

Ernest Haycox

"Dream Snatchers is a highly consuming operation. Kevin. A running out of. So sorry!" And sweaty hand, she began whizz through the invisible zone of dream.

Then there was a new and

Next time Kevin opened his air balloon. Floating through pond scum. Beside him Yee was someone. "She's still such a ch. Hanging around with those lost world."

He was talking about Alice again.

"They'll be stopping in any on. I don't know why they do always go scorching in a

Alder Gulch

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Published by Good Press, 2022

goodpress@okpublishing.info

EAN 4066338075086

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THE END

I. — ESCAPE

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ONE moment he was a cool man who viewed his chances for escape and found them full of risk; and then a night wind moved over the river with its odors of dark soil warmed by summer rain and the resin scent of firs and the acrid taint of brush fires, and when these rank flavors came to him he knew at once he was done with caution. He belonged to the land and the land summoned him. Before midnight came he would go over the ship's side, no longer caring whether it would be as a living man or a dead one. He stood on the foredeck and laid a hand on a capstan's bar, and excitement rushed all through him and sweat made a dry nettle-stinging on his face.

The Bos'n was a short black shadow hard by the foremast pinrail. The Bos'n said: "Pierce, come down from there."

This square-rigged ship, the *Panama Chief*, wound slowly at midstream anchor, bowsprit pointed on the streaky glow of Portland's waterfront lights two hundred feet removed. One street lay against a ragged backdrop of buildings, beyond which the dark main hulk of town ran back into a mass of firs rising blackly to rear hills. All sounds travelled resonantly over the water—the crack of a teamster's whip, the scrape of feet on the boardwalks, the revel of a near-by saloon.

"Come down," repeated the Bos'n.

The ship's bell struck five short ringing notes. The moon's quarter-full face dimmed behind a bank of clouds and the

color of night at once deepened so that the surface of the river became a vague-moving oil surface into which a man might quickly drop and quickly vanish. Pierce bent and unlaced his shoes. He kicked them quietly off, moved to the break of the deck and descended the ladder.

He went by the Bos'n, passed the galley and paused near the mainmast shrouds. Mister Sitgreaves, the First Mate, stood against the starboard rail and Canrinus, the Second Officer, was in the same sentry position on the port side. The Captain was above them on the aft deck, his cigar bright-burning in the shadows. "Mister Sitgreaves," called the Captain, "come here."

There were two named Sitgreaves on this ship, the Mate and his brother the Captain. The Mate retreated and went scuffling up the aft deck's ladder. On the amidships hatch cover the rest of the *Panama Chief's* crew silently and sullenly waited for a break to come, hating the ship and its master and its officers.

The Captain said in his bold, steady voice: "If any man tries to jump ship, Mister Sitgreaves, knock him down. This crew is signed from San Francisco to Canton and return. I'm no hand to lose my men."

The Captain was afraid of losing his men, as well he might. All of them, excepting the two Mates and the Bos'n, had been shanghaied aboard at San Francisco by force and knockout drops. There had been, Pierce remembered, an amiable man beside him in the Bella Union saloon. The amiable man had suggested a drink and presently he, Pierce, had died on his feet, to awaken on the *Panama Chief* at sea.

"Bully boy," said a murmuring voice from the amidships hatch cover.

The Captain moved to the head of the ladder and he stared below him and gave the crew his hard, short laugh. "You'd like me down there, no doubt, to start a confusion whereby you could make your escape. I'll not please you till we put to sea. Then, by God, I'll give you confusion."

On the hatch cover men softly and bitterly murmured. The First Mate, Mister Sitgreaves, clanked down the ladder and took his station again at the starboard rail. The Second Officer hadn't moved from the port side, the Bos'n remained deep in the foremast's shadows. All these men were armed, and it was six months to Canton and back, by which time this year of 1863 would be gone. The *Panama Chief* was no better than the Confederate's prison at Richmond, of which Pierce had his undescrivable memories.

He closed his fingers around the rail and his body, lank in the shadows, bent backward until all weight rested on the balls of his feet. Mister Sitgreaves saw this and smoothly said: "I wouldn't do that."

The men on the hatch cover stirred and rose up. Brought aboard by violence, starved and bruised by iron discipline, they caught the clear wild smell of freedom and suddenly all of them were shifting softly along the deck. The Captain issued a sharp call:

"Who's that by the rail, Mister Sitgreaves?"

The Mate said: "Pierce, sir."

