



FIVE days from San Francisco the British steamer *Sussex Bride* sighted a small boat in which were three men, one still living and the other two dead. The boat, on which was painted the name *El Dorado*, was hoisted on board the *Sussex Bride*. The man who was alive was wrapped in blankets and dosed with warm brandy and water; the men who were dead were sewn up in canvas and buried.

That same evening the eastwardbound mail boat came up and the *Sussex Bride*, not being equipped with wireless, hoisted many flags and painfully spelled out news of the disaster to the *El Dorado* and of the rescue of the man, Drixley.

At four bells in the first watch the captain looked into the spare berth where the survivor of the *El Dorado* was sleeping.

"How is he?" he asked.

"Ell get better, sir," said the steward. "But 'e's been talkin' to hisself about the ship bein' afire."

The captain waited. Presently the man in the bunk began to speak in a low tone:

"My ——! He's dead. I've killed him!"

"E ain't said that before," said the steward.

NEXT morning Drixley opened his eyes and asked for some one called Trander. Then he seemed to sense something wrong.

"Where am I?" he said. "Good —— the ship was on fire!"

Later in the day he told the captain that he had been a passenger on the *El Dorado* and that his name was Smith. The captain, remembering the name Drixley in the pocketbook, did not argue.

Twenty-four hours afterward, followed by the steward who protested that he was "doin' 'isself 'arm," Drixley staggered on deck, and, holding on to a stanchion, looked about him with curious, worried eyes.

"Captain," he said, nodding astern toward the setting sun, "are we headed east?"

"Didn't I tell you we were bound for San Francisco?" said the captain. "Why, what's wrong?"

Drixley assured him there was nothing wrong; nevertheless he could not hide the horror in his face and voice. He

was quite a young man, very much burnt by his exposure in the open boat, very thin and worn, with hollows in his cheeks and eyes unnaturally bright. The captain decided that he liked him; all the same he was puzzled.

"Drixley," he said suddenly, "what made you say your name was Smith?"

Drixley shot a startled glance at him.

"I must have been dreamin' if I said that. Drixley's my name. California's my State. I'm a rancher."

"Ah!" said the captain, who had read many books about the Wild West. "Cattle, cowpunchers, roundups."

"A few head uh cattle maybe," said Drixley; "otherwise hogs, alfalfa, wheat. I do purty well, an' I guess I'll do better still as soon as a deal I got—"

He broke off with a kind of choking noise in his throat.

"I ain't as strong as I thought."

"You'd better turn in," said the captain.

And all through the first watch he paced to and fro on the upper bridge, wondering what grim terror it was that haunted Drixley.

THE night before the *Sussex Bride* reached the Golden Gate there was a tap at the door of the chartroom.

"Come in," growled the captain.

Drixley stood at the threshold.

"May I speak to you a moment, captain?"

"Take a seat, Mr. Drixley. What's amiss?"

Drixley dropped on to the plush covered settee and began to talk.

"Captain," he said, "you're takin' me back where I come from. I left San Francisco because I killed a man. Yes, it's the truth—one evening down by the

waterfront, China Basin way. I was standin' on the edge uh the wharf, lookin' across at Oakland, when I heard some one at the back uh me. I turned quick an' there was Palling yankin' out his gun.

"I grabbed an iron bar an' hit him just as he fired. He was crazy, I guess, but that didn't make no diff'rence. I'd killed him. I can't get the sight uh him out uh my mind, layin' there with his mouth open—"

"But," said the captain slowly, "you did it in self-defense, didn't you?"

"I ain't sure sometimes. My head aches if I try to think too much. He'd no reasons fer sayin' I'd ruined him, neither. Yuh see, captain, he'd always been kind uh jealous. Palling wasn't a worker—I was. I went ahead—he didn't.

"One day he come an' wanted to buy my ranch. He was too anxious. He tried again an' again. It was oil, uh course. He'd got to hear whispers uh what was comin'. How, —— knows! But I wouldn't sell. An then a pal uh mine put me wise, an' I went to San Francisco with Palling after me."

For a time there was no sound in the chartroom but the creaking of the wheel chains and the noise of the steam steering gear and the rumble of the cranks in the engine room.

Presently Drixley roused himself and went on.

"I got an offer from some uh the big int'rests an' closed the deal. Palling would uv done the same with my land if I'd let him. He was waitin' in Market Street.

"'Hello!' I says. 'I sold the oil rights. Thanks fer the hint.'

