HAROLD BINDLOSS

VANE OF THE TIMBERLANDS

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CHAPTER I

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A FRIEND IN NEED

A light breeze, scented with the smell of the firs, was blowing down the inlet, and the tiny ripples it chased across the water splashed musically against the bows of the canoe. They met her end-on, sparkling in the warm sunset light, gurgled about her sides, and trailed away astern in two divergent lines as the paddles flashed and fell. There was a thud as the blades struck the water, and the long, light hull forged onward with slightly lifted, bird's-head prow, while the two men swung forward for the next stroke with a rhythmic grace of motion. They knelt, facing forward, in the bottom of the craft, and, dissimilar as they were in features and, to some extent, in character, the likeness between them was stronger than the difference. Both bore the unmistakable stamp of a wholesome life spent in vigorous labor in the open. Their eyes were clear and, like those of most bushmen, singularly steady; their skin was clean and weather-darkened; and they were leanly muscular.

On either side of the lane of green water giant firs, cedars and balsams crept down the rocky hills to the whitened driftwood fringe. They formed part of the great coniferous forest which rolls west from the wet Coast Range

of Canada's Pacific Province and, overleaping the straits, spreads across the rugged and beautiful wilderness of Vancouver Island. Ahead, clusters of little frame houses showed up here and there in openings among the trees, and a small sloop, toward which the canoe was heading, lay anchored near the wharf.

The men had plied the paddle during most of that day, from inclination rather than necessity, for they could have hired Siwash Indians to undertake the labor for them, had they been so minded. They were, though their appearance did not suggest it, moderately prosperous; but their prosperity was of recent date; they had been accustomed to doing everything for themselves, as are most of the men who dwell among the woods and ranges of British Columbia.

Vane, who knelt nearest the bow, was twenty-seven years of age. Nine of those years he had spent chopping trees, driving cattle, poling canoes and assisting in the search for useful minerals among the snow-clad ranges. He wore a wide, gray felt hat, which had lost its shape from frequent wettings, an old shirt of the same color, and blue duck trousers, rent in places; but the light attire revealed a fine muscular symmetry. He had brown hair and brown eyes; and a certain warmth of coloring which showed through the deep bronze of his skin hinted at a sanguine and somewhat impatient temperament. As a matter of fact, the man was resolute and usually shrewd; but there was a vein of impulsiveness in him, and, while he possessed considerable powers of endurance, he was on occasion troubled by a shortness of temper.

His companion, Carroll, had lighter hair and gray eyes, and his appearance was a little less vigorous and a little more refined; though he, too, had toiled hard and borne many privations in the wilderness. His dress resembled Vane's, but, dilapidated as it was, it suggested a greater fastidiousness.

The two had located a valuable mineral property some months earlier and, though this does not invariably follow, had held their own against city financiers during the negotiations that preceded the floating of a company to work the mine. That they had succeeded in securing a good deal of the stock was largely due to Vane's pertinacity and said something for his acumen; but both had been trained in a very hard school.

As the wooden houses ahead rose higher and the sloop's gray hull grew into sharper shape upon the clear green shining of the brine, Vane broke into a snatch of song:

"Had I the wings of a dove, I would fly
Just for to-night to the Old Country."

He stopped and laughed.

"It's nine years since I've seen it, but I can't get those lines out of my head. Perhaps it's because of the girl who sang them. Somehow, I felt sorry for her. She had remarkably fine eyes."

"Sea-blue," suggested his companion. "I don't grasp the connection between the last two remarks."

"Neither do I," admitted Vane. "I suppose there isn't one. But they weren't sea-blue; unless you mean the depth of indigo when you are out of soundings. They're Irish eyes."

"You're not Irish. There's not a trace of the Celt in you, except, perhaps, your habit of getting indignant with the people who don't share your views."

