

THIS FINER SHADOW

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This Finer Shadow

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CHAPTER I

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The sea's reaches moved blue and green from the western horizon to the Haitian coast. The small ship *Verda* disturbed the roll of water.

Martin gave the ship a little right wheel and she had her course, breaking the current. An offshore wind brought the jungle to him. He closed his eyes and felt its movement—the overcries of birds, animal musk and the heavy heat of clouds. There, facing the sun, lay a swan's feather of beach shining up to the darker ridges. Oceanward, the sea bent into the brightest corner.

It was after supper. He knew the sailors were lounging on the poopdeck. Rio, naked to the waist, handsome, with his broken chest and heavy shoulders, would be telling the younger seamen of One Beer Annie and her electric finger. Martin looked at the clock and at the compass. He struck three bells and stepped away as his relief entered the wheelhouse.

"Thirty-two," said Martin.

"Thirty-two," repeated the quartermaster.

"Steering thirty-two," called Martin to the mate on the bridge.

The officer nodded his head.

Later, on lookout, Martin leaned against the ship's apron and watched the sky ring blue to blue. On the coastal side the bright wing faded under the hills. Seaward, the sun pressed into mist—sustained by color. He shaded his eyes against the shrill line, saw it strike the water, burn and recede. Catching the rim, it held once and fell, breathing up

softer lights. Flame, gold and scarlet in procession shifted to turquoise and a rolling mauve—slowly turning the crystal till darkness caught one star.

The distant light trembled in his eyes. He crossed the deck and faced the shore. An aluminum crust broke the dark shoulder of mountain, rising higher till its bright shale covered the swing of beach with moontide. Burning from the painting ran the moonspindle, striking the ship. Martin dropped his head and stared into the blue foam.

Above him, Orion swung easily past the foremast and returned; Polaris grew in the north; and behind him, the Southern Cross lay on her side. He grabbed the mainstay, pulled himself up on the apron and lay on his back. His eyes followed the moon as she came toward him, changing softly from flesh to white, round and white like the abdomen of a woman.

Silence, dead and liquid, held the *Verda* from both sky and sea. A restless mist, moving downward, obscured the stars. On the land side heat-lightning followed in sheaves. A thin black cloud raised the horizon. It built higher and darker as it rushed at the ship.

Martin pulled off his skivy-shirt. The heat covered his face with perspiration and he drew his arm across his forehead. Isolated on the fo'c'sle head, away from the ship and its crew, there was no proportion. The wind dried his throat and he bent under the apron to breathe, closing his eyes against the lightning. A wave smashed on the bow and sounded through the forepeak. He ducked lower under the steel cover and rubbed the salt from his mouth. The rain struck. Falling solidly, it hammered his back and shoulders until, at last, to ease the pain, he turned his side against the pressure. When he looked aft he knew that he was blind, seeing neither mast nor running-lights. Living in this

vacuum of noise, without sight, he knelt on the deck with his head in his arms and tried to breathe through the falling water. Still and bowed he waited.

Abruptly the wind stopped, and the rain. He looked up and saw the retreating clouds uncovering stars behind him. The moon shone more brightly. The scent of the jungle was deeper and the man with the sword in the sky smiled as he swung past the mast. Martin stripped off his dungarees and wrung the water from them. The stiffening cloth was still moist when he pulled them on again.

He was surprised toward the latter part of his watch by a heavy, amused voice.

"Get your end wet?"

He saw Rio smiling at him.

"I did," he replied gravely.

Rio slapped his hands together.

"Why'd you go to sea?"

Martin rubbed his chin and looked away.

"I'm getting along," he answered.

Rio leaned on the rail beside him.

"A woman's place is in the home."

Martin felt himself beset by an out-of-time capriciousness. Yet he knew these words, so like the emptying of a fool's wounds, were no more idle than the turn of water and wind and all their purposes, though whistled through a child's melody. He knew also that certain eccentricities of men, of winds, of waters, must be directed and employed; therefore, without looking at his friend, he spoke to him.

"The boundaries of the home have been extended. The boundaries of your mind are arbitrary."

"That serves me up, I guess." Rio yawned. "But you ain't no seaman."

Martin sighted over the rail.

"Scorpio's tail light is out."

Rio, persistent, glanced at him sideways.

"You ain't happy here, and I am." He breathed the hot, moist wind and looked at the moon and the quiet length under it. "I'm happy. This is the kind of night I live for. It's clean and hot. It burns the yellow out of your blood. Some day," he nodded toward the island fading behind them, "I'm goin' to get a little shack over there with a shakedown roof, and maybe a small stove."

