

Stewart Edward White



Skookum Chuck

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CHAPTER I

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THE ADVENTURE OF THE SUBLIMINAL QUACK

On a sunny afternoon in early May a young man strolled along a back street of Vancouver. It might have been supposed that he—or any other human, for that matter—would be savouring the fine weather that marked the break of the long winter rains, or enjoying the sight of glittering snow peaks and the twinkle of waters on two sides of the peninsula on which Vancouver is so fortunate as to be situated. But if so, his appearance strangely belied him. He looked bored. Or perhaps bored is too active a word, implying too positive a mental state. Let us substitute. He looked uninterested, indifferent, vacant.

Withal he was a young man of pleasing exterior and costly but elegant habiliments. Only a woman or the older head clerks from the best haberdasheries on Granville Street could have enumerated the detail of that elegance; but the most casual and contemptuous hand logger from the Skookum Chuck must have acknowledged—perhaps blasphemously—the altogether subdued, rich, and harmonious superiority, not only of this young man's caparisons, but also of the easy, and feline grace of his movements. As he was in addition a thin-faced, high-nosed, eyebrow-moustached, long-lashed, altogether impossibly superior and supercilious-looking person, the hand logger would probably have been strongly tempted to "hand him

one." That is, unless he might suspect that this was, after all, a motion-picture actor in make-up on his way to depict the dastardly and polished individual who removes her virtue from the simple though marcelled heroine, or his mine from her uncouth but golden-hearted father.

This beautiful and exotic figure sauntered idly along the backbone street of Vancouver's peninsula for some five or six squares before it took the slightest notice of any of its surroundings. Then it came to a full stop before a certain house. At first glance the place seemed to offer no commanding elements of rivalry for attention to, say, Lion Peak soaring heavenward across the First Narrows. It was a substantial brick house set back of a well-kept lawn. The square of its respectability was furnished forth by a cupola, a porch, a bay window, and an herbaceous border. All of these things were in well-kept repair, but were obviously intended to fulfil the demands of unobtrusive decency rather than to express the stirrings of artistic aspiration. They corresponded to the "neat and well-brushed business suit" of that worthy youth who is destined to wed the rich heiress. But a second glance would have explained our own hero's interest. On a corner of the house, next the porch steps, was a small polished brass sign that read:

X. ANAXAGORAS HEALER OF SOULS

The young man contemplated this for some moments. Then, a slight smile barely lifting the corners of his lips, he pushed open the swinging gate and sauntered slowly up the walk. For some moments further he examined the brass sign

at close range, though its purport and the details of its application were both plainly discernible from the street. Then he mounted the steps and gave a tug at the old-fashioned bell-pull that offered itself.

After some delay the door was opened by the sort of maid one would expect in a brick house of the kind described, and he was admitted to a hall that contained the carved-walnut hat rack, the two straight-backed Inquisition chairs, and the one steel engraving appropriate to the type of house if not to the brass plate.

"I should like to consult Mr. Anaxagoras," prompted the young man, as the maid seemed to hesitate.

The latter looked bewildered for a fleeting instant; then her face turned red with a sudden unexplained but repressed emotion. Without a word she hastily disappeared.

Sounds of scurrying could be distinguished; the echoes of a man's voice in the funereal stillness. The maid returned.

"If you will step this way, sir," she requested, apparently flustered.

They passed through a door to the left into what was obviously a parlour. The parlour also was appropriate to such a house. Its note was struck by spindle-legged chairs, a davenport, a table with a round marble top, a be-tasselled and scalloped lambrequin across the mantel front, a curtain consisting of strings of sea shells threaded on different lengths. The other details in no way were inharmonious with any of these things. Our visitor seated himself on one of the spindle-legged chairs, deposited his hat, stick, and gloves on the floor beside him, and settled himself without impatience to await the issue.

A complete silence reigned. The marble clock on the mantelpiece indicated the hour of 10:21, probably of some day in the year 1885.

After a considerable interval, during which the young man did not move by so much as an eyelash, the maid for the second time reappeared, and with more self-possession again invited him to follow her. She led him down the narrow passageway of the hall, past a newel post of the stairs on which a half-draped female figure upheld a gas jet, and to a second door at the end of the hall.