"No, sir! By birth, I'm North Country—England, I mean. Over there we're descendants of the Saxons, Scandinavians, Danes—Teutonic stock at bottom, anyhow; and we've inherited their unromantic virtues. We're solid, and cautious, respectable before everything, and smart at getting hold of anything worth having. As a matter of fact, you Ontario Scotsmen are mighty like us."

"You certainly came out well ahead of those city men who put up the money," agreed Carroll. "I guess it's in the blood; though I fancied once or twice that they would take the mine from you."

Vane brought his paddle down with a thud.

"Just for to-night to the Old Country,—"

He hummed, and added:

"It sticks to one."

"What made you leave the Old Country? I don't think you ever told me."

Vane laughed.

"That's a blamed injudicious question to ask anybody, as you ought to know; but in this particular instance you shall have an answer. There was a row at home—I was a sentimentalist then, and just eighteen—and as a result of it I came out to Canada." His voice changed and grew softer. "I hadn't many relatives, and, except one sister, they're all gone now. That reminds me—she's not going to lecture for the county education authorities any longer."

The sloop was close ahead, and slackening the paddling they ran alongside. Vane glanced at his watch when they had climbed on board.

"Supper will be finished at the hotel," he remarked. "You had better get the stove lighted. It's your turn, and that rascally Siwash seems to have gone off again. If he's not back when we're ready, we'll sail without him."

Supper is served at the hotels in the western settlements as soon as work ceases for the day, and the man who arrives after it is over must wait until the next day's breakfast is ready. Carroll, accordingly, prepared the meal; and when they had finished it they lay on deck smoking with a content not altogether accounted for by a satisfied appetite. They had spent several anxious months, during which they had come very near the end of their slender resources, arranging for the exploitation of the mine, and now at last the work was over. Vane had that day made his final plans for the construction of a road and a wharf by which the ore could be economically shipped for reduction, or, as an alternative to this, for the erection of a small smelting plant. They had bought the sloop as a convenient means of conveyance and shelter, as they could live in some comfort on board; and now they could take their ease for a while, which was a very unusual thing to both of them.

"I suppose you're bent on sailing this craft back?" Carroll remarked at length. "We could hire a couple of Siwash to take her home while we rode across the island and got the train to Victoria. Besides, there's that steamboat coming down the coast to-night."

"Either way would cost a good deal extra."

"That's true," Carroll agreed with an amused expression; "but you could charge it to the company."

Vane laughed.

"You and I have a big stake in the concern; and I haven't got used to spending money unnecessarily yet, I've been mighty glad to earn a couple dollars by working from sunup until dark, though I didn't always get it afterward. So have you."

"How are you going to dispose of your money, then? You have a nice little balance in cash, besides the shares."

"It has occurred to me that I might spend a few months in the Old
Country. Have you ever been over there?"

"I was across some time ago; but, if you like, I'll go along with you. We could start as soon as we've arranged the few matters left open in Vancouver."

Vane was glad to hear it. He knew little about Carroll's antecedents, but his companion was obviously a man of education, and they had been staunch comrades for the last three years. They had plodded through leagues of rain-swept bush, had forded icy rivers, had slept in wet fern and sometimes slushy snow, and had toiled together with pick and drill. During that time they had learned to know and trust each other and to bear with each other's idiosyncrasies.

Filling his pipe again as he lay in the fading sunlight, Vane looked back on the nine years he had passed in Canada, and, allowing for the periods of exposure to cold and wet and the almost ceaseless toil, he admitted that he might have spent them more unpleasantly. He had a stout

heart and a muscular body, and the physical hardships had not troubled him. What was more, he had a quick, almost instinctive, judgment and the faculty for seizing an opportunity.