"So you're happy," answered Martin. "Happy!" he repeated in a louder voice. "That word doesn't belong on this deck."

Rio grinned.

"You're a Christian, then."

Martin stepped closer to him.

"I believe I am."

The lights of a ship came up on the port bow. Martin crossed the deck and struck two bells. When he returned he spoke abstractedly.

"I'd like to find a quiet beach myself. A beach that walks with you in the daytime and sings with you at night.... A place to rest.... But I can't rest."

Rio became confused. He put his hands on Martin's shoulders and for a second they stood motionless, like mildewed lovers in a gloom proportionately obscure. Then Rio whispered, "I'll do my bit, my friend. I'll take your last illusion."

Martin saw the fluid, hurt eyes and the bitter smile. He struck Rio's arms from his shoulders.

"How do you know that I still possess this 'last illusion?' ... Why do you follow me?... You call for the water and the heat. You're part of the land we passed and of your

buccaneering ancestors. That doesn't include me. I'm a foreigner."

Rio looked at him with hatred.

"Meanin', my fine lad, I ain't part of you? Well, maybe I ain't." He brought one fist down on the rail, then pointed at the water. "Christ, you're wrong about it all, though. You ain't no sailor—but you *are* the 'part of.' I'm the foreigner. My father buccaneered from the pulpit. A hard-shell, hell-fire Baptist, he cheapened a pirate's trade with pennies out of a palm leaf.... I remember him well; a dirty man from the west, with green eyes and a thin beard. He showed me your English and your habits and shouted his bad theology. And all the time, my native mother, with the sound of the beach for religion, stared at him——" He turned clumsily, more like an anthropoid than a man. "I don't get myself, Martin. Maybe I'm starved. It's been a long time. I've lived in a monastery since a brown girl——"

"I hear every word," said Martin. "I hear 'monastery,' 'brown girl,' 'pirate'—but I can't put them together. I can't think logically. They're disconnected pictures."

"Keep your pictures." Rio moved closer. "I said I'm crazy to-night."

Now Martin could see an intentional grace, eager and sharp.

"Hold your Baptist's head then, Rio. That's not for us." Martin's waist was slim in the moonlight. He knew the night was wrong—something to fight or there would be a mistake. He turned away. "It's nearly eight bells, Rio, and the squarehead relieves me too fast."

Rio held his fist against the moon. His face seemed breaking.

"You ain't right, Martin, but you make me think you are."

He climbed down the ladder, walked across the foredeck and aft to his bunk. He took his bath in a bucket, put on clean skivies, turned in and tried to sleep.

On lookout, Martin watched dew form on the steel rail and rubbed his hand across it. The sun had burned his hair lighter than his skin; and as the moist wind pushed it from his temples, a smile, restrained by the unfathomable hurt of one who, for escape, has taken to the sea, formed on his lips. That he could dream well could be told by the changing color of his eyes according to that which was about him; and by the fact or the illusion that he saw great distances or none at all. His conversation with Rio had been a short but a disturbing one. At the climactic moment it had seemed obvious. Not now; and deliberately Martin turned his thoughts to the ocean. His union with the ship and all that was about him was brief and precisioned. Perhaps it was his quietness or perhaps a quality in the sky; but his silent figure was adjusted in the small cosmos. His eyes, indecisive of both moon and ocean, had found the properties of each. Thus, filled with iron and dull gold, he wore the uniform and restlessness of the tides and knew that although his own desire had been encompassed, it had not been lost. He pressed against the rail, his arms braced, his bronze hair damp against the deeper bronze of his skin. Through the clarity of a sudden, stern compassion, he swung around to where Rio had stood. In the recurring consciousness of the presence of his friend, he drew the solemn colors about them. Against his feet the steel plates trembled with the ship's engines. The wind changed. A thousand mirrors broke under the high moon.

CHAPTER II

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Martin looked around the fo'c'sle, swung open the locker door to see if he had packed all his gear and looked under the blankets on his bunk.

"So long, boys," he said. "I'm shoving off."

The seamen at the card table and those lying in their bunks glanced up from newspapers and cigarettes.

"So long, Mart—So long. Take it easy."

He pulled his duffel-bag over his shoulder and walked up the ladder to the afterdeck. Languorous winds and the dark waters of streaming nights lurked in the corners of the bulkheads. Yet the knowledge of his late intimacy with these secrets had no quality of nostalgia for him. He was surprised at the indifference he felt on leaving the ship, all the more so because he had no reason for this coldness.