"Knock him down, Mister Sitgreaves."

The Mate moved forward, his boots sibilantly chafing the deck. Pierce let his arm drop to the cool round top of a

belaying pin, seized it from the bitts and took one quick side step. A sound at his rear warned him that the Bos'n now was moving forward to slug him and a man in the crew called out, "Watch back!"

The Captain roared, "By God, don't you know who's master on this boat?" and came down the ladder in long jumps.

Pierce gave ground and retreated to the hatch cover, thereby avoiding the Mate and the Bos'n who now joined shoulder to shoulder and moved slowly at him. The crew shifted toward Pierce, making a cover for him; faced with this unexpected resistance, Mate and Bos'n paused.

The Captain said, "I'll show you how to handle mutiny, Mister Sitgreaves," and came on, bold and black in the night. Some man groaned, "You're done in, Pierce!"

Pierce gave ground as Bos'n and Mate moved at him, backing toward the port rail. The Captain wheeled to block Pierce's way. "You're a sea-lawyer," he said. "I am going to make you cry like a dog."

These three, Captain and Mate and Bos'n, were pinching him in against the galley wall. He wheeled and ran around the galley, circling it to the starboard side, and reached the mainmast stays. He had shaken Mate and Bos'n but the Captain had outguessed him; the Captain was before him, softly laughing in his throat. Pierce saw the Captain pluck a pistol out of his pocket and lift it for aim, and all this while the steps of the Mate and Bos'n pounded behind him. Pierce, never wholly stopped, wheeled aside. He caught the flat explosion in his face and felt the violent pain of his eardrums, and brought the belaying pin down on the

Captain's head in one sweeping blow. The next instant he took his tumbling dive over the ship's rail, with a second shot from another gun following. Deep under the water he heard its echo.

He stayed under and drifted with the current until his heart began to strike its hammer blows on his ribs, and came up to see the dark hull of the ship slipping by. The water was half warm from spring rain and bore the silt of a hundred valleys and hills far away. He heard Mister Sitgreaves calling: "Lower the boat!"

"There's his head!"

A bullet whacked the near-by water and sent him down. He swam breast stroke until he thought he had cleared the boat completely, and rose again. The stern of the *Panama Chief* was an edgeless shape upstream. Mister Sitgreaves issued his orders, very cold and very even, and the blocks of the davit falls were squeaking. He heard the bottom of the lifeboat hit the water. Mister Sitgreaves said, "Let go," in a softer and softer voice. This man, Pierce remembered, was the Captain's brother.

The current carried him downstream. Somewhere on the water another rowboat traveled and a lantern bobbed close by the water's surface. Pierce angled shoreward, feeling the down-dragging weight of his clothes. He swam overhand, putting his strength into his long arms, and as he swam he had a very strange recollection of a shallow Virginia creek he had crossed two years before under the fire of Confederate sharpshooters. All around him the creek had run red.

Mister Sitgreaves had lost him. It was so quiet aboard that he heard Mister Sitgreaves say conversationally: "Hold it, while I listen." The pilings of a wharf stood before Pierce and water splashed steadily from it to the river. He had the thick odor of sewage around him as he cleared the wharf's end and put his feet down upon yielding mud. A voice called from wharf to ship. "What's the trouble out there?"

He faced a low crumbling bank and dropped into the wet silt to fight for wind. The Mate's answer rode over the water from the *Panama Chief*. "Man jumped ship. Where's your police?"

Pierce drew in a mouthful of water and spewed it out. He came against the bank and climbed it, to face the played-out end of a street on the ragged edge of town. Sheds and barns loomed before him. The wharf was to his left and in that direction the main part of Portland seemed to lie; a wagon rolled by, two men idly arguing on the seat.

There was no more sound from Mister Sitgreaves and no further inquiry from the watchman on the wharf. But as he lay flat on the edge of the river bluff with water draining from his clothes, Pierce realized the town was no more safe for him than the ship had been. Sitgreaves would notify the police and the town would be searched. What he needed was dry clothes, a meal and a quick means of leaving Portland.

He moved away from the bluff, past the wharf and through broken piles of lumber; he crossed the pure mud surface of a street entirely dark and empty, pursued an alley not much wider than wagon's length and found himself at a small, triangular square. Across the square a saloon shed

light from every window, and beyond this saloon the main part of the town apparently lay, hard by the river, its stores open even at this late hour. Along this street supply wagons steadily moved. The name of the saloon was the Oro Fino.