"You may go in," she informed him, and at once left him with a haste that somehow suggested a self-control overstrained.

The young man turned the door knob and entered.

He found himself now in a small square cubicle furnished out in blue. The rug was a deep blue, the walls were done in blue distemper, the ceiling was a lighter cerulean. The subdued light admitted by a single window was filtered through a tinted ground glass. A flat-topped desk, bare save for a pad of paper and a silver pencil, stood across one side of the room. A swivel chair was pushed against the far side of this, and a second chair had been placed in the centre. The visitor calmly seated himself in this, again deposited his hat, stick, and gloves on the floor beside him, and glanced calmly about. There was nothing to see, but his eye lingered for a moment on an ornamentally carved door, and again the slight weary smile lifted the corners of his lips. After a few moments, as nothing happened, he addressed the empty room.

"If you have quite finished examining me through the cleverly concealed aperture in your altogether remarkable door," said he, "you may come in. I am quite sufficiently impressed."

This remark producing no apparent effect, he shrugged his shoulders and resumed his impassive waiting.

At the end of five minutes the door opened briskly and X. Anaxagoras entered the room and seated himself in the swivel chair.

He, too, proved to be a young man of perhaps thirty years of age, clean-shaven, black-haired, alert, with piercing black eyes. These and his long, nervous, competent-looking hands were the features that would have first struck any observer. He was dressed in the fresh white linen of the hospital surgeon.

"I was examining you, to be sure," he said, without preliminary, in a musical voice with the inflections of an old-fashioned courtesy, "but my purpose was not to impress you."

The visitor smiled slightly and his eyes barely flickered toward his surroundings.

"Nevertheless," X. Anaxagoras went on, "the influence of external impression is underrated. This blue lighting, for example, to which your thoughts this instant turned, is not, as you imagine, for the purpose of inducing or conveying an impression of the occult or mysterious. It eliminates certain nerve-rasping properties inherent in the red end of the spectrum. I understand you are consulting me professionally?"

"Such is my intention," acknowledged the other.

"In what manner does your soul stand in need of my services?"

"It is to determine that that I consult you. I do not pretend to be an expert on souls. I am not sure there are such things. If I have a soul, it is sick: that is all I know."

"In which case you must have symptoms of which you are aware. Those I must be told."

"The justice of that is apparent," conceded the visitor. "My symptoms are simple and can be very briefly detailed. I am indifferent. When I say indifferent I mean very completely so. I am interested in nothing. That, if I am correctly informed by the precept and practice of the human race, means a sick soul."

"If you are literally correct in that statement, it would mean a dead soul," corrected the other.

"That may well be. In that case, my soul is already beyond your good offices, for my statement is quite literally and comprehensively true."

"Let us see if that is so," pursued the healer, taking up his pencil and drawing the pad of paper toward him. "And let us begin with the fairly obvious. You are, if I may judge from externals, well-to-do."

The visitor smiled a trifle sardonically.

"You are thinking of my fee," Anaxagoras followed his thought. "In that you do me an injustice; but I will point out to you that if I am, as you insist, to take your statement at its face value, the amount of my fee or my methods of arriving at it must also be of indifference to you."

"That is true," rejoined the visitor, with a shade of respect in his cool and mocking voice. "Then I will reply that

your assumption is incorrect. I am not well-to-do merely; I am very wealthy."

"Should I, as part of my prescription in your case, command you to divest yourself of this wealth?"

"That is a matter of such profound indifference to me that I have already considered it fully in all its aspects. Had I been able to elicit within myself even a spark of regret or fear at the prospect, I should instantly have taken the necessary steps."

Anaxagoras surveyed him keenly for a moment, then noted something on his pad.

"I am constrained to believe in your sincerity," he said. "Nevertheless, such steps would inevitably force upon you a necessity of assuring your own livelihood in a world that demands effort if one would exist."

"Whether or not I continue to exist does not affect me in the slightest degree. In this also I am absolutely sincere, as I have proved a hundred times in the past few years, but with the details of which I will not at this time burden you."