Having quarreled with his relatives and declined any favors from them, he had come to Canada with only a few pounds and had promptly set about earning a living with his hands. When he had been in the country several years, a friend of the family had, however, sent him a small sum, and the young man had made judicious use of the money. The lot he bought outside a wooden town doubled in value, and the share he took in a new orchard paid him well; but he had held aloof from the cities, and his only recklessness had been his prospecting journeys into the wilderness. Prospecting for minerals is at once an art and a gamble. Skill, acquired by long experience or instinctive—and there are men who seem to possess the latter—counts for much, but chance plays a leading part. Provisions, tents and packhorses are expensive, and though a placer mine may be worked by two partners, a reef or lode can be disposed of only to men with means sufficient to develop it. Even in this delicate matter, in which he had had keen wits against him, Vane had held his own; but there was one side of life with which he was practically unacquainted.

There are no social amenities on the rangeside or in the bush, where women are scarce. Vane had lived in Spartan simplicity, practising the ascetic virtues, as a matter of course. He had had no time for sentiment, his passions had remained unstirred; and now he was seven and twenty, sound and vigorous of body, and, as a rule, level of head. At

length, however, there was to be a change. He had earned an interlude of leisure, and he meant to enjoy it without, so he prudently determined, making a fool of himself.

Presently Carroll took his pipe from his mouth.

"Are you going ashore again to the show to-night?"

"Yes," Vane answered. "It's a long while since I've struck an entertainment of any kind, and that yellow-haired mite's dancing is one of the prettiest things I've seen."

"You've been twice already," Carroll hinted. "The girl with the blue eyes sings her first song rather well."

"I think so," Vane agreed with a significant absence of embarrassment. "In this case a good deal depends on the singing—the interpretation, isn't it? The thing's on the border, and I've struck places where they'd have made it gross; but the girl only brought out the mischief. Strikes me she didn't see there was anything else in it"

"That's curious, considering the crowd she goes about with. Aren't you cultivating a critical faculty?"

Vane disregarded the ironical question.

"She's Irish; that accounts for a good deal."

He paused and looked thoughtful.

"If I knew how to do it, I'd like to give five or ten dollars to the child who dances. It must be a tough life, and her mother—the woman at the piano—looks ill. I wonder whatever brought them to a place like this?"

"Struck a cold streak at Nanaimo, the storekeeper told me. Anyway, since we're to start at sunup, I'm staying here." Then he smiled. "Has it struck you that your attendance in the front seats is liable to misconception?"

Vane rose without answering and dropped into the canoe. Thrusting her off, he drove the light craft toward the wharf with vigorous strokes of the paddle, and Carroll shook his head whimsically as he watched him.

"Anybody except myself would conclude that he's waking up at last," he commented.

A minute or two later Vane swung himself up onto the wharf and strode into the wooden settlement. There were one or two hydraulic mines and a pulp mill in the vicinity, and, though the place was by no means populous, a company of third-rate entertainers had arrived there a few days earlier. On reaching the rude wooden building in which they had given their performance and finding it closed, he accosted a lounger.

"What's become of the show?" he asked.

"Busted. Didn't take the boys' fancy. The crowd went out with the stage this afternoon; though I heard that two of the women stayed behind. Somebody said the hotel-keeper had trouble about his bill."

Vane turned away with a slight sense of compassion. More than once during his first year or two in Canada he had limped footsore and weary into a wooden town where nobody seemed willing to employ him. An experience of the kind was unpleasant to a vigorous man, but he reflected that it must be much more so in the case of a woman, who probably had nothing to fall back upon. However, he dismissed the matter from his mind. Having been kneeling in a cramped position in the canoe most of the day, he decided to stroll along the waterside before going back to the sloop.

Great firs stretched out their somber branches over the smooth shingle, and now that the sun had gone their clean resinous smell was heavy in the dew-cooled air. Here and there brushwood grew among outcropping rock and moss-grown logs lay fallen among the brambles.

Catching sight of what looked like a strip of woven fabric beneath a brake, Vane strode toward it. Then he stopped with a start, for a young girl lay with her face hidden from him, in an attitude of dejected abandonment. He was about to turn away softly, when she started and looked up at him. Her long dark lashes glistened and her eyes were wet, but they were of the deep blue he had described to Carroll, and he stood still.

