Sharp Ink

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CHAPTER I—DICK AND HIS MERRY ANNE

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THE *Merry Anne* was the one lumber schooner on Lake Michigan that always appeared freshly painted; it was Dick Smiley's wildest extravagance to keep her so. Sky blue she was (Annie's favorite color), with a broad white line below the rail; and to see her running down on the north wind, her sails white in the sun, her bow laying the waves aside in gentle rolls to port and starboard, her captain balancing easily at the wheel, in red shirt, red and blue neckerchief, and slouch hat, was to feel stirring in one the old spirit of the Lakes.

It was a lowering day off Manistee. Out on the horizon, now and then dipping below it, a tug was struggling to hold two barges up into the wind. Within the harbor, at the wharf of the lumber company, lay the *Merry Anne*. Two of her crew were below, sleeping off an overdose of Manistee whiskey. The third, a boy of seventeen, got up in slavish imitation of his captain,—red shirt, slouch hat, and all,—was at work lashing down the deck load. Roche, the mate, stood on the wharf, the centre of a little group of stevedores and rivermen. “Hi there, Pink,” he shouted at the red shirt, “what you doin' there?”

The boy threw a sweeping glance lake-ward before replying, “Makin' fast.”

“That 'll do for you. There won't be no start *this* afternoon.”

“But Cap' Smiley said—”

“None o' your lip, or I 'll Cap' Smiley you.

“Pretty ugly, out there, all right enough,” observed a riverman. “Cornin' up worse, too. Give you a stiff time with all that stuff aboard.”

“I ain't so sure about that,” said Roche, with a swagger. “If *I* was cap'n o' this schooner, she'd start on the minute, but Smiley's one o' your fair-weather sort.”

“Sure he is. He done a heap o' talkin' about that time he brung the *William Jones* into Black Lake before the wind, the day the *John T. Eversley* was lost; but Billy Underdown was sailin' with him then, and he told me hisself that he had the wheel all the way—Smiley never done a thing but hang on to the companionway and holler at him to look out for the north set o' the surf outside the piers; and there's my little Andy that ain't nine year old till the sixth o' September, could ha' told him the surf sets south off Black Lake, with a northwest wind. If it hadn't been for Billy, the Lord only knows where Dick Smiley'd be to-day.”

A tug hand had joined the group, and now he addressed himself to Roche.

“Cap'n Peters wants to know if you're a-goin' to try to make it, Mr. Roche.”

“Not by a dam' sight.”

“Well—I guess he won't be sorry to wait till mornin'. What time do you think you 'll want us?”

“Six o'clock sharp.”

“Them's Cap'n Smiley's orders, is they?”

“Them's *my* orders, and they're good enough for you.”

“Oh, that's all right, of course, only Cap'n Peters, he said if 'twas anybody else, he'd just tie up and wait, but there

ain't never any tellin', he says, what Dick Smiley 'll take it into his head to do."

"You tell your cap'n that Mr. Roche said to come at six in the mornin'."

"All right. I 'll tell him. Say—Cap'n Smiley ain't anywhere around, is he?"

"*No, Cap'n Smiley ain t anywheres around!*" mimicked Roche, angrily. "If you want to know whereabouts Cap'n Smiley is, he's uptown skylarkin', that's where *he* is."

The river hands laughed at this.

"I reckon he's somethin' of a hand for the ladies, Dick Smiley is, with them blue eyes o' his'n," said one. "I ain't a-tellin', you understand, but there's boys in town here that could let you know a thing or two if they was minded."

As a matter of fact, Dick was at that moment in an up-town jewellery shop, fingering a necklace of coral.

"I want a longer one," he was saying, "with something pretty hanging on the end of it—there, that's the boy—the one with big rough beads and the red rose carved on the end."

"Must be somebody's birthday, Captain," observed the jeweller, with a wink.

And Dick, who could never resist a wink, replied: "That's what. Day after to-morrow, too, and I haven't any too much time to make it in."

"Here's a nice piece—if she likes the real red."

Dick took it in his hands and nodded over it. "I think that would please her. She likes bright colors." He drew a wallet from a hip pocket and disclosed a thick bundle of bills.

“I shouldn't think you'd like to carry so much money on you, Captain, in your line of work.”