The chief mate saw him standing by the rail. He had often wondered about Martin—that strange sailor who had gone about his duties so quietly. That was part of it. He was so damned quiet. No wonder the other sailors hadn't liked that. He did his work well and was the best helmsman on the ship; but off watch, he had the air of a man looking for the unnecessary. He avoided the sailors with such instinctive thoroughness that it was obvious even to them that he intended no offense. It was more, thought the mate, as if he seemed to be thinking a great deal and never getting anywhere with it. Frequently, on sultry nights, when the mate couldn't sleep and had taken a turn around the 'midship deck, he'd seen Martin sitting alone on the afterhatch looking at the sky. The officer had a few books on

psychology which he read instead of fiction; and therefore felt himself pretty well up on the distressed mind. He was a kind-hearted man, and one night he'd called Martin into his cabin to "sort of decide what made him tick," as he said afterwards. What was it Martin had said?... Something about the sea being a fine girl for a man, or some such rot; and said quite pleasantly. And when the mate had pulled him round to psychology, Martin had agreed with him that it was a nice vehicle for a malingering neurasthenic.... No—damn it!—the fellow had said that first, himself! It was easy to see the chap had read a bit. He addressed the mate's most ponderous terms with earnestness; but always he'd wound up in a theoretical mess that half sounded like a laugh. Still, one couldn't get upset over something that wasn't there; and certainly there was no laughter in Martin's expression. The mate was sure of it. It was a damned odd feeling though, to have him sitting there looking at you patiently with that peculiar, absent manner. He'd told Martin that it was best for the sailors to get along together and to yarn a bit and get things off their chests. And then the queerest thing happened. Martin had told him that good-fellowship was not only essential, but unavoidable; and from there on, he'd continued to speak in English; only what he was saying didn't make sense. It was like dumping words into a pot and shoveling them around with your finger. By God!—it was a strange feeling listening to that! And then Martin had gone.... Just the same, when the mate saw him with his duffel-bag beside him, looking out at the bulk of the city, it made him feel funny—sort of lonely for him. And he went over.

"New York in the winter is no place for a sailor, Martin, and you're paying off with very little."

"I know." He leaned toward the officer and spoke in a low voice. "I know. But there's something important to be found out, Mister. Important to myself, yes—and to you, and perhaps to more than both of us." He pointed beyond the warehouses to the pinnacles of the city. "That old line won't stay. But there's a basic pattern under it that will remain. That ought to be known. Damn it, Mister, I won't find it nor, perhaps, my son, but if we keep looking—" He picked up his bag.

Infinitely puzzled, the mate looked after him.

"That's that," he said to himself.

Martin went down the gangplank and, without turning, started for the city. He took the elevated to Chatham Square where he got off and asked a policeman for an address. The shock of change from the cleanliness and solitude of the ocean to this polyglot of grime and faces was physical; and he tightened up his nerves as though preparing for an explosion. A few minutes later he walked into Relief Headquarters, a rusty, high-walled building in the center of the Bowery. Policemen watched the group of applicants carefully. There were two lines of men, one set apart for seamen. Martin joined this group, noticing how strangely the sailors, tanned, alert and swaggering, contrasted with the white-faced, hopeless habitués. When his turn came a clerk, tired, frowning, looked up from his desk.

"Name?"

"Devaud."

"De what?"

"Devaud," answered Martin. "Vaud, as in vaudeville."

"Age?"

"Twenty-eight."

"Go to that desk." Aside, the man called to a case-worker. "Mr. Stein, here's another for you."

Martin went over and stood patiently in front of Mr. Stein who was fumbling with some papers. Stein had short-cropped gray hair which grew halfway down his forehead. It made Martin think of a Polynesian thatched hut. Stein's chin sloped backward so abruptly that he appeared more like a primitive man than one of the present. Only his fat lips and stomach were mellowed and sweetened by whisky and a rapidly departing youth.

"Sit down," he said. Then, smiling so that he showed a large area of widely separated teeth, he slowly drew in his smile and ended by regarding Martin almost beseechingly. "Sit down," he said again, folding his hands over his fat stomach. "We like to understand, to get closer to our more unfortunate brothers. We are here to help you adjust yourself. We hope to provide you with every facility for rehabilitation."

Martin felt a momentary irritation.

"Rehabilitation from what?" he asked, wondering what this empiric monstrosity was conspiring.

