot and they shook it.

"The two of us," Daniels explained, "run a meteorological station here." He had an easy smile that the growth of whiskers could not hide. "Weather shack to you, lieutenant."

"You mean you live here?"

"That's a delicate word. Let's say we occupy the place."

**CANNON** regarded them with respect. It took a special kind of fortitude to live on a warty knob of land in this fog and rain, week in, week out, just to dope the weather for guys like Steve Cannon. It took guts.

He was going to miss all this, and there was no use pretending he liked it. Flying was in his blood. Jap hunting was a job he enjoyed.

He told of his crack-up, his hours in the lifebelt. His lips delivered all that while his mind reached beyond to shape the last few details of The Idea. When Daniels asked him his name, he was ready.

"Waite," he said. "Jim Waite." The ease of it frightened him a little. But he knew what he was doing.

*The irony of the situation tickled him. But why wasn't Joan here?*



It made sense, didn't it? What better way could he square matters? When Joan heard that her beloved Jim had been rescued—and she'd hear it soon, Cannon resolved—she would live for the day of reunion. Her Jim, her darling Jim, on his way back to her arms!

The hurt would come when the kid failed to show up, when the waiting dragged on and on with no further word from him, no sign that he gave a damn. The days would pass, bringing her nothing. Then at last she would get the idea he wasn't interested. At last she would suffer as Cannon had suffered. It was all good. It was perfect.

"How soon can I get out of here?"

Daniels rubbed a hand over his stubble. "I've talked to Dutch Harbor. They may send a boat for you right away."

"Good."

"If we don't get that storm back on our necks. It's been playing around."

"Let it play," Cannon said.

He went out later for a look at the weather and the island. It was a bleak little place. From the spire of volcanic rock in its center he could see the sea in every direction almost as clearly as from a ship's masthead. Very nasty sea, black as the island's jumble of rocks and restless as Cannon's thoughts. The sky was a moving gray mass, all alive and all ugly.

riding the swells like a blimp unable to pull clear.

He watched the swarms of birds shrilling in the wind above him and nursed a bitterness for the luck which had crossed his path with Jim Waite's again. Was the war so small that two men who hated each other as they did had to be glued together like Siamese twins? Or was it so big that such personal hates were overlooked in the rush of it?

For weeks he had waited grimly for the kid to make some remark, some crack that would instigate a private little war of their own. He'd been ready to win that one. But the kid had disappointed him. The kid's mouth had stayed buttoned; his talk was confined strictly to business. There'd been a change in him, a quieting, all for the good. Cannon had wondered about it.

The island was a good place for wondering. He was moody at the thought of leaving it. Departure meant the end of a job, the beginning of nothing. He hated the need for quitting.

The weather piled up. It scattered briefly to let the sun through, then massed again in a weighty, rolling sky that kept Daniels and Carleton glumly shaking their heads. "If she hits us," Carleton said, "you'll think you're riding that lifebelt again, with big scale Hollywood sound effects." He sighed, perhaps thinking of crack-up victims or survivors of broken ships who might be doing that very thing. But they were wrong about the boat. It came.

**I**T wallowed in at a weary crawl, towing a mountain of fog behind it, with the sea and the sky restlessly poised for a final cataclysm. From the roof of the weather shack, where he clung like a bug while reinforcing an antenna mast, Daniels saw it and shouted. Carleton and Steve Cannon climbed the lookout of rocks behind the station to have a look.

"She'll never make it past Coffin Rock," Carleton predicted. He hurried to the shack for signal flags and Cannon helped run them up the mast to warn the boat off. But the wind screamed over the island and plucked the bits of bunting loose

before they reached the mast tip. Carleton didn't try to shake out others. "She couldn't see 'em anyway," he said helplessly.

There was nothing a man could do. The wind shrieked on the sea, flattening the giant waves by the simple process of slicing the crowns off them, and would have leveled trees with the same carnival spirit had there been any to work on.