He left the alley and walked directly over the small square toward the flaring lights of the saloon. A string of freight wagons crawled out of the darkness and passed between him and the saloon and somewhere a river boat whistled. Paused at the edge of the square while the freighters rolled by, he observed a man ride up and come to a halt before the string of wagons. He was in high boots and rough clothes, he wore a shaggy beard and he had the stain and the smell of a miner about him.

Pierce said: "Where's gold country around here?"

The man gave him a look and a moment's study. "Up-river. Away up. In Ideeho."

"Just came from the California diggings myself."

"Hear they're played out. You look damp to me. You could stand a drink."

"I am a little shy of company," said Pierce.

He had judged his man rightly. The miner's lawless spirit instantly arose and prompted him to say: "Stay here and I'll get you a drink." The string of freighters had now gone on; the miner crossed the mud, dismounted before the Oro Fino, and rolled the swinging doors aside with his shoulders.

There seemed to be a sharp dividing line in town. Before him light glowed and warmth moved, regardless of the hour, while behind him in Portland's quieter quarter the solid and respectable citizens slept the sleep of the righteous. At that moment Pierce heard a quick call and turned to find

Sitgreaves pointing at him. Behind Sitgreaves was the Bos'n and two citizens who were undoubtedly police.

"That's him," said Sitgreaves.

Pierce wheeled across the square to the alley's mouth. There was perfect darkness here for the length of a full block. Running down the loose mud, he heard the halloo of voices and a command from one of the police, "Hold up or I'll fire!" The alley played out in the middle of the block, dissipating itself into a series of between-building pathways and Pierce took one of these in full flight, to arrive at a street all dark except for a corner house whose lights shimmered on wet pools in the street's mud. He swung close to the face of the buildings with the racket of the pursuing gentlemen steady-continuing to his rear. He cut across the mud to the far side of the street; he ran through the beam of light from the corner house, and curved into another street—and heard a woman's voice say:—

"Wait!"

He came to a dead stop, he whirled half around to face the dark side of the house. The woman was a shadow against the house and he saw only the motion of her shoulders in these shadows. "No," he said impatiently. "No, I'm sorry."

She came nearer. "I had a look at you when you came across the light. You're wet." She put a hand against his chest and drew it away. Back on the other street Sitgreaves' dead calm voice was very distinct: "He went that way."

The woman said: "Come with me."

She went ahead of him at a light run, so that he had to stretch his legs to keep up with her. Half a block onward she

darted behind a building and paused to catch his hand. "Careful with your feet," she said, and led him on. Somewhere in the heart of this complete darkness she stopped again, threw open a door and pushed him into a lighted room. She came in after him, closing the door.

It was a bare and worn and unlovely room with a stove in its center, a counter in the corner, a clock on the wall, and a huge man-shaped woman sitting unsurprised in a rocking chair. She had iron gray hair and a tremendous figure and her eyes were thoroughly unsympathetic as she looked at Pierce and read his story. "Jumped ship, didn't you?" she said. Then she turned her attention to the other woman and her expression changed, as though she saw something she didn't understand. "What are you doing in this end of town, Miss Castle?"

Pierce wheeled to have a look at this Miss Castle and met a pair of gray-green eyes dead on. She had black hair covered by a kind of shawl that women sometimes seized on the spur of the moment for both hat and cloak. It sat like a cowl on her head and came down about straight shoulders and a strong, rounded bosom. The night had brought color to her cheeks and her glance made a good job of investigating him. For a common woman she was well gotten out in a maroon dress which came snug to her throat. A cameo pendant hung from a fine gold chain about her neck.

The big woman in the rocker said: "Ladies never come here. What kind of menfolk have you got to let you be such an elegant fool? If you were seen you would be compromised."

Miss Castle shrugged her shoulders. "You have two fugitives instead of one, Madame Bessie."

"How would a lady like you know my name?" demanded Madame Bessie in clear displeasure. "And how did you know my door?"

"From my menfolk, of course. You're talked about over Portland's supper tables."

"Is that what the best part of town talks about?" asked Madame Bessie. "In mixed company?" She got up from the rocker and took a lamp from the counter, and trimmed and lighted it. She was, when she faced Pierce, both taller and heavier than he; she was a formidable creature with a square jowled face and a bit of a mustache. "Your menfolk ought to keep such things out of their houses."