“It isn't so much. They are most all ones.” But the jeweller, seeing a double X on the top, only smiled and remarked that it was a dark day.

“Yes, too dark. I don't like it. Makes me think of the cyclone three years ago April, when the *Kate Howard* went down off Lakeville. I spent three hours roosting on the topmast that day. It was black then, like this. If it keeps up, you 'll have to turn on your lights in here.”

“Guess I will. It wouldn't hurt now. Well, good-by, Captain. Drop in again next time you run in here.”

“All right. But there's no telling when that will be. I have to go where Captain Stenzenberger sends me, you know.”

“You don't own your schooner yet, then?”

“No; only a quarter of it. Well, good-by.” And he left the shop with the corals, securely wrapped, stowed in an inside pocket.

The first big drops of rain were falling when he reached the schooner. The deck was deserted, but he found Roche and his wharf acquaintances settled comfortably in the cabin. Their talk stopped abruptly at the sight of his boots coming down the companionway.

“Why isn't the load lashed down, Pete?” he asked, addressing Roche.

“Why—oh, it was lookin' so bad, I thought we'd better wait till you come.”

“Where's the tug? Don't Peters know we want him?”

The loungers were silent. All looked at Roche.

“Why, yes—sure. He ain't showed up yet, though.”

“You ain't goin' to try to make it, are you, Cap'n?” asked a riverman.

“Going to try? We *are* going to make it, if that's what you mean.”

One of the men rose. “I'm going up the wharf, Cap'n. If you like, I 'll speak to Peters.”

“All right. I wish you would. And say, Pete, you take Pink and see that everything is down solid. I don't care to distribute those two-by-fours all down the east coast.”

Roche went out, and the others got up one by one and took shelter in the lee of a lumber pile on the wharf. A little later, when he saw the tug steaming up the river, Roche shook the rain from his eyes and looked long at the black cloud billows that were rolling up from the northwest, then he slipped below and took a strong pull at his flask. The tug came alongside, and then Roche sought Dick.

“Cap'n, what's the use?” he said in an agitated voice. “Don't you see we're runnin' our nose right into it? Why, if we was a three-hundred-footer, we'd have our hands full out there. I don't like to say nothin', but—”

Smiley, his hat jammed on the back of his head, his shirt, now dripping wet, clinging to his trunk and outlining bunches of muscle on his shoulders and back, his light hair stringing down over his forehead, merely looked at him curiously.

“You see how it is, Cap'n, I—”

“What are you talking about? All right, Pink, make fast there! Who's running this schooner, you or me?”

“Oh, I don't mean nothin', Cap'n; but seein' there ain't no particular hurry—”

“No hurry! Why, man, I've got to lay alongside the Lakeville pier by Wednesday night, or break something. What's the matter with you, anyhow? Lost your nerve?”

“No, I ain't lost my nerve. And you ain't got no call to talk that way to me, Dick Smiley.”

“Here, here, Pete, none of that. We're going to pull out in just about two minutes. If you aren't good for it, I 'll wait long enough to tumble your slops ashore. Put your mind on it now—are you coming or not?”

“Oh, I'm cornin', Cap'n, of course, but—”

“Shut up, then.”

The idlers on the wharf had not heard what was said, but they saw Roche change color and duck below for another pull at his flask.

The tug swung out into the stream; the *Merry Anne* fell slowly away from the wharf.

“Call up those loafers, Pete,” shouted Smiley, as he rested his hands on the wheel. The two sailors, roused by a shake and an oath, scrambled drowsily upon the deck with red eyes and unsettled nerves, and were set to work raising the jib and double-reefing foresail and mainsail. Captain Peters sounded three blasts for the first bridge, and headed down-stream.

Passing on through the narrow draws of the bridges and between the buildings that lined the river, the *Merry Anne* drew near to the long piers that formed the entrance to the channel. And Roche, standing with flushed face by the foremast, looked out over the piers at the angry lake, now a lead-gray color, here streaked with foam, there half obscured by the driving squalls. His eyes followed the track

of one squall after another as they tore their way at right angles to the surf.

Already the *Anne* had begun to stagger. At the end of the towing hawser the tug was nosing into the half-spent rollers that got in between the piers, and was tossing the spray up into the wind.