"You really shouldn't give way like that," he said.

It was all he could think of, but he spoke without obtrusive assurance or pronounced embarrassment; and the girl, shaking out her crumpled skirt over one little foot, with a swift sinuous movement, choked back a sob and favored him with a glance of keen scrutiny as she rose to a sitting posture. She was quick at reading character—the life she led had made that necessary—and his manner and appearance were reassuring. He was on the whole a well-favored man—good-looking seemed the best word for it—though what impressed her most was his expression. It indicated that he regarded her with some pity, not as an attractive young woman, which she knew she was, but merely as a human being. The girl, however, said nothing; and, sitting down on a neighboring boulder, Vane took out his pipe from force of habit.

"Well," he added, in much the same tone he would have used to a distressed child, "what's the trouble?"

She told him, speaking on impulse.

"They've gone off and left me! The takings didn't meet expenses; there was no treasury."

"That's bad," responded Vane gravely. "Do you mean they've left you alone?"

"No; it's worse than that. I suppose I could go—somewhere—but there's
Mrs. Marvin and Elsie."

"The child who dances?"

The girl assented, and Vane looked thoughtful. He had already noticed that Mrs. Marvin, whom he supposed to be the child's mother, was worn and frail, and he did not think there was anything she could turn her hand to in a vigorous mining community. The same applied to his companion, though he was not greatly astonished that she had taken him into her confidence. The reserve that characterizes the insular English is less common in the West, where the stranger is more readily taken on trust.

"The three of you stick together?" he suggested.

"Of course! Mrs. Marvin's the only friend I have."

"Then I suppose you've no idea what to do?"

"No," she confessed, and then explained, not very clearly, that it was the cause of her distress and that they had had bad luck of late. Vane could understand that as he looked at her. Her dress was shabby, and he fancied that she had not been bountifully fed.

"If you stayed here a few days you could go out with the next stage and take the train to Victoria." He paused and

continued diffidently: "It could be arranged with the hotel-keeper."

She laughed in a half-hysterical manner, and he remembered what she had said about the treasury, and that fares are high in that country.

"I suppose you have no money," he added with blunt directness. "I want you to tell Mrs. Marvin that I'll lend her enough to take you all to Victoria."

Her face crimsoned. He had not quite expected that, and he suddenly felt embarrassed. It was a relief when she broke the brief silence.

"No," she replied; "I can't do that. For one thing, it would be too late when we got to Victoria, I think we could get an engagement if we reached Vancouver in time to get to Kamloops by—"

Vane knit his brows when he heard the date, and it was a moment or two before he spoke.

"There's only one way you can do it. There's a little steamboat coming down the coast to-night. I had half thought of intercepting her, anyway, and handing the skipper some letters to post in Victoria. He knows me—I'm likely to have dealings with his employers. That's my sloop yonder, and if I put you on board the steamer, you'd reach Vancouver in good time. We should have sailed at sunup, anyhow."

The girl hesitated and turned partly from him. He surmised that she did not know what to make of his offer, though her need was urgent. In the meanwhile he stood up.

"Come along and talk it over with Mrs. Marvin," he urged. "I'd better tell you that I'm Wallace Vane, of the Clermont

Mine. Of course, I know your name, from the program."

She rose and they walked back to the hotel. Once more it struck him that the girl was pretty and graceful, though he had already deduced from several things that she had not been regularly trained as a singer nor well educated. On reaching the hotel, he sat down on the veranda while she went in, and a few minutes later Mrs. Marvin came out and looked at him much as the girl had done. He grew hot under her gaze and repeated his offer in the curtest terms.

"If this breeze holds, we'll put you on board the steamer soon after daybreak," he explained.

The woman's face softened, and he recognized now that there had been strong suspicion in it.

"Thank you," she said simply; "we'll come."

There was a moment's silence and then she added with an eloquent gesture:

"You don't know what it means to us!"