She led them down a dismal hall scarcely wider than her shoulders and flung open a room's door. She put the lamp on a marble-topped dresser and stepped back, again watching Miss Castle with resentment. "I don't understand this. I shouldn't permit it. You're a fool for being something you shouldn't be. Usually it is money or a man that turns a girl. Your people have got money enough. So it must be a man."

"We won't be spending the whole night here," said the girl.

"That makes no difference," said Madame Bessie. "You are compromised now. But I suppose it is the same falling from a high place as from a low place." Thus far ignoring Pierce, she now turned to him. "Be quiet if you hear trouble outside. Get out of those clothes and I'll find some dry ones. All these ship jumpers land here wet to the skin. You'll be

getting the last one's clothes. The next one will get yours. I'll take four dollars now."

"Two," said Pierce, "is my stake."

"You think I do this for the fun of it?" asked Madame Bessie sharply. "You can get out now. I won't be cheated."

"It's all right," said the girl. She produced a little purse from somewhere and laid a half-eagle into Madame Bessie's waiting palm. Madame Bessie gave the girl one look of scorn. "To go with him is bad enough. To pay his way is worse. He'll use you and lay you aside. Don't you know you can't buy a man for very long?" She closed the door behind her with a harsh jar; her heavy body went audibly down the narrow hall.

"Fugitives," murmured the girl, "can't be particular."

"Don't spend your money on me," said Pierce. "I have no way of paying you back."

"Perhaps," she answered, "a way will present itself. What is your name?"

"Jeff Pierce."

"Mine is Diana Castle. You were shanghaied aboard ship at San Francisco, I suppose, and made a break tonight."

"That's it," he said. "How would you know?"

"I saw the *Panama Chief* drop anchor in the middle of the river. When a boat stays out from the dock it usually means she's got a shanghaied crew. Men escape frequently from these boats. It is an old story to us. You can hide here until your ship sails and then walk abroad a free man. Our authorities are not much interested in recapturing seamen for bully shipmasters."

"For a lady," he said, "you have uncommon knowledge of the hard side."

"I told you I was a fugitive also, didn't I?" Then she lifted her hand to keep him silent; for there was the sound of men suddenly arrived in Madame Bessie's office, and uncivil talk. Pierce looked carefully around the room, saw a window and went to it. He raised the window and put his head and shoulders through the opening. There was an alley black as a tunnel running beside this building; he drew back but left the window open. Out in Madame Bessie's office a first class quarrel raged with Madame Bessie laying her voice around like a club. "If they come down the hall," said Pierce, "we go out this way."

It was her lack of excitement that puzzled him more than anything else. She was, as Madame Bessie had said, a lady from the proper quarter of town and had no business being here; this cheap lodging house was for the other kind of woman. There were only two kinds. This was the thing that unsettled his judgment of her and made him resent her steadiness, as Madame Bessie had resented it. Either she was too ignorant of this muddy side of life to feel shame or she was a woman turning bad. He could not really tell. She was a strong shapely girl with full red lips firmly controlled and with a cool expression in her eyes. She was sober, yet he had the idea there was a laughter in her which she deliberately hid from him. On her left hand a diamond burned its single spot of white fire.

The sound of bitter brawling died and the searchers apparently departed. The girl said as an idle thought: "Madame is outraged by my conduct. I have noticed that

her kind of woman always has the strictest sense of propriety. Why is that?"

"She knows what good and bad is."

"What is good and bad?" asked the girl. "Do you know?" She gave him a sharp glance, she shook her head. "You do not approve of me," she murmured and shrugged her shoulders. "I'm afraid it will do you no good."

Madame Bessie came into the room. She closed the door behind her and stood with her great shoulders against it, more formidable than before. "They're gone," she said. "Now you both get out of here."

"How about that change of clothes?" asked Pierce.

"No," retorted Madame Bessie. "I'll call no trouble down on myself." She put both large arms across her bosom and locked them together, and a clever thought came gray and sly to her eyes. She turned on Diana Castle. "You're paying for this man's trouble, ain't you? It will just cost you a hundred dollars to keep my mouth shut. I could always call the police back."

Diana Castle said: "What has happened?"

"This man," said Madame Bessie, nodding at Pierce, "killed the Captain in the fracas."

II. — THE SECOND FUGITIVE

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DIANA CASTLE stood before Madame Bessie and watched the woman. She matched Madame Bessie's stare. She was cool and she was very thoughtful. Madame Bessie said: "You can get that hundred dollars for me, Miss Castle."