One of the life-saving crew, in shining oilskins, was walking the pier; he paused and looked at them—even called out some words that the wind took from his lips and mockingly swept away. Roche looked at him with dull eyes; saw his lips moving behind his hollowed hands; looked out again at the muddy streaks and the whirling mist, out beyond at the two barges laboring on the horizon, gazed at the white and yellow surf. Then his eye lighted a little, and he made his way back to the wheel.

“Don't be a fool, Dick,” he shouted. “Just look a' that and tell me you can make it. I know better. I'm an old friend, Dick, and I like you better'n anybody, but you mustn't be a dam' fool. Ain't no use bein' a dam' fool.”

“Who are you talking to?”

“Lemme blow the horn, Dick.'Taint too late to stop 'em. We can get back all right—start in the mornin'. Don't you see, Dick—”

Smiley's eyes were fixed keenly on him for a moment; then they swept to the windward pier. He snatched the horn from Roche's hand and blew a blast.

The sailors up forward heard it, and shouted and waved their arms. A tug hand, seeing the commotion, though he heard nothing, finally was made to understand, and Captain

Peters slowed his engines. Smiley, meanwhile, was steering up close to the windward pier.

“Tumble off there, Pete,” he ordered. “Quick, now.”

“What you going to do to me? Ain't goin' to put me off there, are you?”

“Get a move on, or I 'll throw you off. There's no room for you here.”

“Hold on there, Dick; I ain't got no clothes or nothin'. And you owe me my pay—”

“You 'll have to go to Cap'n Stenzenberger about that. Here, Pink, heave him off. Quick, now!”

“Don't you lay your hand on me, Pink Harper—”

But the words were lost. The young sailor in the red shirt fairly pitched him over the rail. The life saver, running alongside, gave him a hand. Captain Peters was leaning out impatiently from his wheel-house door, and now at the signal he dove back and hurriedly rang for full steam ahead; it was no place to run chances. And as the schooner passed out into the open lake, leaving the lighthouse behind her, and soon afterward casting off the tug, there was no time to look back at the raging figure on the pier. Though once, to be sure, Dick had turned with a laugh and shouted out a few lines of a wild parody on the song of the day, “Baby Mine.”

The song proved so amusing that, when they were free of the tug and were careening gayly off to the southwest with all fast on board and a boiling sea around them, he took it up again. And braced at a sharp angle with the deck, one eye on the sails, another cast to windward, his brown hands knotted around the spokes of the wheel, he sang away at the top of his lungs:—=

"He is coming down the Rhine.

With a bellyful of wine,"=

Young Harper worked his way aft along the upper rail. His eye fell on the figure of his captain, and he laughed and nodded.

“Lively goin', Cap'n.”

Lively it certainly was.

“Guess there ain't no doubt about *our* makin' it!”

“Doubt your uncle!” roared the Captain. And he winked at his young admirer.

“Guess Mr. Roche didn't like the looks of it.”

“Guess not.”

Harper crept forward again. And Smiley, with a laugh in his eye, squared his chest to the storm, and thought of the necklace stowed away in the cabin; and then he thought of her who was to be its owner day after to-morrow, and “I wonder if we will make it,” thought he; “I wonder!”

And make it they did. Sliding gayly up into a humming southwest wind, with every rag up and the sheets hauled home, with the bluest of skies above them and the bluest of water beneath (for the Lakes play at April weather all around the calendar), Wednesday afternoon found them turning Grosse Pointe.

The bright new paint was prematurely old now, the small boat was missing from the stern davits, the cabin windows had been crushed in, and one sailor carried his arm in a sling, but they had made it. Harper, hollow-eyed, but merry, had the wheel; Smiley was below, snatching his first nap in forty-eight hours, with the red corals under his head.

“Ole,” called Harper, “wake up the Cap'n, will you? I can't leave the wheel. He said we was to call him off Grosse Pointe.”

So Ole called him, and was soon followed back on deck by another hollow-eyed figure.

“Guess it's just as well Mr. Roche didn't come along,” observed the boy, as he relinquished the wheel. “*He'd* a' had all he wanted, and no mistake.”

“He had enough to start with. There wasn't any room for drunks this trip.”