"You would in that case abandon all effort and starve?"

"You mistake me. I should in some manner make the effort to live, but this would not be because of a desire to do so, but through a sense of the ordinary indecency of doing otherwise. That consideration," he pointed out, "brought me to a decision against the course of action you advise—or suggest."

The doctor, if such he could be called, made another note.

"Nevertheless," he continued, after a moment, "I observe your appointments, and I cannot avoid the thought that

they indicate at least an interest in your own appearance before your fellow creatures."

"On the contrary, they indicate a following of the line of least resistance. With my upbringing, and perhaps the tastes appropriate to my temperament, a deviation from the perfection of the appointments to which you refer would indicate the stirrings of a purpose to which my thoughts are utterly foreign."

The other bowed his understanding of this point of view.

"In view of your statement it is perhaps useless for me to inquire as to whether you have no personal affiliations of any age—or either sex—" he paused slightly at the last, but after a keen scrutiny went on—"that intrigue even a shred of your attention."

"None, none whatever," replied the young man, firmly. "If I were to learn on indubitable authority—your own, for example—that to-morrow the entire human race was to be eliminated from this planet it so worthily administers and adorns, I should feel no stirring of either regret at the fact or curiosity over the wherefore. And if, the next instant after full belief in that catastrophe, I were to be told—on equally indubitable authority—that a reprieve had been decreed, I should not rejoice."

X. Anaxagoras nodded briefly.

"Very well," said he, "I understand your condition. Now I must ask you some questions in order to complete my data. Your name?"

"Roger Marshall."

"Your age?"

"Thirty-one."

"Other physical details can await on the physical examination. Soul and body are more intimately connected than many people imagine."

"I may state," put in Marshall, "to save time, that physically I am sound. I have been very thoroughly examined by Dr. Daniel Everard and numberless competent and expensive specialists of his recommendation. I can furnish you with their voluminous findings."

"Very good. Now as to a history of your case. How long have you been in this condition?"

"Five years."

"Five years! You served in France?"

"For four years and a half—the duration."

"I see; I see," commented the doctor, thoughtfully. He ruminated a moment, made a note, and went on. "Wounded?"

"No."

"Shell shock?"

"No, no, no. Nor any disappointments in love, or disillusionments, or frustrated ambitions, or anything of the sort. I cannot be psycho-analyzed. This thing has happened to me; that is all."

"Your occupation?"

"I have been seeking a cure."

"Obviously without success. How?"

"In every way. Business, art, writing, science, women, the so-called curiosities of travel, danger, study, philanthropy, politics. I have examined all religions—even to Holy Rollers; I have delved into the mysteries of occult things as they are offered through psychic investigation, through the occult

teachings of the East, from the careful and learned and guarded experiments of what is called the new science to the barefaced fakeries of Water Street. No fraud has been too obvious for my trial. I have allowed no preconceptions to stand in my way. That," he concluded, deliberately, "is why I find myself here."

X. Anaxagoras paid no heed to the implication of the last statement, but remained for some moments lost, not so much in thought as in some inner concentration.

"I will take your case," he said, briskly, at last, "but only under certain conditions which you will enter into of your own free will, which you will observe rigidly and honourably, and to which you will subscribe not merely your signature but your word as a gentleman."

"Those conditions?" queried the weary and elegant young man.

"As follows," enumerated X. Anaxagoras, ticking them off on the fingers of his left hand while he jotted them down on the pad of paper with his right: "You will place yourself unreservedly in my hands for the next eight months. During that time you will perform without question anything I may ask you to do; and this irrespective of whether you consider my requests sensible, desirable—or even relevant. In other words, you will be absolutely—and blindly—under orders. If I tell you to go stand on your head on Granville Street, you will do so, however distasteful such a course of action may appear to you to be."

"I should not care to stand on my head in Granville Street," pointed out the young man, politely.

"If your self-diagnosis is correct—which, pardon me, I am inclined to doubt—it is a matter of equal indifference to you whether you stand on your head in Granville Street or in Portland Drive."

"That," agreed the patient, a trifle grimly, "I am prepared to admit. Let us waive the point for a moment and consider the other conditions."

