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### CHAPTER I.

The Last Round.  
An oily sea! Billows—absolute stillness, save for the green and creak of the yards and booms, as the bark rolled listlessly on the long, shimmering swell. Not a breath of air; only a stifling heat that beat upon the decks until the pitch in the seams bubbled. Only a waste of water that reflected the merciless tropic glare of the sun and hurt the eyes cruelly.

Under an awning in the stern a man in a white shirt and trousers was huddled in a chair by the cabin skylight, lifted his head and mumbled through cracked lips.

"Twenty grains of calomel, twenty-four quinine—magnesia, peppermint-water, please."  
His hands fumbled with the drugs from the ship's medicine chest that strewed the skylight, and guessing at the quantities, carried portions to his mouth. He swallowed with difficulty, and reeled into a huddled position.

After a little he raised his head once more, and began to count upon his fingers. One, two, three, four, five—was it five or eight days, or ten, or a month that the calm had lasted? He did not know. He had lost all track of time. But it worried him, and to his sick brain assumed very vital proportions. The ship's log would tell him.

He reached for it and began to scan the entries. It was strange that trying to read brought red flashes and pain to his eyes.

The words came only to him in snatches.

"October 10. Still becalmed. In tense heat. Native boatwain took sick this morning."  
"October 11. Buried boatwain last night. Four more of crew down. We've got yellow fever aboard. God help us if we don't get a breeze!"

His eyes went on down the page in a haphazard, irresponsible way, skipping entries here and there unconsciously.

"Still becalmed. God have mercy on us! Native crew all down. Chinaman named Won Su, after making a murderous attack in his delirium on Wallen, the first mate, jumped overboard."

Ting Wah was still alive.  
"Medicine," said Wallen hoarsely. The Chinaman pushed it away. "No can take," he answered weakly. "No finish."  
Wallen steeled himself with an effort, and looked at the other closely. It was near the end; but still, as under certain conditions it sometimes did the disease had left the man's intelligence unimpaired.

"Look here, old chap," said Wallen cheerfully through his own cracked lips. "You never know. Buck up. Take the medicine." He stooped to lift the other's hand gently, and nearly fell himself in doing it.

A sudden gleam of gratitude came into the Chinaman's eyes.  
"You good man," he whispered. "You all same good man. But no can take—all same finish now." He pushed the medicine away again, and then plucked at Wallen's sleeve, evidently trying to get the mate's head down closer to his lips.

The man was going fast. Wallen tried to force his lips to the other's. "What is it?" he asked.  
"Listen!" said Ting Wah. "Mebbe you die too. Mebbe no. All same me, tell—you good man—last night bling medicine all night you good man—mebbe you die too."  
His voice trailed off weakly.

"Yes?" prompted Wallen kindly.  
The man tried to speak, tried again, but without avail.  
Wallen's own head was reeling, premonitory of coming nausea. He pushed the other's hand away.

"It's all right, Ting Wah, it's all right," he said soothingly. "Better not try to talk."  
But now Ting Wah, with a desperate effort, raised himself to his elbow.

"You must talk quick. Me here, Won Su here, four more all same Chinamen come on board and make crew on ship here for all same knife you."  
There was contention in the man's face, a pitiful struggle to get back the weakness and exhaustion that came upon him. Wallen stared at him in a dazed way.

"Kill me, Ting Wah!" he cried out. "What for? You—you don't know what you're saying. Go, you! You don't mean that!" The Chinaman's elbow was slipping gradually away from beneath him, his eyes were closed. The medicine spilled from Wallen's hands onto the deck, and he caught at the other, propping him up.

"Ting Wah! Ting Wah!" he cried again, shaking the man to rouse him. "What do you mean? Ting Wah, don't you hear me! What did you mean to kill me for?"

so many bars and locks, and when every night his father and Gunga turned the keys and the chains rattled on the doors as they fastened them.

He raised his hand and passed it across his eyes in a startled way. How vividly it came back to him, that night—as though it were just happening now, as though he were in the very act of living it again.

A crash in the dead of night through that silent house, and he had sat up, trembling in bed. Then a cry, the report of a pistol shot, and the echoes of the shot rumbled and reverberated through the house, sending terror into his young heart. And he was crawling out of his bed, and out into the hall and down the stairs in his nightshirt.

And half-way down, he stopped in horror's grasp.

Below, in the hallway, stood the giant form of his father holding a candle, and on the floor lay stretched a huddled form, and Gunga, with a revolver, was bending over the thing that did not move. Then came his father's voice, in a stern, querulous tone of tense eagerness.

"Look again, Gunga. Has he one finger on the left hand?"  
And Gunga had shaken his head as he had answered.

"I have looked, sahib, and the hand is whole."  
Spellbound he had stood there on the stairs, a lad of fourteen, and Gunga had lifted the thing in his arms and gone away with it; and the great figure of his father, dressed in pajamas, had stood motionless for a long time, then turning had faced the stairs and caught sight of him—and suddenly had sent a wild, unnatural laugh ringing through the house.

"You there, eh, Steer?" he had laughed out, as though unmanned. "Well, I'll tell you something now. Never go to the East. Remember that—never go to the East."  
And then he had pointed himself to Gunga, and he had set down the chair as he had pointed up the stairs. "Go back to your bed!" he had commanded sharply. "Go back to your bed instantly!"

"Yes," said Wallen aloud to himself. "That's what he said: 'Never go to the East—never go to the East.'"  
But he had come to the East and six Chinamen had slipped aboard the Upolo to kill him. His father had been quite right in telling him not to go to the East. How was it that he had come there? He had run away from that gray house after that night, and he had never heard of his father since.

That was in California. He had gone to Fresno, and gone to sea. He had been at sea for some time in all kinds of ships, and he had done pretty well. He had his master's certificate already.

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References: The Continental Trust Company and mercantile agencies. 6-14-6m

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