As he spoke, Smiley was running his eye over the familiar yellow bluffs, glancing at the lighthouse tower, at the stack of the water works farther down the coast, at the green billows of foliage with here and there a spire rising above them, and, last and longest, at the two piers that reached far out into the Lake,—one black with coal sheds, the other and nearer, yellow with new lumber.

Between these piers, built in the curve of the beach and nestling under the bluff, was a curious patchwork of a house. Built of odds and ends of lumber, even, in the rear, of driftwood, perched up on piles so that the higher waves might run up under the kitchen floor, small wonder that the youngsters of the shore had dubbed it “the house on stilts.”

Old Captain Fargo (and who was not a “Captain” in those days!) had built it with his own hands, just as he had built every one of the sailboats and rowboats that strewed the beach, and had woven every one of the nets that were wound on reels up there under the bluff.

A surprisingly spacious old house it was, too, with a room for Annie upstairs on the Lake side, looking out on a porch

that was just large enough to hold her pots and boxes of geraniums and nasturtiums and forget-me-nots.

Smiley could not see the house yet; it was hidden by the lumber piles on the pier. But his eyes knew where to look, and they lingered there, all the while that his sailor's sixth sense was watching the set of the sails and the scudding ripples that marked the wind puffs. He wore a clean red shirt to-day and a neckerchief that lay in even folds around his neck. Redolent of soap he was, his face and hands scrubbed until they shone. And still his eyes tried to look through fifty feet of lumber to the little flowering porch, until a sail came in sight around the end of the pier. Then he straightened up, and shifted his grip on the spokes.

The small boat was also blue with a white stripe. At the stern sat a single figure. But though they were still too far apart to distinguish features, Dick knew that the figure was that of a girl—a girl of a fine, healthy carriage, her face tanned an even brown, and a laugh in her black eyes. He knew, even before he brought his glass to bear on her, that she was dressed in a blue sailor suit, with a rolling blue-and-white collar cut V-shape and giving a glimpse of her round brown neck. He knew that her black hair was gathered simply with a ribbon and left to hang about her shoulders, that her arms were bared to the elbow. He could see that she was carrying a few yards more sail than was safe for a catboat in that breeze, and there was a laugh in his own eyes as he shook his head over her recklessness. He knew that it would do no good to speak to her about it; and her father and mother had never been able to look upon her with any but fond, foolish eyes.

Steadily the *Merry Anne* drew in toward the pier; rapidly the *Captain*—so Annie called her boat—came bobbing and skimming out to meet her. A few moments more and Dick could wave his hat and shout, “Ahoy, there!” And he heard in reply, as he had known that he should, a merry “Ahoy, there! I 'll beat you in!” And then they raced for it, Annie gaining, as she generally could, while the schooner was laboriously coming about, and working in slowly under reduced sail. She ran in close to the pier, came up into the wind, and waited there while the crew were making the schooner fast.

At length the stevedores started unloading the lumber and Dick was free. He leaned on the rail and looked down at Annie who had by this time come alongside; and he saw that she had a bunch of blue-and-white forget-me-nots in her hair.

“Well,” she said, looking up, and driving all power of consecutive thought out of Dick's head, as she always did when she rested her black eyes full on his, “well, I beat you.”

“Take me aboard, Annie. I've got something for you.”

“All right, come down. You can take the sheet.”

Dick pushed off from the schooner's side and the *Captain* filled away toward the shore.

“Hold on, Annie, come about. I don't have to go in yet.”

“Where do you want to go?”

“I don't care—run out a little way.”

Annie brought her about and Dick watched her with admiring eyes. “Well, now,” he began, as they settled down

for a run off the wind, “I didn't know whether I was going to get here to-day or not.”

“It *was* pretty bad.”

“You were thinking of me, weren't you, Annie?”

She smiled and gave her attention to the boat.

“Roche was drunk, and I had to leave him at Manistee.”

“You didn't come down shorthanded, did you, Dick,—in that storm?”

He nodded.

“But how? You couldn't have got much sleep.”

“I didn't get any till this noon.”

“Now, that's just like you, Dick, always running risks when you don't have to.”

“But I did have to.”

“I don't see why.”

“What day's to-day?”

A mischievous light came into her eyes, but her face was demure. “Wednesday,” she replied.

“Yes, I knew that.”

“Why did you ask me, then?”

“Oh, Annie, Annie! When are you going to stop talking that way?”