"There are none, if this first condition is faithfully carried out. I will, however, add what might be called correlative addenda: You will go unquestioningly where I take you; you will, when once entered on the course of cure, continue with it until the expiration of the time agreed; you may discuss my methods, but you will not be privileged to argue their advisability. You will refrain, whatever your emotions, from complaint. Above all, in whatever situation I place you, you will conscientiously and honestly do the best that is in you, substituting—since every action requires a motivation—for the personal interest that would naturally actuate you the artificial stimulus of this agreement. These conditions, though you may not at present appreciate that fact, are in themselves therapeutic agents of no mean value."

The young man considered for some moments in silence, staring sombrely at the practitioner in souls.

The latter broke the silence at last.

"Had I more faith in your self-diagnosis," he said, gently, "I should not add what I am about to say. Were I convinced that your indifference is as fundamental as you believe it to be, it would be unnecessary. I will therefore assure you that the conditions are abrogated and yourself absolved from all

compliance therewith if I demand of you anything dishonourable."

"And the standard of honour?" demanded the patient, with cool insolence.

"Shall be determined by yourself," replied the practitioner, unruffled.

The young man considered further—and gloomily.

"Your fee?" he demanded, shortly.

"Is, I believe—theoretically—a matter of indifference to you, as long as it is within your means, which I understand you to say are large." The young man flushed a trifle angrily, but whether from resentment at being considered a financial zany or vexation over the dialectical traps the nature of his malady had placed in his every path would be impossible to say. "But," continued the doctor, "practically, it is well to have such matters defined. You will pay actual expenses. In the event my methods are crowned with success, the fee will be nothing; in case I fail, ten thousand dollars."

"Pardon, I cannot believe I have correctly understood you," said the young man, after an interval of astonishment.

"You pay expenses; no fee in case of a cure; ten thousand dollars if my methods fail," repeated X. Anaxagoras, briskly.

The young man leaned back with a cynical smile.

"You play safe," he observed, dryly.

"Certainly," agreed Anaxagoras. "Why not? But not possibly in the way your very natural suspicions point. I do not think I shall fail with you; indeed, I have every

confidence of succeeding, and I shall certainly bend my best endeavours to that end."

"Why should I think that?"

"You should not. But of course that is a matter of indifference to you. You are at best taking a chance with any physician. You must use your judgment as to whether to take a chance with me."

The young man digested this in silence for a moment.

"That is true. But you will pardon me if I ask you to relieve, not a curiosity, but an intellectual bafflement that may prove an obstruction, by elucidating the rationale of your extraordinary proposal."

"The expenses, of course, are obvious," Anaxagoras obliged him. He looked steadily across the table at the young man, and for an instant his candid brow seemed almost to shine and his figure to swell into grandeur. "He to whom it is given to cure a human soul of aught which threatens its destruction must have entered into a place where he must stand humbly and gratefully, full-heartedly but with empty hands." He paused and something drained away as though a presence had been withdrawn. "Of course, if I fail," he added, briskly, "I ought to be paid. That is obvious."

"I accept," said the young man.

Anaxagoras evinced no emotion, whether of satisfaction or the contrary. He pencilled a few lines on his paper, then pushed a button concealed beneath the edge of the table desk. The door into the hall so instantly opened as to have lent colour to Marshall's suspicion that it had been either guarded or attended for the purpose of surreptitious

observation, or eavesdropping, or both. Or this promptitude in response might be part of the "atmosphere." Marshall had no interest in either case. Nor did he raise his eyes to examine the newcomer, even when he became aware that it was a woman; and, as to that portion included in the radius of his lowered gaze at least, one not devoid of attractions.

"Please type this in triplicate at once," Anaxagoras requested her.

The woman took the sheets of pencilled memoranda and disappeared.

The two men sat in an unembarrassed silence during her absence. Marshall gazed at the floor rather blankly; the Healer of Souls stared off into some distant space that contained his thoughts. The room must have been deadened; at least, no sounds penetrated from outside.