Vane merely took off his hat and turned away; but a minute or two later he met the hotel-keeper.

"Do these people owe you anything?" he asked.

"Five dollars; they paid up part of the time. I was wondering what to do with them. Guess they've no money. They didn't come in to supper, though we would have stood them that. Made me think they were straight folks; the other kind wouldn't have been bashful."

Vane handed him a bill.

"Take it out of this, and make any excuse you like. I'm going to put them on board the steamboat."

The man made no comment, and Vane, striding down to the beach, sent a hail ringing across the water. Carroll

appeared on the sloop's deck and answered him.

"Hallo!" he cried. "What's the trouble?"

"Get ready the best supper you can manage, for three people, as quick as you can!"

"Supper for three people!"

Vane caught the astonished exclamation and came near losing his temper.

"For three people!" he shouted. "Don't ask any fool questions! You'll see later on!"

Then he turned away in a hurry, wondering somewhat uneasily what Carroll would say when he grasped the situation.

CHAPTER II

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A BREEZE OF WIND

There were signs of a change in the weather when Vane walked down to the wharf with his passengers, for a cold wind which had sprung up struck an eerie sighing from the somber firs and sent the white mists streaming along the hillside. There was a watery moon in the sky, and when they reached the water's edge Vane fancied that the singer hesitated; but Mrs. Marvin laid her hand on the girl's arm reassuringly, and she got into the canoe. A few minutes later Vane ran the craft alongside the sloop and saw the amazement in Carroll's face by the glow from the cabin skylight. He fancied, however, that his comrade would rise to the occasion, and he helped his guests up.

"My partner, Carroll. Mrs. Marvin and her daughter; Miss Kitty Blake. You have seen them already. They're coming down with us to catch the steamer."

Carroll bowed, and Vane thrust back the cabin slide and motioned the others below. The place was brightly lighted by a nickeled lamp, though it was scarcely four feet high and the centerboard trunk occupied the middle of it. A wide cushioned locker ran along either side a foot above the floor, and a swing-table, fixed above the trunk, filled up

most of the space between. There was no cloth on the table, but it was invitingly laid out with canned fruit, coffee, hot flapjacks and a big lake trout, for in the western bush most men can cook.

"You must help yourselves while we get sail upon the boat," said Vane cheerily. "The saloon's at your disposal—my partner and I have the forecastle. You will notice that there are blankets yonder, and as we'll have smooth water most of the way you should get some sleep. Perhaps you'd better keep the stove burning; and if you should like some coffee in the early morning you'll find it in the top locker."

He withdrew, closing the slide, and went forward with Carroll to shorten in the cable; but when they stopped beside the bitts his companion broke into a laugh.

"Is there anything amusing you?" Vane asked curtly.

"Well," drawled Carroll, "this country, of course, isn't England; but, for all that, it's desirable that a man who expects to make his mark in it should exercise a certain amount of caution. It strikes me that you're making a rather unconventional use of your new prosperity, and it might be prudent to consider how some of your friends in Vancouver may regard the adventure."

Vane sat down upon the bitts and took out his pipe.

"One trouble in talking to you is that I never know whether you're in earnest or not. You trot out your cold-blooded worldly wisdom—I suppose it is wisdom—and then you grin at it."

"It seems to me that's the only philosophic attitude," Carroll replied. "It's possible to grow furiously indignant with the restraints stereotyped people lay on one, but on the

whole it's wiser to bow to them and chuckle. After all, they've some foundation."

Vane looked up at him sharply.

"You've been right in the advice you have given me more than once. You seem to know how prosperous, and what you call stereotyped, people look at things. But you've never explained where you acquired the knowledge."

"Oh, that's quite another matter," laughed Carroll.