"You want to keep out of trouble, don't you?" asked the girl. "What if I were to step out on the street and start screaming? Suppose I said you had dragged me into your place? I think you'd be in the penitentiary a long while."

Madame Bessie watched her a considerable interval, not so much with anger as with a reluctant admiration. And she said finally: "All right, Miss Castle. I guess you know what you want."

"Now," added Diana Castle, "could you get him some clothes? And he needs a drink, Madame, and we are both hungry, aren't we?"

Madame opened the door and cruised through it and turned. "Miss Castle," she said, "you are too calculating for a proper lady. Wherever did you learn to be smart?" With this, she departed.

The girl walked to the open window, her back to Pierce, and placed her hands on the window's sash. Her shoulders dropped and became round at the points and then she came slowly about and he saw that her face had a shadow on it. Her confidence was momentarily broken, leaving her tired or weak or a little afraid. He liked her better for seeing it. It took the calculation and the chill out of her.

"Did you have to do that?" she asked in a small voice.

"When I made for the rail he came against me and fired a shot. I knocked him down with a belaying pin and went over the side." He shook his head; he made an odd motion with his hand. "Not to be helped."

She was watching him and he discovered that she was afraid of him for the first time. "What?" she asked in a distant voice, "would you like me to do?"

"Nothing. You'd better go out of that window now."

She let out a sigh and moved toward him. She was almost smiling, her fear vanished. "For a moment I thought I had made a mistake in you. But I have not. You are not one of those murderous Sydney ducks coming off a ship with your teeth broken in, cunning and half inhuman." She paused, not quite through with her thoughts about him, and added in a softer way, "I can still hope."

He said: "Why should you hope?"

"Because I need a man. That is why I stopped you on the street. You are to help me get out of this town. There are four thousand people in Portland. I can't appear on the street or get on the California stage, or take a boat, without being recognized, A woman traveling alone in this country is under handicaps."

"I do not know about that," he said.

She checked him in with a gesture. "You're in trouble and you know nothing of this region. You cannot take any road from Portland without being spotted in the back country. But I know how you can drop from sight."

"How?"

"Do I go with you?"

"How do you go with me?" he asked.

She drew a breath and her pleasant lips came momentarily together. She looked down at the floor and so avoided his eyes. "As your wife."

"No," he said. "Not as my wife."

She said: "There will of course be no marriage. We must make the best of it before people's eyes until we get to the place we're going. Is it so much to ask? Are you already married?"

"No," he said. He moved back to the window and he stood there watching the yellow lamplight shine in her eyes. She had a fair, smooth skin and a round face pointed by a firm chin; she had an enormous certainty in her, she had a positive will. What confused him was that light in her eyes which seemed to hold back some kind of laughter from him. In a way she liked this touch-and-go business; it had an exciting effect on her. Madame Bessie stirred heavily in the hall and time went fast on and he looked at her and made this decision. "All right," he said.

Madame Bessie came in with a suit of clothes and a pair of boots over one arm. She had a whisky bottle under the clothes, and carried a pitcher of coffee and a loaf of bread in her other hand. She threw the clothes on the bed and deposited the rest of her burden on the washstand. "There's a miner from the Owyhee dead drunk in one of my rooms," she said. "This is his suit."

"Give him mine in the morning," said Pierce, "and tell him he fell in the river."

Madame Bessie nested both fists against her ample hip line and scanned these people with her dismal experience of

the world's worst side. "You're a cool lot," she said, "the both of you, and you want your way and mean to get it."

"Yes," said Diana Castle, "we mean to get it, Madame."

"Mark me," said the Madame, "you'll get something else. You will get hurt." She turned out and lifted her shaggy eyebrows in faint surprise when Diana Castle followed her into the hall and closed the door. "You start with modesty," Madame commented in her tart, disbelieving voice. "You will end with something else. You will never keep him."

"I don't want him, Madame. Not for long."

"So you think," retorted the Madame. "Cool as you are, you are still a fool. The game you play will make you cry soon or late. He will break your heart and you might break his."

"What game, Madame?"

"For a woman there's only two—money or a man. You have money, so it must be a man."

"There's still another game, Madame."

"Is there?" countered Madame Bessie. She moved her massive shoulders forward and laid her gray chilled stare on Diana Castle. "I've seen a lot of girls start as you start. You know where they are now? Up on the second floor of places like mine, waiting for trade." She put her face quite close to Diana Castle, darkly murmured, "Women are weaker than they think," and moved heavily down the hall.