Again the door opened and closed. Again the feminine figure crossed the room to the side of the desk. Again Marshall's eyes, too heavy in indifference to rise, became aware, nevertheless, of high-heeled slippers, slim silk-clad ankles, a cloth skirt and a hand. The hand was tapering and brown. It wore only one ring, on the middle finger—a curious thing of beaten silver, remarkable in itself but altogether remarkable in its present situation.

The papers passed across the desk. The woman turned to go. No word was exchanged. The little shoes and the silk-clad ankles passed Marshall's chair, disappeared from his radius of vision, on their way to the door. He heard the door open.

But it did not immediately shut, in the regular sequence. Marshall's dulness of indifference was penetrated in spite of

itself by the uneasy feeling that he was a subject of scrutiny. He stirred uneasily. And then, fancifully, he seemed to become aware, somehow, that the compact hard substance of his personality was being slowly permeated by something from outside itself, an exploratory vague searching with a distinct quality of its own. It was an impression whose life was momentary, for he thrust it from him as he would have thrust out an intruder from his private room. But instinctively prompt as was his action, still his subconscious had caught and registered the nature of that distinct quality. It was amusement. And amusement echoed back from the delighted chuckle that preceded the closing of the door.

But X. Anaxagoras was claiming his attention.

"Here," said he, "are triplicate memoranda of our agreement. These we will sign, for form's sake, and in order that we may each be enabled at any time to refresh our memories. This other paper contains your directions. You will kindly follow them. You can consult them at your leisure."

He pressed again the button beneath his desk and arose from his seat.

"I will wish you good-day," said he; and without further ceremony disappeared whence he had come.

Marshall turned with a gleam of interest as the hall door again was pushed ajar. The maid who had admitted him stood in the opening. It was to be noted that she wore shoes, that her ankles were clothed in lisle, and that the fingers of her square and competent hand were unadorned.

"This way, sir, if you please," said she.

Marshall retrieved his hat, gloves, and stick, and so shortly found himself again in the street.

To his annoyance he discovered a desire to unfold the paper which he still held in his hand, in order to ascertain the directions for his conduct prescribed by the Healer of Souls. This impulse he sternly repressed as threatening the sacredness of his indifference. When, however, he had reached a small strip of parking that offered the accommodation of a green-painted bench, he permitted himself to be seated thereon. The strip of park had been cunningly chosen. It was completely sheltered, and the sun poured in on it a concentrated elixir of its subtler essences. A great concourse from among the little peoples had been made aware of that fact, and had there gathered to receive of that elixir of sun warmth and to render back their hummings and buzzings and chirpings in cheerfulness of gratitude. Nevertheless, outside, it could be seen, a lively breeze was blowing. The waters of English Bay were aflash with the stir of it, and the blue of the open gulf beyond showed dark. The lighthouse on Point Atkinson, miles away, stood bravely white and clear. And beyond it, over the edge of the world, were great mountains like soap bubbles, and the hint of many islands urging the spirit to wing farther than the eye could leap.

Marshall snatched his eyes away almost with impatience. For a single shining instant his spirit had spread its wings.

He unfolded the paper disdainfully, a slight sneer sketching its lines about his nostrils, and read:

To-night you will take the 11:40 "W" westbound car in front of the Vancouver Hotel, debarking at the first street

the other side of the old Armory building. Proceed down the alleyway directly opposite. You will come to two floats. Go to the end of the one on which stands a barrel. At the end of this float you will find a gas-boat cabin cruiser. Bring with you only warm stout garments suitable for an extended outdoor excursion. Come alone, and see that you are not followed. Provide yourself with ten thousand dollars, some of it in small bills. Arrive promptly at midnight.

He read this document slowly, the cynical lines deepening. The old weariness blanketed his soul. Back to nature: old stuff! Midnight mystery; bunkum of the cheapest sort! Ten thousand dollars—— He paused, then shrugged his shoulders: what matter? A great cloud hurrying down the wind grayed the waters of English Bay. Its shadow chilled the strip of park. The little peoples fell silent out of the sun.