"Rehabilitation from—" Stein hesitated. He looked at Martin's dungarees. "Are you planning on returning to the sea?"

"No."

The case-worker took his pencil.

"I'm sure we can help you." He smiled again and nodded encouragingly. "It will be all right. Just sketch your history briefly." He slipped back into his chair, setting the flat convolutions of his brain at a receptive curve.

Martin reflected on his "history." The walls of this dirty place fell apart and memories came up in a flood.... His father—a story of the one professor, deathless in his circumference of knowledge; a man affectionate, yet untenable within the world, struck close in the mystery of

his students; humble with his virtues, out of cognizance, and strong in the strength of those he guided, he lived apart and yet among the compasses of his direction.... His mother, carrying an exotic, foreign beauty into time as though indignant with maturities.... His white child-wife, her white child-fingers screaming on the piano against his inevitable demands.... Her death.... Then ships and oceans and the lust of palms....

"Your history!" Stein's sharp voice, bringing back the sharper walls and the honesty of where he was, demanded laughter. And Martin laughed until each memory was dead.

"My history?" he asked, wiping his eyes. "You wouldn't like my history. It isn't interesting enough. Case-historians would starve to death with me."

Mr. Stein sat up straight. He frowned and looked at his hands.

"Very amusing." He filled two forms rapidly. "This," he said, handing Martin one of them, "provides you with a hotel room for the duration of two weeks. And this," he continued, "allows you meal tickets at any of our restaurants to the value of forty cents per day for the same length of time."

Outside, Martin shook his head to free it from the mustiness of dismissed progressions and the impurity of this newer living. He glanced at one of the tickets. "HOTEL PINE LEAF, RESERVED ESPECIALLY FOR SEAMEN," he read. As he walked on toward the hotel he was stopped twice for a cigarette. One heavy-jawed fellow tried to strike up a conversation and offered to help him with his bag, all the time walking uncomfortably close to him. Martin shook his head and the man dropped behind, muttering.

The lobby of the Pine Leaf was one floor up. A man seated in one of the chairs which lined the walls, was snoring loudly. "He must be sick," thought Martin, for no one

disturbed him. Martin leaned his bag near the desk and as he did so, a bull-necked sailor, his collar open, ran at him.

"Good God!" said the man. "We've grounded. Damn you, Captain! Keep her in the channel." He held his fist menacingly.

"All right," said Martin, stopping stock-still. "And now, look to your engines."

The clerk behind the wire netting regarded them worriedly.

"Go back to your cabin, Danny," he said. "We've taken on the pilot."

Danny, shaking all over, looked once more at Martin and returned to his chair.

Martin handed his slip to the clerk who turned it nervously in his hand.

"Danny's all right," he said. "Liquor took his ticket. He never jumped like that before, though. Kind of look out, will you?"

"He didn't mean anything." Martin smiled reassuringly. "I jumped like that once myself." He took his key and towel, packed his canvas up three flights of stairs and walked down the corridor to his room. It was a narrow, cell-like cubicle, furnished with a cot and a small locker. There was no light and the tiny window, high in the wall, admitted only a few indirect rays of sunshine. Martin sorted his gear, found his razor and went into the washroom.

Three men were huddled in a corner. As Martin lathered his face he looked in their direction and saw that they had a bottle of rubbing alcohol which they were diluting with warm water. After a good deal of grunting and shaking and laughing they held it to the light.

"Looks to me like Tri Gin," said one whose hands shook violently.

"Looks to me like smoke," said another, laughing and turning to Martin. "Have some smoke, Jack?" he asked.

Martin shook his head.

"Ulcers," he said, pointing to his stomach, and started shaving.

The men shook their heads sympathetically. This, they understood. They were dancing to the clapping of hands when Martin left.

In the low glim of his room he changed his shirt. He was about to lock his door when a lad ran frantically down the narrow hall, bumping into him. Martin held the boy coldly.

"Hide me," sobbed the lad. "It's Danny. He's had smoke—" the sobs continued. "Danny thinks ... for Christ's sake!—hide me!"

Martin shoved the boy inside his little room and closed the door, then took a cigarette from his pocket. A moment later, Danny put his head around the shadowy corner and walked slowly toward him. When he was closer, Martin struck a match and lit his cigarette abstractedly.

"Where is he?" asked Danny in a hard whisper. "Where's my little galley rat?"

"Speak American, buddy," said Martin. "This is an American vessel—not a Limey."

"Don't lie to me, you damned school-ship!" cried Danny, coming forward. "Where is he?"