"Palling always had been a bit soft in the head; he purty nigh went mad right there. I'd ruined him, he said, an' he'd get even.

"Mebbe I made a mistake, laughin' at him, but honest, captain, I never give

him another thought. I hadn't nothin' to do fer an hour or two an' I went fer a walk round the waterfront. An' then—why, then, Palling come up an' tried to kill me. When I seen he was dead, I got scairt an' beat it.

"That night I met a friend, captain uh the *El Dorado*, an' went aboard. Yuh know the rest, don't yuh? I'm goin' back to San Francisco. Fate, ain't it? I'd be obliged, captain, if you'd send fer the police soon's we get there."

"Worst of it is," said the captain, "the day we picked you up I signaled the mail boat to say you were safe—they'd pass it on by wireless."

Drixley laughed.

"Clinched it, I guess."

"Mr. Drixley," said the captain, "there's always a chance. If you'd care to try it—You needn't tell me, you know."

Drixley shook his head.

"No, cap, I can't dodge what's comin'. I got away in the *El Dorado*—burnt. I get picked up by the *Sussex Bride*, bound fer San Francisco. Yuh tell the mail boat yuh got me. Don't it look like fate, hey?"

"They'll know it was me killed Palling. I went around leavin' clues aplenty. There was my hat with my name in it. I dropped that, — knows where; but when I got back to the Embarcadero I was bareheaded. Palling killed—me the last person he was seen with—me missin'. No, sir; no use dodgin'. I'm goin' back, an' then—"

He smiled grimly.

"*Quien sabe*—"

THE captain of the *Sussex Bride* was not happy; the thought of what might happen to Drixley depressed him.

Yet the meeting between the detectives and Drixley, soon after the

Sussex Bride was tied up alongside the pier, was not quite what he had pictured. Afterward he had a confused impression in his mind that half the officials of the port of San Francisco, medical, immigration and customs, plainclothes detectives, newspapermen, representatives of the British consul general, the consignees, the ship's agents, as well as one of the owners of the schooner *El Dorado* and various weeping relatives of the *El Dorado* crew, had managed to force their way past the steward into the little mess room where every one had talked and it was impossible to make out who they all were and what business they had on board his ship.

To the captain the most perplexing part of the whole affair was that the detectives had to be persuaded to take Drixley away. One of them, a big man with a round face, asked why he had sent for them.

"I sent word we had Drixley for you, though—you must have known—"

"I don't understand," said the round-faced man.

No one else seemed to understand, either.

And then Drixley said that he had killed Palling and that they had better arrest him. The detectives looked at him as if they thought he was crazy. They knew he had been saved from the *El Dorado*, but who was Palling? Some one said, wasn't Palling the man who was missing? His wife had been making inquiries. And at last after a good deal of arguing it was decided to do as Drixley asked.

Drixley seemed relieved by the decision.

"I killed him anyway," he said.

The crew of the *Sussex Bride* crowded the rail to watch him go ashore.

"Good by all," he said. "So long,

cap. Thanks fer what yuh done.”

“Good by,” said the captain. “An’ best of luck.”

Drixley turned away. All at once he stopped.

“My ——!” he said in a strangled tone. “Look!”

He pointed to a shabby looking man with a white face and stubbly black beard, a mean looking man with mean eyes.

“Jack!” said the man with the stubbly beard. “Jack!”

His voice broke.

“You—you keep off, —— yuh! Keep off!”

“It’s Palling,” shouted Drixley. “Palling, golden him—alive!”

He grabbed at Falling’s throat and shook him till he began to screech.

“What happened?”

“You leave me alone. Stop him. I been through ——. You hit me—I didn’t do nothin’. Ow! You’re chokin’ me. When I come to, Jack, you wasn’t there—only yer

hat—an’ I—I thought yuh was dead an’ fallen into the water—”

“An’ what made yuh think that, yuh liar? Tell me or I’ll croak yuh.”

“Because uh my gun— Ow! You’re killin’ me—”

“Yuh shot at me, you dod-blasted crook!”

Drixley still held him by the throat, and not even the round-faced man made any move to interfere.

“Shot at me——”

“Yeh, I shot at yuh—an’—an’ I thought yuh was dead, Jack. Yuh done me enough harm—lemme go! I been hidin’ ever since, an’ I—I read in the paper yuh was picked up—an’ I been waitin’ to make sure.”

“I wouldn’t be surprised by nothin’,” said the captain of the *Sussex Bride*. “Not even if it was to rain rubies—not even if we were to get a charter for home.”