Roger Marshall cursed himself for a fool, not once but many times—and did as he was bid! His baggage he packed and laid away in the hotel cellars; his kit bag he filled with such garments as had been prescribed. Long he hesitated over the ten thousand dollars, some of it in small bills. Only a reperusal of the last clause in the agreement he had so carelessly signed tipped his decision. After briefly reciting the terms of the association, the thrice-damned document ended as follows:

It is specifically agreed and understood that this contract has no legal or moral force whatever, and that either party thereto shall have the right to break its terms at any time. It is to be considered merely as a memorandum intended for the double purpose of (a) reminding the parties thereto of

the original terms of compact, and (b) as a barometer of moral evaluations.

A barometer of moral evaluations, forsooth! No legal or moral force!

The stroke of midnight found Marshall stumbling down an incredibly steep and littered alleyway that led between ramshackle crazy-roofed little buildings whose motive for existence was obscure. It was black-dark save where the sky showed murk-wreathed stars; and the half-glimpsed water of Coal Harbour below him stirred guardedly as one who lurks. The night was deathly still. No faintest breath of life came from the buildings at either hand, no slightest stir even of a vagrant paper fluttered by a vagrant wind. The half-guessed boats and launches, crowded along the floats below, lay as though set in glass, their mastheads unbreathingly motionless against the sky. In spite of himself Marshall felt a faint stir of adventure. In spite of himself he moved furtively. When, on the pavement of the street above, a belated pedestrian klopped by, as loud and profane as a whistle in a church, he flattened himself against a wall with a certain gusto. Two phrases popped into his brain: "Come alone and see that you are not followed" and "Once aboard the lugger and the girl is mine!"

"Oh, thrice-born ass of asses!" he apostrophized himself, disgustedly; and stepped deliberately and openly and defiantly down to the level of the floats.

From this new vantage point he became aware of a single guarded light at the end of the float. Toward this he made his way.

It proved to reveal a portion of the midships of a small cabin cruiser, casting into clarity only a section of her substrike and rail, and into a penumbra only a little less obliterating than the darkness all other details. A dark figure stood erect near the stern of the craft. Another dark figure could be dimly discerned on the forward deck. A third, Marshall made out as he approached, was holding the guarded light, which seemed to be either a powerful flashlight or a hooded extension of some sort. For a blinding instant his eyes were dazzled by its direct glare as it was elevated to his features.

"All right," said the voice of X. Anaxagoras, in low tones, and the hand of X. Anaxagoras was extended to assist Marshall and his kit bag to the deck. From forward came the slithering of a rope's end and its soft *plash* as it touched the water and was drawn aboard. The figure on the forward deck disappeared. Almost immediately a throttled engine began its smooth, low murmuring, and the inert fabric of the craft became vibrant with awakened life. The figure popped up again from below and took its silhouetted place on a low bridge back of the pilot house.

By a touch on the arm the Healer of Souls guided his patient along the narrow channel to the triangle of a small after deck where stood the third figure.

"Wait here a few moments," he whispered, dropping the kit bag; then to the third figure, in a low tone, "All right, cast off."

The third figure deftly flipped the line it had been holding, and the loop, disengaged from some low pile head, in its turn plashed and was drawn swiftly aboard. A boil of

phosphorescence, a mounting tremor of life—the low building of the float glided quietly by. X. Anaxagoras snapped off the light he had held. But his doing so swept for a brief instant the planks of the little deck and a portion of the figure stooping to coil the line. Marshall caught a fleeting impression of a short mackinaw coat, of stout laced boots. Only one thing the beam of light struck sharply across his vision—a ring of beaten silver on the middle finger of the left hand.

X. Anaxagoras slipped forward to join the man on the bridge. As the craft glided in a long curve out into Coal Harbour the two could be distinguished bending forward in an attempt to make out the marks of the exceedingly narrow dredged channel to the old coal hulk. The mud shallows were successfully skirted; the dark mass of the hulk was almost abeam; the little craft heeled slightly as the wheel went hard over. Under the shadow of the Stanley Park peninsula she glided quietly at half speed, until at the point she heeled again, more sharply, under the impulse of the tidal whirlpools beneath her keel. She straightened out and shot away down the ebb that had but just begun to run out through the First Narrows.