Martin sighed resignedly.

"He's here, Danny—under my shirt. Come get him."

"Ah! That's better. I'm coming, friend."

He walked up close to Martin who dropped his cigarette. Danny shot out his right hand and grabbed Martin's shoulder; but feeling the broad, tensed muscle, he became suddenly quiet and stood for a long time running his hand up and down Martin's arm. At last, he started to cry gently.

Then, and only then, did Martin throw his arm about him and whisper all the lonely, desperate things that sailors know; until willingly, Danny let himself be led into his own room. Martin got down on his knees and took off Danny's shoes. He covered him with a blanket, looked at him once to be sure he was sleeping and tiptoed out.

When he got back to his own room the boy was gone. So were his small camera and his pea-jacket.

He went out into the street and walked along until he saw a beer sign. He stood at the rail and kicked the sawdust angrily, thinking of his camera. As he took his glass he caught his reflection in the large mirror above the bar and burst out laughing; for his head seemingly rested between the enormous breasts of a nude which had been painted on the wall behind him. Amazed at this unsuspected liaison, he turned to regard with favor the immense mural. The lady reclined, supine and indifferent to the ardent glances of the drunken men about her. Her bottom rested on a couch of lurid green and one arm, disproportionate, held aloft a wreath of garden spray and roses.

Martin was still laughing when a little white-haired man with a thick nose and red eyes walked over to him.

"Ahoy, sailor," said the little fellow, and blew two sharp notes between his teeth. "Ship ahoy!"

"Ship ahoy," said Martin.

The little man giggled.

"I like you, mate." He held out his hand, his eyes watering happily. "I'm a sailor, and my name's Old Crackin. When my old lady's sick—when she's havin' babies—I don't take no tea for the fever. / don't wait."

He turned and pointed to the mural. "I git mine from *her*." His eyes dimmed in affection as he stared at the naked

lady. Then he smiled again at Martin. "I can spell too, mate," he added proudly.

"Spell CAT," said Martin.

"K-R-Double T," said the old seaman, an ecstatic glow on his face.

"That's right," observed Martin, in a tone of approbation. "Can you spell DOG?"

"Sure I can!" Old Crackin answered promptly, looking as if he could scarcely contain himself for joy. "G-R-Double D," he recited, and held out his hand once more.

Martin saw the running sores between the old sailor's fingers. He smiled at him, called the bartender, asked for a beer and paid for it.

"Drink up," he said and left.

The little man looked at his beer and drank it slowly, bitterness and necessity in his expression.

The nearest Relief restaurant was at the far end of the Bowery. Martin walked along, sticking to the edge of the sidewalk, glad that his dungarees were clean. The horizons of the sea outlined the figures of the people about him. They moved down the street, slack-mouthed, too tired to be desperate. Martin saw them as an old river, full of eddies and currents—muddy, yet retaining the purity of utter despondency.

In a doorway, out of the late afternoon sun, a man lay sleeping as though drugged. And at one corner three men were drinking openly from a bottle while a policeman passed them without interest. A long-haired, wild-eyed fanatic, his shirtfront covered with dark stains, addressed an amused group of loafers on their sins, vividly painting the atrocious hells that awaited them, and turning only to spit at the passing cars. Whenever there was a momentary lull of traffic he would spit on his own thin coat-tails in his excess

of hatred. This brought the most hilarious laughter from the crowd. A thick-set drunken woman with one stocking dragging the pavement brought the preacher's fury to such a height that he rushed at her, his mouth wide open. She swung at him sluggishly, missing his chin by a narrow margin; whereupon he ran around her in ever-widening circles as she continued her forward movement in dignified arabesques.

Martin walked on more slowly, attempting to find a stronger sedative with each horror he passed. A man lay stretched across the sidewalk. His mouth was bleeding, his trousers were open and a slow trickle of urine ran down to the curb. The crowd, apparently oblivious, walked around him and continued down the street. In his rising emotion, Martin nearly stopped. He wanted to cover and protect the man—wanted to carry him to some safe doorstep. But his hesitation was brief; for he knew that this was the accustomed vagary in a clouded, forgotten street—knew that he would be jailed or put to trial as a mischief-maker or a madman if he tried to block the immutable routine of such a land. And so he went on to the restaurant with his heart completely hypnotized because, alive, it could not bear the awareness of such a state.

Noise and confusion were in the cafeteria. A line of men moved slowly past the counter, carrying their trays and pointing to the food they wanted.