Pierce removed the cheap sweater and pants that had come out of the *Panama Chief's* slop chest and stood stripped in the room's center, drying himself with a towel. He was lank-bodied top and bottom, with long flat muscles; his ribs showed when he lifted his arms and two bullet scars

made white nipples above his left hip. He had sandy red hair and a heavy-boned face, and his eyes sat broad and deep in their sockets. His mouth was full at the center, and habitually held steady. When he had gotten into the miner's clothes—trousers and double-breasted blue shirt and high boots—he said: "You can come in," and took time to wash up at the stand.

She came in; she stood against the wall, waiting. When he turned to her she noticed that he had the bluest and darkest eyes a man could possibly own. They were penetrating and reserved rather than friendly, and he had an alertness to his body motion, as though keyed and cocked for the unexpected. He was thinner than he should be and she had not yet seen him smile. She supposed he was around twenty-eight.

He put on the miner's coat and took a water glass from the washstand. He filled it half with coffee and half with whisky; he tipped his glass to Diana Castle and waited a moment. She had that smile somewhere behind her eyes when she said: "Luck." He drank his coffee and whisky straight down.

He had been cold, and presently was warm. He broke the bread with his hands and offered her half the loaf. She shook her head and watched him eat. He had a ring on his small left-hand finger that interested her, since it seemed to be a woman's ring, but she pushed the obvious question away. He put his hands in the miner's coat and pulled out a pipe, a letter, a small bullet mold, and a buckskin pouch. The pouch, when he loosened the pucker string, held three or four ounces of coarse gold nuggets.

She watched him now with complete troubled interest. He looked down at the pouch and hefted it between his hands, and laid it on the washstand beside the other articles. "What's left of a large bust," he commented. "Madame Bessie will probably see that he never gets it." He went to his wet clothes in the corner, retrieved his two dollars and put them in the pocket of the borrowed coat. The girl released a held breath. "You're honest," she said.

"Up to thirty dollars," he answered, dryly. "What now?"

"The steamboat *Carrie Ladd* leaves the foot of Washington Street at five in the morning for Lewiston. A thousand miners come through here every month bound for the mines upriver. When you get there you'll be out of sight."

"Neither you nor I," he pointed out, "will walk up that boat's gangplank at five in the morning without being stopped. The police will watch it."

"I know," she said, "but we have to get on that boat."

"Where's Washington Street?"

"Two blocks south of here. Then turn left and go two blocks to Front."

"I'll go take a look."

She came toward him. She had her small purse in her hand. "As long as we're together," she said, "this is yours."

He let the purse lie in his palm, feeling its heaviness.

"Maybe my honesty doesn't go beyond thirty dollars."

"I've got to take that chance, haven't I? When I left the house tonight, I left for good. There's six hundred dollars gold in the purse."

He turned to the window and had one leg through it when a thought arrested him. He looked back to her. "You married?"

"No."

"Not that it would have made much difference," he said in the same dry way. "But I have never run off with a married woman."

"Otherwise?" she asked.

He gave her a good and sudden smile. "Or any woman," he said.

The window let him into a pitch-black alley which he pursued to a street bordered by little frame shops long since locked up for the night. He halted on the sidewalk, listening to the thinned-out voices of men drift over housetops from the waterfront; and presently crossed the mud and advanced another block and saw the flare of lights on Front. Keeping to the shadowed walls, he moved toward the river and now began to pass late-closing establishments whose lights made successive yellow pools out upon the loose mud. There had been a driving rain recently hereabouts, turning the air damp and sweet. Coming to Front he put his back to a saloon for a moment's observation.

Directly across from him stood the Pioneer Hotel, and beyond that was a dock to which a steamboat lay tied, pilothouse and single stack showing against the night sky. Men trotted from boat to dock, loading freight, and a barrel of tar burned on the dock's end, its smoky yellow light darkly dancing on the river. A line of waiting wagons bent around the corner of the Pioneer House as far as the dock.

He was in poor position here, with men moving past him, in and out of the saloon; and so he crossed through the line of wagons and took position on the shadowed side of the hotel. A runway tilted downgrade to the lower deck of the boat, and at the foot of the runway a big canvas-topped wagon stood, its driver half asleep inside a blue army overcoat.

"Hard sleeping," said Pierce.