Again the boat claimed all her attention. He leaned forward and dropped his voice.

“Don't you think I've waited most long enough, Annie?”

“Now, Dick, be sensible.”

“But haven't I been sensible? Not a word have I said for two months. And I told you then I would speak on your birthday.”

“So you really remembered my birthday?”

“Remembered it, Annie! What a girl you are! Do you know how long I've been waiting? And all the boys laughing? It's two years this month. It was on your birthday that I saw you first, you know. And it wasn't a month after that that I spoke to you. How could I help it? Who could have waited longer? And you, with your way of making me think you were really going to say yes, and then just laughing at me.”

“Now, Dick—if you don't stop and be sensible, I 'll take you straight inshore.”

“Oh, you wouldn't do that, Annie?”

“Yes, I would. I will now. Ready about!” The *Captain* came rapidly up into the wind, but stopped there with sail flapping; for Dick held the sheet, and his hand had imprisoned hers on the tiller.

“Now, Dick—Dick—”

“Wait a minute. Don't be angry with me when I've risked the schooner and everybody aboard her just so's to get down here on your birthday. Promise me you 'll hold her in the wind while I get you your present.”

She hesitated, and looked out toward the horizon.

“Promise me that, Annie, and I 'll let go your hand.”

“You—you've forgotten—what you promised—”

“I know, I said I'd never take hold of your hand again until you put it in mine—didn't I?”

She nodded, still looking away.

“And I've broken the promise. Do you know why, Annie? It's because when you look at me the way you do sometimes, I could break every promise I've ever made—and every law of Congress if I thought it would just keep you looking at me.”

Not a word from Annie.

“Promise me, Annie, that you 'll hold her here?”

Still no word.

“Won't you just nod, then?”

She hesitated a moment longer, then gave one uncertain little nod. He released her hand, held the sheet between his knees, drew the package from his pocket, and displayed the corals. She was trying bravely not to look around, but her glance wavered, and finally she turned and looked at it with eager eyes. “Oh, Dick, did you bring that for me?”

“I surely did.” He held it up, and when she bent her head forward, he slipped it over and around her neck. Her eyes shone as she ran the red beads through her fingers and looked at the carved pendant. Dick leaned back and watched her contentedly. Finally she let her eyes steal upward and meet his, with a smile that was half roguish. “I never really laughed at you, did I, Dick?”

He moved forward with sudden eagerness. “Don't you think now is a good time to say yes, Annie,—now, on your birthday? I own a quarter of the schooner now, you know; and I'm ready to make another payment to-morrow. And don't you see, when we're married you can help me to save, and before we know it we can have a home and a business of our own.” She was bending over the corals. “You didn't really think you could save more with—with me, than you could alone, did you, Dick?”

“Yes, I'm sure of it. It will give me something to work for, don't you see?”

“But—but—” very shyly, this—“Haven't you anything to work for now?”

“Oh, Annie, do you mean that—are you telling me you 'll give me the right to work for you? That's all I want to know.”

“Now, Dick—please let go my hand—you promised, you know—”

“What is a promise now! If you knew how you torture me when you lead me on till I'm half wild and then change around till I don't know what I've said or what you've said or hardly who I am—”

“No, Dick, you mustn't—I mean it. We must go in. See, there's father on the beach. It must be supper-time.”

“Wait a minute—I haven't half told you—”

But she was merciless. The *Captain* came about and headed shoreward.

“Did you meet the revenue cutter anywhere up the Lake—the *Foote?* She was here yesterday.”

“There you are again, all changed around! What do I care about the *Foote*—when I'm just waiting to hear you say the only word that can make my life worth living. Now, Annie—”

“You mustn't, Dick. I've let you say too much now. If you go on, you 'll make me feel that I can't even thank you for your present.”

“Was that all? Were you only thanking me?”

She nodded, and Dick's face fell into gloom. But when the *Captain* was beached, and Annie had leaped lightly over the rail, she turned and gave him one merry blushing look that completely reversed the effect of her reproof. And as she hurried up to the house, he could only gaze after her helplessly.

CHAPTER II—THE NEW MATE

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IN the morning the *William Schmidt*, Henry Smiley, Master, came in from Chicago and tied up across the pier from the *Merry Anne*.