The world was for the moment all wind and spray, and the boat out there, though reachable with a good casting rig, was as far from contact as Japan or Australia, or the River Styx Ferry.

She was not a cutter, Cannon observed, though for a while he could not make out just what she was. A fisherman, apparently. One of the odd-job tubs, called Yippies, whose owners had been commissioned by the Navy. Diesel powered, probably. But in this blow she would need the power of a herd of humpback whales to make safety.

With the spray in his face and his hair straight back in the wind, Cannon watched the homely little tub slug back. She was a veteran of such slugfests; she could take it. But she couldn't duck the rocks.

The sea was all rocks out there. The ocean's bottom was a range of round black knobs that rolled into view and were gone again, like the backs of swimming turtles or the humps of an incredibly humpbacked sea-serpent. The little boat wallowed among them and was helpless.

"She'll pile in a minute," the man at Cannon's side said, shouting to be heard. And Cannon nodded. He saw men on her deck—not running, apparently not even moving. Just standing, staring, waiting for the inevitable.

She struck. There was no sound through the sea-roar and the wind-shriek, but Cannon saw the impact and felt it, or seemed to, in his bones. The gray boat swung and cracked, and the dim shapes on her shuddering deck were snapped into the sea when she rolled.

She was over in an instant, her keel an upthrust fin that blocked the following waves with a series of reports loud as thunderclaps. Men clung to the rocks; strange, twisted barnacles of men that



waved feebly and probably were shouting.

Cannon shouted, too, as he ran to the inadequate small-boat at the island's strip of beach. He was not sure what he was doing. The urge to do something was irresistible; that was all. When he reached the boat and found no oars in it, he stumbled about and started back again, but stopped. Daniels, with a pair of oars under each arm, was weaving toward him against the wind.

"We're crazy," the bearded boy shouted, "but hell!" He dropped the oars and held the boat while Cannon clambered into it. In the weather shack doorway Carleton was watching, woodenly motionless. Someone, of course, had to stay behind to run the place.

Cannon made fast the oarlock chains and filled his chest so full of air that it hurt. He hadn't looked at the battered Yippy again. He hauled on the oars to hold the boat steady while Daniels jumped into it.

For what happened then Cannon was not to blame. The boat's nose bucked a wave and fell from its crest with a crash that jarred every plank. The bearded boy, off balance, stumbled and pitched forward in a tangle of arms, legs and twisted neck.

Cannon leaned to him, but it was too late. His hands were needed on the oars. He shouted and saw Daniels' eyes come dazedly open, but they closed again and the bearded boy was out. Out cold. A gray and bottomless sea whirled the boat heavenward. The strip of beach was incredibly far down, not quite real. Cannon groaned and fought the oars.

**I**T was no job for one man, one pair of straining sticks, but after the first frantic moments he liked it. The need for action and effort was stormy enough to keep him from thinking of other things. Or had he stopped thinking, if his mind still recognized the need for reprieve?

To hell with it! He was using the best of himself, the strength in his arms and legs, the spring in his back. He was fighting and he liked to fight. He'd been born to fight.

This Bering Sea was the coldest drink on earth, yet despite the wind's icy bite

and the drenching slap of ice-water waves, Cannon sweated. With stolen looks over his shoulder to line up the men on the rocks, he pulled the pitching boat into a kind of defiant subservience and softly cursed every exploding wave that smothered his unconscious boat-mate. Then came the rain.

Horizontally it advanced in a howling wall, flattening the sea's humps and completing the sodden blend of sea and sky. It roared on past him, obliterating the island. He felt naked in its penetrating wetness, and the feeling strengthened him as it would fortify a man to shed shirt and shoes for a job demanding pure brute strength.

He was at home in that sea. The boat was sturdy under him and the oar-handles were flint in his grip. And he was almost there.