Martin picked up a tray, shook off the greasy drops and looked at the signs. They read:

BREAST OF LAMB!	FIFTEEN CENTS.
HAM AND BEANS!	FIFTEEN CENTS.
EGG!	FIVE CENTS.

"Ham and beans!" he shouted against the noise of rattling plates and cups.

The boy behind the counter ladled out a large plate of beans, dropping a slice of boiled ham upon them.

"Milk," yelled Martin.

He carried his tray to a vacancy on the long, marble-slabbed table.

An old man, bent, unshaven, was scavenging the plates for food that others had left. Martin reached in his pocket for a meal ticket. A boy sitting nearby pulled at his elbow to stop him.

"Don't be a sucker," he said. "It's the old guy's racket."

Martin handed the ticket to the old man. He felt irritable as he sat down next to the boy.

"He can take it, and to hell with him," he said.

The boy laughed.

"I felt like that when I paid off. Now, I'm Red, the Cockroach—and a tighter one you'll never find in the galley sink!" He talked on rapidly, going from one subject to another and his freckled nose was so impudent that Martin had to smile with him. At last, the boy pulled off his cap, showing his dark red hair. "That's why they call me 'Red.' And," he continued, putting his hand in his pocket and pulling out a fistful of tickets, "that's why I'm 'Red, the Cockroach.' How's shipping?"

"I'm not trying to get out," Martin replied. "No butter?" he added, looking at the stale, brownish bread.

"No butter," answered the boy, nodding his head. "And watch the beans. See those black fellows?" He pointed to Martin's plate. "They'll come up."

"We'll leave them," said Martin, running his fork through the pinkish mixture.

The boy had thrown his cap on the floor. He picked it up with a nervous gesture and got out of his chair.

"I'm going for a stick of weed," he said. "Do you want to blow one up with me?"

Martin shook his head.

"I'm a drinker," he said. "I'll put a beer behind yours if you care for it. I'm not hungry enough yet to manage this." He stood up, pushing his plate to one side.

"It's a hell of a racket," said Red, as they walked out together. "They make plenty on this garbage."

It had grown dark. Under a streetlamp, Red looked sideways at Martin.

"My connection is around the corner," he said. "It's Chilean Hay—good stuff."

"Sorry," said Martin. "I'm a drinker. I don't object to Marihuana, but it depresses me; gives me bum kicks, you know."

The boy shrugged.

"O.K.," he said. "There's my connection." He nodded to a man watching them from a doorway.

The fellow met them and looked suspiciously at Martin.

"It's O.K.," said Martin's friend. He took two cigarettes and handed back a quarter.

"I'm hot," said the fellow, and walked away.

"He's right," said Red. "The law has his number. They know he's peddling."

"That makes it nice for us." Martin glanced cautiously around him.

"We're O.K. The law don't bother the consumer. Here!" Red pointed to a dimly-lighted alley. "We can blast it right here."

"Isn't it rather open?"

"It's all right," said the boy. He lit a cigarette, puffed on it and held the smoke in his lungs. Talking jerkily, he let out the smoke.

"There's just two kinds of men in the Bowery," he said. "Weed-heads like me, and they're smart. And lushhounds—" he stopped talking.

"Like me?" asked Martin.

Red took several more puffs from the cigarette, jiggling on his heels.

"There it is," he said. "I got it." He laughed uncertainly. "Come over to the Square with me. I know where we can make a couple of bucks."

"How?" asked Martin before he thought.

"Hustling," answered Red.

"Hustling what?" insisted Martin, already in.

"Anything from gin to Jesus," said the boy dreamily. "Or in a pinch, an Old Auntie."

"No. I'm turning in." Martin felt suddenly tired.

Around the corner, Red faced him.

"It's as soft as roses," he said. "Just as soft as roses." He walked to the curb, peered over the edge, and stepped carefully across the street.

CHAPTER III

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The *Verda*, due to sail the following day, lay in port. Her lines were coiled and her deck chipped. The houses had been cleaned and the captain's deck and the bridge were freshly painted. She was neat and lonely, pushing against the wharf with tired swells. She was not the same ship that had smashed against a storm-driven wave with a ferocity equaling that of the ocean, or had tolled deftly under the charge of a freak sea. She was aloof, nearly desperate amid the deluge of cans and boxes and other flotsam that swept the harbor. She was a dead creature, with the look of a coffin about her; and all the ships alongside were the same.