The driver pulled himself awake. "Been here three days. Damned boat is booked solid. I'll get on tonight, though."

"Coat looks familiar."

"Third Ohio," said the driver.

"First Michigan myself," offered Pierce.

"Ah," observed the driver, "it is a hard war, and a long one. Buy your way out?"

"Wounded and discharged," said Pierce. "My wife and I are trying to get upriver. There isn't any space."

"Be lucky if you get away inside of a week."

"That would be too late," said Pierce. "It is damned serious." He came forward and stood close by the wagon. A heavy piece of machinery crashed on the deck of the *Carrie Ladd* and four men rounded the corner of the Pioneer and came to a stand behind Pierce. He was in the shadow cast by the wagon, with his back to them, but he recognized Sitgreaves' voice at once.

"We will watch this boat until it sails."

"Hard man to give up, ain't you?" said one of the others.

"Why yes," stated Sitgreaves in a steady voice, "I reckon I am. I will get him tonight, or in the morning, or next week, or next year. Let's try the alleys again."

The four departed. "Somebody killed," commented the driver with disinterest. "Well, I guess we seen a lot of boys killed, ain't we brother?"

"You've got a cover on your wagon," said Pierce. "If my wife and I hid inside they couldn't see us."

The driver revived himself sufficiently to pack and light his pipe. He lowered the match until he caught a clear view of Pierce's face. He laughed easily to himself. "That's one way," he said. But he gave Pierce one more sharp appraisal before he said, "Come later when some of these lights go out."

Sitgreaves and his three partners were fading into the darkness up Washington. Pierce moved back into the first available shadows beyond the saloon and took station there, watching the driver of the canvas-topped wagon with a degree of suspicion; the man's gesture with the match was on his mind. The driver settled down inside his big coat for a chilly rest and, half an hour later, Pierce made his way cross town to Madame Bessie's, let himself through the window to the lodging-house room, and found Diana Castle sound asleep on the bed.

The strain of the evening had been greater on her than she suspected. She lay curled on the bed's gray top-blanket, her arms around her chest and with both fists doubled, and her face had a softened expression, as though she dreamed of pleasant things. Pierce pulled out the edge of the blanket and brought it over her and stood back, and suddenly he was displeased both with himself and with her. She had no right to want the things she seemed to want. She was laying the false light of romance over her night's adventure, she

was touching the borders of an existence meaner and harder and dirtier than she could conceive. She did not even realize her present danger, asleep and unguarded in the shabby room of an ill-reputationed rooming house, in the presence of man she knew nothing about. She had too much faith.

He took a helping from Madame Bessie's bottle and stood with his back to her, feeling the damp night air move through the window. Far past midnight, the town had fallen asleep at last. Deep silence lay on Portland, broken at long intervals by a distant voice or the hollow knock of some lone traveler's' boots on the near-by boardwalks. A plank squeaked in the upper part of the house; he heard a body shift on the dry springs of a bed. He ate the rest of the bread and drank the cold coffee and tilted himself on the room's only chair. He thought of the dead Captain with a slow pity but without regret, much as he had once thought of those butternut-clad Confederate infantry who came running out of the summer wheat fields in Virginia and dropped at the crack of his gun. Pity was something he remembered in a far-off boyhood, never since recaptured; it was just a memory.

Long later he got up from the chair, observing that the black night's square at the window began to tremble slightly with gray, and touched the girl on the shoulder. "Time to go," he said.

She was up at once, frightened. She stared at him and her arms came up in a quick pushing gesture; and then the shock passed and relief softened her and for the first time

he saw her smile. "I would have been asleep in another moment. You weren't gone long."

"You have been asleep for three hours," he said irritably.

She said in a little voice: "I don't ever mean to cause you trouble."

"You have a good home. You have people. You have friends and money and nothing much to worry about. You don't know what you're getting into. It is like leaving a warm room and going out into the rain. You'll never get dry again."

"So you have a conscience," she murmured. "But let's not argue. If you hadn't turned the corner of this house a few hours ago some other man would have. I would have taken him."

"All right," he said. "We go out through the window." He gave her a hand through the window, seized the gray blanket from the bed and followed her. It was still black in the heart of this block but overhead the stars had lost some of their electric brightness, and a thin river mist moved against them. Diana Castle took the lead, reaching back for his arm, and in this manner they reached the nearest street and went along it, their footfalls running sharply ahead.