"Anyway, there's one remark of yours I'd like to answer. You would, no doubt, consider that I made a legitimate use of my money when I entertained that crowd of city people—some of whom would have plundered me if they could have managed it—in Vancouver. I didn't grudge it, of course, but I was a little astonished when I saw the wine and cigar bill. It struck me that the best of them scarcely noticed what they got—I think they'd been up against it at one time, as we have; and it would have done the rest of the guzzlers good if they'd had to work with the shovel all day on pork and flapjacks. But we'll let that go. What have you and I done that we should swill in champagne, while a girl with a face like that one below and a child who dances like a fairy haven't enough to eat? You know what I paid for the last cigars. What confounded hogs we are!"

Carroll laughed outright. There was not an ounce of superfluous flesh upon his comrade, who was hardened and toughened by determined labor. With rare exceptions, which included the occasions when he had entertained or had been entertained in Vancouver, his greatest indulgence had been a draught of strong green tea from a blackened pannikin, though he had at times drunk nothing but river

water. The term hog appeared singularly inappropriate as applied to him.

"Well," replied Carroll, "you'll no doubt get used to the new conditions by and by; and in regard to your latest exploit, there's a motto on your insignia of the Garter which might meet the case. But hadn't we better heave her over her anchor?"

They seized the chain, and a sharp, musical rattle rang out as it ran below, for the hollow hull flung back the metallic clinking like a sounding-board. When the cable was short-up, they grasped the halyards and the big gaff-mainsail rose flapping up the mast. They set it and turned to the head-sails, for though, strictly speaking, a sloop carries only one, the term is loosely applied in places, and as Vane had changed her rig, there were two of them to be hoisted.

"It's a fair wind, and I dare say we'll find more weight in it lower down," commented Carroll. "We'll let the staysail lie and run her with the jib."

When they set the jib and broke out the anchor, Vane took the helm, and the sloop, slanting over until her deck on one side dipped close to the frothing brine, drove away into the darkness. The lights of the settlement faded among the trees, and the black hills and the climbing firs on either side slipped by, streaked by sliding vapors. A crisp, splashing sound made by the curling ripples followed the vessel; the canoe surged along noisily astern; and the frothing and gurgling grew louder at the bows. They were running down one of the deep, forest-shrouded inlets which, resembling the Norwegian fiords, pierce the Pacific littoral of Canada; though there are no Scandinavian pines to compare with the

tremendous conifers which fill all the valleys and climb high to the snow-line in that wild and rugged land.

There was no sound from the cabin, and Vane decided that his guests had gone to sleep. The sloop was driving along steadily, with neither lift nor roll, but when, increasing her speed, she piled the foam up on her lee side and the canoe rode on a great white wave, he glanced toward his companion.

"I wonder how the wind is outside?" he questioned.

Carroll looked around and saw the white mists stream athwart the pines on a promontory they were skirting.

"That's more than I can tell. In these troughs among the hills, it either blows straight up or directly down, and I dare say we'll find it different when we reach the sound. One thing's certain—there's some weight in it now."

Vane nodded agreement, though an idea that troubled him crept into his mind.

"I understand that the steamboat skipper will run in to land some Siwash he's bringing down. It will be awkward in the dark if the wind's on-shore."

Carroll made no comment, and they drove on. As they swept around the point, the sloop, slanting sharply, dipped her lee rail in the froth. Ahead of them the inlet was flecked with white, and the wail of the swaying firs came off from the shadowy beach and mingled with the gurgling of the water.

"We'll have to tie down a reef and get the canoe on board," suggested Carroll.

"Here, take the tiller a minute!"

Scrambling forward Vane rapped on the cabin slide and then flung it back. Mrs. Marvin lay upon the leeward locker with a blanket thrown over her and with the little girl at her feet; Miss Blake sat on the weather side with a book in her hand.

"We're going to take some sail off the boat," he explained. "You needn't be disturbed by the noise."

"When do you expect to meet the steamer?" Miss Blake inquired.

"Not for two or three hours, anyway."

Vane fancied that the girl noticed the hint of uncertainty in his voice, and he banged the slide to as he disappeared.

"Down helm!" he shouted to Carroll.