Below, in the *Verda*, the sailors were busy in the washroom. Tired by a day in the holds they opened some beer. A young ordinary seaman, restrained by weeks at sea, jumped around the room noisily and popped a towel at one of the men.

"Pipe down!" someone yelled at him.

The boy, unlistening, wrapped a towel around his waist, grabbed another, put on wooden sandals and ran into the fo'c'sle. Rio was sitting on his bunk, his chin in his hands, staring straight before him. Exhilarated by the beer and the cold bath, the ordinary danced forward and snapped the towel, flicking it against Rio's cheek. Instinctively, the big sailor jumped to the boy's side, his fingers spread. The ordinary turned pale and backed away. At this, Rio's eyes cleared. He regarded the lad as though seeing him for the first time and without a word, returned to his bunk. The

ordinary took one more frightened look at him, went back to the washroom and was soon laughing again.

In the fo'c'sle Rio was silent. The other sailors began to drift in, but no one spoke to him. He sat on his bunk with his chin in his hands, thinking about Martin. He remembered the night on lookout, the ship's foam and the low constellations. He remembered lights over Haiti and a young, impulsive face. Martin hadn't understood. He knew what his friend had thought. By God!—he'd thought it himself for a minute or two.... Why had Martin got off in New York at this season? It would soon be winter. He didn't have any money. His body was conditioned to the tropics. His clothes were light and his blood thin. He would sleep in a flop house, eat bad food and get sick from that cold east wind.

Rio got up from his bunk and went to his locker. He put on a new suit and new shoes. He packed his gear except for his sea boots and oilskins. These he laid on a bench. Then he put on his overcoat and a new hat, picked up his bag and walked out of the fo'c'sle.

None of the sailors had said anything while he packed. But when he had gone, the young ordinary looked around with wide eyes.

"For gosh sake!" he said. "What's he doin'?"

No one answered him. An old sailor picked up Rio's sea boots and inspected them.

"There's a god-damned hole," he said.

An able-bodied seaman lit a cigarette.

"He blew his cork," he said to the smoke.

"It's his own cork," answered the old sailor.

"Yeah," said the A.B., picking up Rio's oilskins and hanging them by his own locker.

"Let's get a game," suggested the ordinary, shuffling a pack of cards.

"Get your game with the black gang," said the old sailor. "Them lights're goin' out."

"So'm I," said the A.B., pulling on a blue jacket. "There's a bag on Sand Street that thinks I'm papa."

The ordinary stopped him.

"Loan me a dollar, Al. An' I'll go with you."

The A.B. laughed.

"A dollar?" He laughed again without looking.

"I'll pay you back in Panama," said the ordinary.

"We don't get no draw in Panama," said Al, and left.

Some of the men followed him and the others climbed into their bunks. The lights went out. The old sailor snored uneasily through the bitter ghosts of his life. In the bunk above him the young ordinary tried to forget Sand Street. He wanted to think about a secluded little valley on the Pacific coast—so far away. He remembered the thick smell of clover and the believing, fresh eyes of a girl he had left—for this? His bunk felt damp and he turned wearily.... His shipmate was on Sand Street now. There would be light-haired women and dark-haired women. There would be dancing and an orchestra.... The boy rolled on his stomach and held a pillow tightly against his eyes. The darkness brought fields and sunsets; branches and yellow, curving rivers. Memory covered Sand Street—Sand Street with its gin-mills, its red mouth and perspiration. The boy held the pillow tighter. Smelling the girl's lips and the clover—dreaming of the bright, soft land—so far—his mother, his sweetheart, he went to sleep.

CHAPTER IV

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Martin had lived in the Bowery a week before he realized that the sounds and odors seemed less offensive to him; that his acquaintances and his surroundings appeared less brutal. Each night in the hotel some man died loudly in his bed. It was an incident. Martin felt himself in a husk through which no poison could penetrate. One day, in an effort to regain his lost perception he left the street, crossed old Italian town, passed barren, rock-like buildings and looked for the first time at Washington Square. He walked across the park, holding it all—the grassy air, the fat babies, the old men with tanned, bald heads and individualities he'd never seen before nor understood. On one bench he saw several of his comrades on Relief. They were sitting quietly in the warm, fall sunshine. "Talked out," thought Martin, "and glad of it." He passed them, nodded, smiled and wondered why they thought him so apart, youthfully looking at them for an answer instead of at himself. He then crossed over to the circular pool in the center of the Square where boys and girls were romping in the thin spray of the fountain. In the anticipation of the approaching colder weather when the water would be stopped and this late play ended for a time, they seemed more active than usual. "Why is it," Martin asked himself, "that I feel kinship among the antitheses—these gay children or the devil!"