The dark shore to port brooded in its deep shadow; over the way Lion's Head, supremely indifferent, communed with its million stars. Like a phantom the little craft glided, darkened and silent. The low purr of her throttled engines was almost inaudible. Only the eddying waters alongside whispered and gurgled and tossed angrily a thousand arms in protest at the intrusion of this alien through the involved and intricate dance of the tide on its way to the open sea.

By the after rail the girl remained where she had coiled the rope, apparently looking back. In a moment X. Anaxagoras joined her. They exchanged no word, but he too looked back intently. The Second Light dropped astern. The point of the peninsula appeared. For an instant Siwash Rock stood out clear and detached; then, as they passed, it blended with the shore. Far away the lights of Point Atkinson on the right and of Point Gray on the left marked the widespread arms of that little sea called English Bay. The outrushing tidal current met the calm of the open water, slackened, turned uneasily, and was stilled. X. Anaxagoras left his post and spoke aloud, cheerily:

"All right, Bill, let her go!"

At his word the running lights flashed on; the purr of the engine became a steady beat; the wake boiled white a moment under the counter; then, as the propeller bit and the craft gathered way, strung out astern in a long faint line. The girl slipped by Marshall and disappeared down the companionway.

"Now," remarked the Healer of Souls, courteously, "I will, if you please, show you your quarters. They are neither distant nor commodious—nor, indeed, are they even exclusive. Our only stateroom—to dignify it by that name—is occupied, so that you and Bill and I are constrained to occupy the after cabin together. I will indicate your bunk and you can turn in."

"And yourself?" inquired Marshall.

"Oh, Bill and I will do the navigation."

"I think I will remain on deck a little while, with your permission."

"Please yourself, to be sure. But in that case let me persuade you to slip on this pilot coat. And may I offer you refreshment?"

"Thanks, no."

"In case you should feel the need of rest," Anaxagoras advised him, "you can lie down on any of the bunks."

Without further parley he rejoined Bill on the bridge where, presently, the faint light of a binnacle disclosed dimly the two figures staring intently out into the darkness.

Marshall put on the pea jacket and sat down in an easy chair that occupied almost the entire space on the tiny after deck. The night air nipped sharply, but its edge was turned by the thick pea jacket into the pockets of which he thrust his hands. No ripple of wind blurred the glassy surface of the sea, which itself breathed slowly as though asleep. The chill depths of Heaven were a-crackle with stars. To starboard the land seemed to lie prone and inert, dark as velvet, shrunk by night into a narrow band of shadow; and the great snowclad peaks, grown insubstantial as soap bubbles under the starlight, hovered above its sleeping form as though embodied from the substance of its dreams.

Marshall lit a cigarette and fell into musing. On what adventure had he embarked, and in what company? What plots against his close-guarded personality had been laid? What, in this wild experiment, meant these things that had been here gathered together by this man who called himself fantastically a Healer of Souls? Where was this little craft heading so bravely out into the starlit sea? Who and what was Bill? Who and what was the mysterious girl of the silver ring?—Marshall reflected cynically that he thought he could

guess her why.—Who and what was he himself in all this—besides a fool? The whole of creation suddenly seemed to beat in on him with an answer, clamouring at the gateways of his soul. From the widespread night came forces demanding.

Suddenly, without reason, mystically, he felt as though he were in the midst of a combat, silent and unseen. The sense of struggle was strong and real within him. He was being assaulted, and he roused himself fiercely and tensely to defense. External things disappeared before a strange inner concentration. Forces outside were clamouring at him a triumphant battle cry; and, fantastically, something within was answering faint and far, as though a prisoner deep immured lifted its smothered voice. Then came a great surge as of a pride that reared a haughty crest. The forces withdrew as swiftly as they had gathered. Again he looked about him on external things. The little craft once more forged steadily on into the starlit night; once more he became aware of the deck and the bridge with the two figures peering into the dimness.

He passed his hand across his forehead and looked about him as though at an iron victory won. The mood, draining away, left him with a fleeting wonder, with a little terror. What was this thing that had befallen him? Had he indeed been invaded? Had indeed the defenses of his inner being been rallied in instinctive resistance of some threatened privacy of self? Did indeed this mysterious man possess some power that—

He shook himself angrily and snapped back into reality. Again the night slumbered; again, wearily, he called himself

a fool.