There was a banging and thrashing of canvas as the sloop came up into the wind. They held her there with the jib aback while they hauled the canoe on board, which was not an easy task; and then with difficulty they hove down a reef in the mainsail. It was heavy work, because there was nobody at the helm; and the craft, falling off once or twice while they leaned out upon the boom with toes on her depressed lee rail, threatened to hurl them into the frothing water. Neither of them was a trained sailor; but on that coast, with its inlets and sounds and rivers, the wanderer learns readily to handle sail and paddle and canoe-pole.

They finished their task; and when Vane seized the helm Carroll sat down under the shelter of the coaming, out of the flying spray.

"We'll probably have some trouble putting your friends on board the steamer, even if she runs in," he remarked. "What are you going to do if there's no sign of her?"

"It's a question I've been shirking for the last half-hour," Vane confessed.

"It would be very slow work beating back up this inlet; and even if we did so there isn't a stage across the island for several days. No doubt, you remember that you have to see that contractor on Thursday; and there's the directors' meeting, too."

"It's uncommonly awkward," Vane answered dubiously.

Carroll laughed.

"It strikes me that your guests will have to stay where they are, whether they like it or not; but there's one consolation—if this wind is from the northwest, which is most likely, it will be a fast run to Victoria. Guess I'll try to get some sleep."

He disappeared down a scuttle forward, leaving Vane somewhat disturbed in mind. He had contemplated taking his guests for merely a few hours' run, but to have them on board for, perhaps, several days was a very different thing. Besides, he was far from sure that they would understand the necessity for keeping them, and in that case the situation might become difficult. In the meanwhile, the sloop drove on, until at last, toward morning, the beach fell back on either hand and she met the long swell tumbling in from the Pacific. The wind was from the northwest and blowing moderately hard; there was no light as yet in the sky above the black heights to the east; and the onrushing swell grew higher and steeper, breaking white here and there. The sloop plunged over it wildly, hurling the spray aloft; and it cost Vane a determined effort to haul in his sheets as the wind drew ahead. Shortly afterward, the beach faded

altogether on one hand, and the sea piled up madly into foaming ridges. It seemed most improbable that the steamer would run in to land her Indian passengers, but Vane drove the sloop on, with showers of stinging brine beating into her wet canvas and whirling about him.

As the Pacific opened up, he found it necessary to watch the seas that came charging down upon her. They were long and high, and most of them were ridged with seething foam. With a quick pull on the tiller, he edged her over them, and a cascade swept her forward as she plunged across their crests. Though there were driving clouds above him, it was not very dark and he could see for some distance. The long ranks of tumbling combers did not look encouraging, and when the plunges grew sharper and the brine began to splash across the coaming that protected the well he wished that they had hauled down a second reef. He could not shorten sail unassisted, however; nor could he leave the helm to summon Carroll, who was evidently sleeping soundly in the forecastle, without rousing his passengers, which he did not desire to do.

A little while later he noticed that a stream of smoke was pouring from the short funnel of the stove and soon afterward the cabin slide opened. Miss Blake crept out and stood in the well, gazing forward while she clutched the coaming.

Day was now breaking, and Vane could see that the girl's thin dress was blown flat against her. There was something graceful in her pose, and it struck him again that her figure was daintily slender. She wore no hat, and it was evident

that the wild plunging had no effect on her. He waited uneasily until she turned and faced him.

"We are going out to sea," she said. "Where's the steamer?"

It was a question Vane had dreaded; but he answered it honestly.

"I can't tell you. It's very likely that she has gone straight on to
Victoria."

He saw the suspicion in her suddenly hardening face, but the quick anger in it pleased him. He had not expected her to be prudish, but it was clear that the situation did not appeal to her.

"You expected this when you asked us to come on board!" she cried.

"No," Vane replied quietly; "on my honor, I did nothing of the kind. There was only a moderate breeze when we left, and when it freshened enough to make it unlikely that the steamer would run in, I was as vexed as you seem to be. As it happened, I couldn't go back; I must get on to Victoria as soon as possible."