He turned for a look. The broken fishing boat loomed in the rain and he saw her clearly for the first time. He saw the name of her white against the heaving gray of her hull. He looked again, frozen at the oars. His lips flattened on his teeth and he whispered her name as though afraid of it.

It *couldn't* be she. Of all the craft in Alaska, it couldn't be! But it was.

His Plan loomed before him and fell apart in the wind's derisive howl. This boat. *This* one. He had fished from her half a score of times. He had shared food and whiskey and bedding with salty Link Annerman, her skipper, on more cruises than he could remember. There was no ghost of a chance Annerman would fail to recognize him, and with recognition would go his Plan, his revenge. He swore bitterly and long at the boat and all it stood for.

He could have turned back. Daniels was unconscious and would never know, and if he slipped an oar before reaching the beach, Carleton would ask no questions. Any man might lose an oar in such a sea. The thought occurred to him, but he swore at that, too, and was rid of it. There were huddled shapes on the knobs of rock between him and the fishermen. He saw them waving and headed for them, the

(Continued on page 77)

# So Long, Sister

*(Continued from page 37)*

shivers of the oars racing through his arms to his shoulders. But he swore bitterly with every stroke.

The boat nudged the crusted side of the first rock and a man came forward on hands and knees to cling to it. "Room for all of you!" Cannon shouted. "Careful of the injured man here!" He steadied the boat and they wriggled into it, and he searched their faces for the salty face of Link Annerman.

It wasn't there. When the last of them crawled in, clearing the rock of its load, Cannon caught briefly at his arm.

"That's Annerman's boat, isn't it? Where's Link?"

"Kodiak, friend. In the Navy six months now."

"Ah," Cannon said.

The fellow put cold lips to Cannon's ear and pointed. "There's two more of our boys on that other rock. Can we get 'em, you think?"

"Hell, yes!" Cannon shouted back. He was in fine spirits. His Plan was whole again. "We'll get 'em!"

**I**T wasn't easy though, even with the other pair of oars adding their pull. The sea was bad there. The rocks warped the shape of the waves and the peaks of water came from a dozen directions at once, rolling the little boat mercilessly. The rock itself was a threat.

It was shaped like a floating coffin, one end high, the other hidden in the spray of pounding waves. Two men on it, one kneeling, the other sprawled face down,

unmoving. The laden boat swung close. Numbed hands in the stern were torn loose as they reached for a hold. A pull on the oars closed the gap again—a wave hiked the boat skyward—the fingers regained their grip and clung fast.

"One of 'em's hurt," a man at Cannon's back shouted. "We fished him out of the drink on the way here. Be careful—" His voice went wailing.

Cannon shipped his oars and leaped, thrusting his head into the wind. On hands and knees he crawled through the wind and spray. He caught the first man's shoulders and found him dazed, half frozen. "All right," Cannon said. "All right. Hang onto me."

Then he looked at the other one, the prone one, and paused. There was something about the shape of the man, or the look of his clothes, his uniform, that momentarily robbed Cannon of his strength to breathe against the wind's blast. He reached swiftly for the limp arms and pulled them away from the face, saw the white, wet features and heard in the shriek of the wind a howl of derisive mirth.

He paused a moment. Then his mind functioned. "This man's hurt!" he yelled. "Hurt bad. No room in the boat for him in this condition. Come back for me, you guys!" He shoved the hurt man's companion toward the boat and bellowed, "Unload and come back for me! I'll stay here with him. Beat it! Hurry!"

The wind screamed, but they heard him.

Cannon watched the boat go. He watched it soar high on a speeding comb-er, its nose pointed to the island. Then he turned to scowl again at the bleak face of the man he was marooned with.

Marooned. That was a word with possibilities. There was every chance the sea would wash them off this coffin of rock before the boat returned for them. Every chance. One of them, anyway.

The thought did not surprise him. Or shock him, either. Lately he had learned to think not in shapeless lumps, emotionally, but of small, separate details. His mind automatically reached out with a net to encompass all the angles. Now his mind saw the rock and the sea and the returning

boat. One man on the rock, waiting. One man alone. He looked again into the white face of the kid who had stolen his wife, and then he reached for Jim Waite's limp shoulders.