With decision he arose, took off the pea jacket, and descended to his bunk.

CHAPTER II

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THE ADVENTURE OF THE UNDESIRABLE GRAY BOAT

Marshall was shaken into consciousness some hours later by the violent tossing of the cruiser. The sun, shining through the portholes, played like violently erratic searchlights back and forth, up and down, in circles and ellipses, crazily jerking. He swung from the bunk to his feet. Instantly he was cast with precipitation straight toward an uncompromisingly hard bulkhead, from collision with which he saved himself only by an acrobatic contortion. There seemed to be no plan or decent maritime rhythm, whether of roll or pitch or scudding. The craft was shaken about. He assured his way to the companion by holding to the edge of the bunks, ascended until his head and shoulders were above the combing of the hatch, steadied himself, and looked about him.

The sun was shining brightly, the air was clear and sparkling, a little wind was blowing from the northwest. It was only a little wind, a breeze in advance of summer; certainly insufficient, one would think, to account for the enormous and peaked whitecaps which were so tossing the boat. These rose and fell straight up and down, or rushed forward or back, or whirled about without semblance of

order or sequence. The cruiser, moving ahead at lowered speed, did her best to adapt herself to these conflicting ideas, but was being sadly shaken and confused by the attempt. Forward on the bridge were still the figures of both Bill and the Healer of Souls. The latter held the wheel, which he spun rapidly from time to time in an attempt to ease her over some peculiarly twisting comber. Bill, without other visible means of support than his own two feet, stood nonchalantly and miraculously and smoked a short pipe. Marshall glanced astern. The Gulf sparkled blue and winking under the little breeze, but nowhere showed the whitecaps that would indicate heavy weather. Far in the distance, half to be guessed among the cloud hazes of the horizon, were the snow ranges of the mainland whence they had come.

He stepped to the deck and tried to see ahead. A low, dark, tree-clad strip of land lay squarely across the bows. Apparently the boat was driving squarely nose on against it. The shore showed black with jagged dripping rocks up which the sea water alternately surged and drained. There were no spray rockets of onward-running waves—merely an up-and-down wash of uneasiness. So near were the rocks that Marshall, on first catching sight of them, shrank back as though in expectation of a blow. Anaxagoras, glancing astern, at this moment waved his hand.

Marshall, clinging to the rail, stepped fully on deck. In spite of himself, an uneasiness and an indignation rose in his breast. He knew a good deal about yachts. What were these fools up to? Didn't they realize that in this sea they were not leaving themselves room to manoeuvre? In another ten seconds they'd be piling her up——

In a melodramatic last-minute sort of scene-shifting fashion, the line of black rocks directly ahead divided itself into a near plane and a back plane; and between them, sharp to the left and almost parallel to the coast line, opened a narrow channel like an S-shaped river. From it rushed a strong tide. This tide it was which, meeting the open waters and the wind outside, had raised the erratic and choppy seas. On the very instant of Marshall's recognition of this fact, the cruiser passed from them into the smoother-running current.

He shook himself a trifle disgustedly as this obvious explanation occurred to him. He must have been half asleep! Actually for a few moments he had entertained the idiotic conceit that an attempt was being made to scare him by shaving close to disaster! Fine state of mind he was getting into already! Last night that silly fantasy of an assault of some kind on his inner self, and this morning an equally silly—though momentary, thank Heaven!—idea of a flirtation with danger for his impressing! He was attaching altogether too much importance to—himself!

The cruiser stuck her nose into the current. Below, the engines beat in deeper rhythm as the throttle was opened. Slowly but steadily she began to force her way up the narrow passage against the strong run of the tide.

Two hundred yards in, the channel bent again sharply to the right, then as suddenly to the left. With a last effort the cruiser tore herself from the suction of the current and fairly darted forward into the flat, rippling waters of what had the appearance of an immense inland lake. X. Anaxagoras turned the wheel over to his companion and came aft.