One child, like all the others but for thinner legs and an abundance of pale freckles, looked up at him and asked if he would watch her shoes and stockings while she waded. This responsibility was heartening; and he sat down on the edge

of the pool while she went in rather cautiously. The child seemed even more fragile among the vigorous ones who were shoving each other and kicking up the water. For a long time Martin watched her. "She might have been my own little daughter," he said aloud at last; and immediately the mist seemed to fall more heavily from the fountain and the play to become more violent until he wished it over with. The thought of home—a child—serenities attendant, brought the conflicting inquiries of his life more sharply before him and he brooded. A few drops of cold water in his face stopped the course of these reflections and he looked up frowning, his eyebrows raised. It was the little girl. She was laughing at his discomposure.

"You looked funny," she said.

"Did I?"

"Yes. That's why I threw the water. You looked cross. Did I keep you too long?"

"Not at all," he answered, smiling at her. "You know quite well that wasn't it at all. Furthermore, I shouldn't be astonished if you *did* know, right now, why I was cranky."

This amused her again.

"You're the funniest person I ever knew," she said. "You talk like a teacher."

"I'm not a teacher; I'm a pupil," Martin replied. "And I'm funny because I study funny things."

"What kind of funny things?" asked the child, looking excited.

"Many things. I study lady tigers that take off their stripes every night and put them on in the morning quite differently and——"

"Why do they do that?" interrupted the girl.

"So they will be in style," he continued seriously. "And I study dentist birds that repair alligators' teeth; and mice

that fly upside down.”

“Why!” exclaimed the girl somewhat indignantly, “I never heard such stories in my life!”

“That isn’t half,” said Martin. “Be very quiet now. Don’t move. Do you see that fly that lit on my knee? He’s looking for something to eat. There. He’s found it. Maybe I spilled sugar on my pants this morning. But do you see what he’s doing before he eats? He’s washing his face with his forelegs.”

The little girl watched carefully and saw the insect dip its head and bring its arms across its face like a brush. Suddenly she waved at it and the fly spun away.

“I can’t stand them,” she said.

“Just the same,” Martin nodded, “it washed its face.”

“It isn’t as funny as the tiger,” the girl concluded. “Tell me how a tiger can take off its stripes. Does it hurt?”

“Of course not.” Martin stood up. “I have to go now.”

The little girl put on her shoes.

“I wish you’d come again to-morrow. If you do, I’ll bring my ball.”

“That will be fun,” called Martin as he walked away. Going back to his hotel he thought of this blue-eyed youngster and how great it would be to tell her fairy tales every night and buy her sandals and her frocks. And with this picture came once more the vision of all the rest of it—a wife’s head on his shoulder, a fireplace, and yes—a pipe. He wondered then where in the world a finer shadow was leading him—a search for mysteries without substance or reason. At that moment he was a tired and a lonely man, quite willing to exchange a pound of mysticism and ideals, hard-won from depth to depth, for one ounce of level complacency. But after the first bitterness had worn off he was the same desperate young lover of the physiostatic

tides of force that subtly pull and push until out of sheer pity they permit the frail skeleton to slip up on the sands of its desire where the hollow star, so followed, lies desolate and discontent.

The next day he was glad to see the child again. Her good humor freed him—was pure liberation from the constriction of the Bowery. She called out to him at once.

“Hello, teacher.”

“I’d rather you said ‘Martin.’”

“Is that your first name?”

“Yes.”

“And you don’t mind if I call you that?”

“Of course not.”

“Well,” she said deliberately, “my name is Alice.”

“A pretty name.” Martin appeared abstracted.

“I don’t like it. But I can’t help it. I’d rather be called ‘Betty.’” She held out her hand. “Here’s my ball. Let’s play by the Arch.”

They bounced it back and forth until Alice was tired.

“You can’t throw it on top,” she declared, sitting down on the curb.

Martin examined the light and badly worn tennis ball and measured the distance to the top of the great Arch.

“You’re probably right,” he agreed. But he gave a mighty heave and the ball just rolled over the edge where it remained. This amused Alice; but Martin was annoyed. He stood looking up at the top ledge of the Arch for several minutes. At last, however, he said, “Come along,” for he remembered a drug store near by in which he had seen some tennis racquets.

A policeman had been watching them play ball and Martin thought the observation had been casual; but when they made ready to leave the park the suspicion on the