A wave smashed the submerged end of the rock and buried them. It spilled away, hissing and snarling, and Cannon shook salt from his eyes. The kid's fingers had come to life and were clutching him. The kid was conscious and moaning.

Cannon leaned closer, catching the words.

"Damned subs!" Jim Waite muttered. "Damn' dirty Jap subs! That's two of 'em we got, fellas, two we got. And we'll get more!"

The sea rolled in to smother them. White foam gurgled about the kid's face. When it receded, the pale lips were still moving, the voice still came. "More of 'em, fellas. We'll get 'em all, every last one of 'em. Got a big job to do . . . big job . . . Japs to kill . . ."

"Sure," Cannon snorted. "Oh, sure. You're a big shot. You can do anything." He lay flat and pulled the kid close with one arm, wrapped his legs around the kid's legs and scissored them. It gave him a queer feeling to be that close. It troubled him. He could feel the kid's pulse throbbing against his arm.

"All snug and cozy," Cannon said. He could grin now. The irony of the situation tickled him. "She ought to be here with us. That would make it complete."

Jim Waite didn't answer. But when the boat returned, there were still two men on the rock. The sea had not budged them.

TOWARD morning the storm died down and there was sunlight shining feebly through the mist. There was the fiddle scream of the birds above the bassoon rumble of the surf on the island's shore, and in the weather shack a sound of exhausted men snoring.

Cannon rubbed the crusted salt from his eyes and got them open, and nodded to the man standing over him. He was lame and sore. He was on a blanket on the floor, and from that position the scowl on young Daniels' face seemed to hang from the

ceiling. A bruise on the boy's forehead bulged in a glorious blend of yellows under a smear of salve.

"You all right?" Cannon asked.

"I'm all right." Daniels came closer. "Never mind me; it's you. You said your name was Waite, didn't you? Jim Waite?"

"Me?" Cannon replied warily. "Did I?"

"You did, and I don't get it. Neither does Carleton." The weather-man held a hand over Cannon and let a sheet of paper fall from it. "If you're Jim Waite, what does this mean? It was in the pocket of that fellow you stayed with on Coffin Rock—the one the Yippy fished out of the sea on the way here."

Cannon held the letter up to read it, and it blocked his view of the bearded boy's scowl. Queer, his reluctance to read it. He had thought his scruples were dried up long ago. But his eyes followed the dainty lines of type, sorting the words out of the crazy-quilt blur of water-smearred ink. He read it half through and looked back for the date—a month old!—and went on to read the rest of it, hanging dazedly over the last two lines.

"So you see, Jim, I simply must consider my career first and foremost, naturally, and with Mr. Pluber feeling the way he does about me, and him the most talented director in the entire profession,

I simply haven't any other choice but to say goodbye to you. I really love Mr. Pluber very much, and I am sure you will understand."

Cannon lowered the letter and looked up into the scowl again and said at last, "Is the kid awake?"

"You mean Jim Waite? He's been asking for you."

"Do me a favor," Cannon said, "and rustle me up a bottle of something and two glasses. Two glasses you don't care much about. We'll likely bust 'em. Hurry it, will you?"

The bearded boy stopped scowling. "Waite was one of your crew, wasn't he? I guess you want to drink to the rest of your boys," he said.

"We could do that," Cannon admitted. "Sure. And to the future." His mind had stopped reaching for details and was content now with bigger things, and he was smiling. Jap-hunting was a job he enjoyed. He and Jim Waite—hell—a lot of Japs would regret that combination. Two subs was but a beginning.

"I'll get some Scotch," Daniels said. "Is Scotch all right?"

"Wonderful," Cannon said. "That'll wipe it really clean. She never could stand the taste or smell of Scotch—it always made her sick."