Henry, Dick's cousin, was a short, stocky, man, said to be somewhat of a driver with his sailors. He seldom had much

to say, never drank, was shrewd at a bargain, and was supposed to have a considerable sum stowed away in the local savings bank. Though he was wanting in the qualities that made his younger cousin popular, he was daring enough in his quiet way, and he had been known, when he thought the occasion justified it, to run long chances with his snub-nosed schooner.

After breakfast Dick walked across the broad pier between the piles of lumber, and found Henry in his cabin. They greeted each other cordially.

“Sit down,” said Henry. “Did you come down through that nor'wester?”

Dick nodded.

“Have any trouble?”

“Oh, no. Lost some sleep—that's all. You aren't going down to the yards to-day, are you?”

“Yes—I think likely. Why?”

“I 'll go along with you. I'm ready to make another payment on the schooner. I've been thinking it over, and it strikes me I'm paying about three times what she's worth. What do you think? Would it do any harm to have a little talk about it with the Cap'n? You know him better than I do.”

Henry shook his head. “I wouldn't. He is too smart for you. He will beat you any way you try it, and have you thanking him before he is through with you. I have gone all over this ground before, you know. Of course he is an old rascal—but I don't know of any other way you could even get an interest in a schooner. You see, you haven't any capital. He will give you all the time you want, and I don't know but what he's entitled to a little extra, everything

considered. But don't say anything, whatever you do. You've got too good a thing here."

"You think I ought to just shut up and let him bleed me?"

"He isn't bleeding you. Just think it over, Dick. You are making a living, and you already have a quarter interest in your schooner. You couldn't ask much more at your age. Have you heard from him yet, by the way?"

"No."

"He spoke to me the other day about wanting to see you when you came in. There's another order to come down from Spencer."

"Where's that?"

"Up in the Alpena country."

"Lake Huron, eh? Oh—isn't that where you went in the spring?"

"Yes, I've been there. An old fellow named Spencer runs a little one-horse mill, and he's selling timber and shingles. And from what the Cap'n said, I don't think he'd care if you brought along a little venture of your own. That's the way I used to do, when I was paying for the *Schmidt*."

"How could I do that?"

"Spencer will give you a little credit. You can stow away a few thousand feet, and clear twenty or thirty dollars. It helps along."

"All right, I 'll try it. Are you sure the old man won't care?"

"Oh, yes. He's willing enough to do the square thing, so long as it keeps us feeling good and doesn't lose him anything."

"Say—there's another thing, Henry. I fired Roche, up at Manistee."

“Fired him?” Henry's brows came together.

“Yes, I had to. I had stood him as long as I could.”

“I don't know what the Cap'n will say about that.”

“I'd like to know what he can say. I was in command.”

“Yes, I know—of course you had a right to; but the thing is to keep on his good side. Suppose we go right down to the yards, and see if you can get your story in before Roche's.”

“What does the Cap'n care about my men, I'd like to know!”

Henry Smiley.

“Now, keep cool, Dick. Roche, you see, used to work for him,—I don't know but what they're related,—and it was because the Cap'n spoke to me about him that I recommended him to you when I did. And look here, Dick,”—Henry smiled as he laid a hand on his cousin's shoulder,—“I'm a good deal older than you are, and you can take my word for it. Don't get sour on things. Of course people will do you if they can; but it's human nature, and you can't change it by growling about it. You are doing well, and what you need now is to keep your eyes open and your mouth shut. Why should you want to hurry things along?”

A flush came over Dick's face. “There's a reason all right enough. You see, Henry, there's a little girl not so very many miles from here—”

“Oho!” thought Henry, “a little girl!” But his face was immobile, excepting a momentary curious expression that passed over it.

“Now don't get to thinking it's all fixed up, because it isn't—not yet. But you see, I've been thinking that when I've got a little something to offer—”

“There's another thing you can take my word for, my boy,” said Henry, with a dry smile; “don't get impetuous. Marrying may be all right, but it wants to be done careful.”

Captain Stenzenberger's lumber yard was a few miles away, at the Chicago city limits. As the two sailors left the pier to walk up to the railway station, Dick was glad to change the subject for the first one that came into his head. “What do you suppose the *Foote* has been doing here this week, Dick? I heard she put in Tuesday or Wednesday.”

“Looking for Whiskey Jim, I suppose.”