She looked at him searchingly, but he fancied that she was slightly comforted.

"Can't you put us ashore?"

"It might be possible if I could find a sheltered beach farther on, but it wouldn't be wise. You would find yourselves twenty or thirty miles from the nearest settlement, and you could never walk so far through the bush."

"Then what are we to do?"

There was distress in the cry, and Vane answered it in his most matter-of-fact tone.

"So far as I can see, you can only reconcile yourselves to staying on board. We'll have a fresh, fair wind for Victoria, once we're round the next head, and with moderate luck we ought to get there late to-night"

"You're sure?"

Vane felt sorry for her.

"I'm afraid I can't even promise that; it depends upon the weather," he replied. "But you mustn't stand there in the spray. You're getting wet through."

She still clung to the coaming, but he fancied that her misgivings were vanishing, and he spoke again.

"How are Mrs. Marvin and the little girl? I see you have lighted the stove."

The girl sat down, shivering, in the partial shelter of the coaming, and at last a gleam of amusement, which he felt was partly compassionate, shone in her eyes.

"I'm afraid they're—not well. That was why I kept the stove burning; I wanted to make them some tea. There is some in the locker—I thought you wouldn't mind."

"Everything's at your service, as I told you. You must make the best breakfast you can. The nicest things are at the back of the locker."

She stood up, looking around again. The light was growing, and the crests of the combers gleamed a livid white. Their steep breasts were losing their grayness and changing to dusky blue and slatey green, but their blurred coloring was atoned for by their grandeur of form. They

came on, ridge on ridge, in regularly ordered, tumbling phalanxes.

"It's glorious!" she exclaimed, to his astonishment. "Aren't you carrying a good deal of sail?"

"We'll ease the peak down when we bring the wind farther aft. In the meanwhile, you'd better get your breakfast, and if you come out again, put on one of the coats you'll find below."

She disappeared, and Vane felt relieved. Though the explanation had proved less difficult than he had anticipated, he was glad that it was over, and the way in which she had changed the subject implied that she was satisfied with it. Half an hour later, she appeared again, carrying a loaded tray, and he wondered at the ease of her movements, for the sloop was plunging viciously.

"I've brought you some breakfast. You have been up all night."

Vane laughed.

"As I can take only one hand from the helm, you will have to cut up the bread and canned stuff for me. Draw out that box and sit down beneath the coaming, if you mean to stay."

She did as he told her. The well was about four feet long, and the bottom of it about half that distance below the level of the deck. As a result of this, she sat close at his feet, while he balanced himself on the coaming, gripping the tiller. He noticed that she had brought out an oilskin jacket with her.

"Hadn't you better put this on first? There's a good deal of spray," she said.

Vane struggled into the jacket with some difficulty, and she smiled as she handed him up a slice of bread and canned meat.

"I suppose you can manage only one piece at a time," she laughed.

"Thank you. That's about as much as you could expect one to be capable of, even allowing for the bushman's appetite. I'm a little surprised to see you looking so fresh."

"Oh, I used to go out with the mackerel boats at home—we lived at the ferry. It was a mile across the lough, and with the wind westerly the sea worked in."

"The lough? I told Carroll that you were from the Green Isle."

It struck him that this was, perhaps, imprudent, as it implied that they had been discussing her; but, on the other hand, he fancied that the candor of the statement was in his favor.

"Have you been long out here?" he added.

The girl's face grew wistful.

"Four years. I came out with Larry—he's my brother. He was a forester at home, and he took small contracts for clearing land. Then he married—and *I* left him."

Vane made a sign of comprehension.

"I see. Where's Larry now?"

"He went to Oregon. There was no answer to my last letter; I've lost sight of him."

"And you go about with Mrs. Marvin? Is her husband living?"

Sudden anger flared up in the girl's blue eyes, though he knew that it was not directed against him.