The remnant of a tar-barrel fire guttered crimson and black on the dock—and the superstructure of the *Carrie Ladd* traced a skeleton shape against the night mists. The girl suddenly pulled him to a stop before a building's door. She had, he saw, a letter in her hand and now bent and slipped it beneath the door. Looking up, he noticed a sign that said: "Castle and Tipton, Wholesalers." Diana Castle faced the door, and her voice contained the first regret he

had so far heard from her. "I am telling my father not to worry. I am telling him that this is my own doing."

Somewhere footsteps made a breach in the town's stillness. The girl whispered, "That will be them," and seized his hand and led him down a between-building gap. Fifty feet from the street, once more in the sightless heart of a block, he pulled her to a stop. Back of them, at the mouth of the opening, a lantern made its diamond-bright flash, and men were talking.

"There was a racket up this way."

"She'd not be walking the street at this hour, Harry. It makes no sense."

The first man's voice came back, hard-used and very tired. "None of it makes sense. I'm going to knock on the door of every house in town."

A third man added his word: "You have seen all her friends. Now I should not like to offend you, Mr. Castle, or you, Mr. Wyatt. But we must be practical about this. Was she fond of any other man?"

"If you suggest that again I'll be forced to knock you down," said the tired voice.

They moved on, their steps long echoing back from distant quarters, Light made a first thin pulse in the sky and the river mists began to show clearer. "One was the marshal," whispered Diana Castle. She had his hand again, leading him on through quarters she seemed to know well. "One was my father. I am sorry for my father."

"That leaves Mr. Wyatt," suggested Pierce.

"I'm not sorry for him," she answered. They came presently to another street along which low-burning night

lights showed out of glassed shop-windows. The square edge of the Pioneer Hotel stood directly to their right, and a man lay on the boardwalk wrapped in a tarp, and the line of wagons waiting for the boat made a black curve around the hotel's corner. The girl moved over the mud to the farther walk. They passed along a building's side, thus coming to the dock at which the *Carrie Ladd* lay and softly groaned against the piling. A light burned in the purser's cabin.

"What do we do now?" asked the girl.

The foot of the runway was near them and the teamster who had been in the Third Ohio slept soundly on the seat of his wagon. Deep in the hull of the *Carrie Ladd* iron fire doors slammed and woodsmoke drifted in the heavy river air. Light appeared from a window of the Pioneer and steam curled from dew-damp housetops and back of town the Oregon fir forest began to break through, silvered by mist. There was nobody at this moment visible on Washington except the sleeping teamster. Taking the girl's arm, he moved toward the Ohio man's wagon, pulled the canvas open at the rear and gave Diana Castle a hand up. Following, he found himself sprawled on a load of sacked potatoes, with scarcely more than breathing room between the potatoes and the canvas top.

The teamster, wakened by the motion of their entrance, put his head through the front apron and withdrew it. Pierce heard the girl say, "You are resourceful," and saw her face dimly near. This situation would be uncomfortable and in some degree risky, for although the canvas lay tight-lashed against the bows, all down to the wagon box, there was an opening at the rear into which anyone might look. He

thought about this, and settled himself half on his knees, shifting the potato sacks to block off that view and also to create a space in which they might better lie. He spread down Madame Bessie's gray blanket. "Yours," he said, and watched her slide into it.

It was light enough so that he now saw her face. She wasn't smiling but the effect of excitement was in her eyes, as though she had far pleasanter thoughts than she wanted to show. "Thank you," she whispered, "for being thoughtful."

"It is Mr. Wyatt I'm wondering about," he said.

The teamster left the wagon. Daylight came and the odor of coffee drifted out of some near-by door and people began to stir around the corner of the Pioneer Hotel toward the *Carrie Ladd*; and presently the boat's whistle sent a great warning blast bounding back through Portland. People tramped steadily along the gangplank, and a woman said, half in tears, "Write, won't you?" And over and above the growing confusion he caught a voice that belonged to Sitgreaves. "You've gone through the boat, cabin by cabin?"

"He's not on board."

"We will watch."

The girl touched Pierce's arm. She looked up and her lips moved and he saw the steady brightness of her eyes; and once more he got the idea that this was all something which pleased her in a way that no other thing could. The Ohio man stirred on the wagon seat and kicked off the brake; the wagon moved downgrade and struck the *Carrie Ladd's* deck. A boat's officer shouted his constant orders and all round there was the rising clash of voices on dock and on board, and other wagons groaned across the deck. "Plank's in, sir!"