



SNARING THE SEA FOX

By JAMES K. WATERMAN

The French thought they had him—this Sea Fox—this little Yankee adventurer. And indeed it looked as though he had at last been run to earth. For not a gunshot off his Wild Pigeon's quarter the French frigate Araignee thundered down the wind—and ahead lay the dread reef called "Dutchman's Grave"!

THAT thick, clammy mist peculiar to the Gulf of Guinea, which had enshrouded the French frigate Araignee during the night suddenly lifted about eight in the morning, disclosing on her starboard bow a large brigantine, well within gunshot, and heading into the coast under an immense press of canvas.

"A slaver bound into Old Calabar!" exclaimed Commodore Murat, a tall, stiff man with bushy black side-whiskers and eyes cold and gray as polished stone.

Focusing his glasses on the strange vessel he took a long look, swore softly beneath his breath, and turned again to his first lieutenant, who was new to the West African Coast.

"*Mon Dieu!* Mr. Lassan, that is the

Yankee contraband-runner and slaver, the *Wild Pigeon*, the fastest keel on this coast—commanded by Captain Pepper—the Sea Fox, y' know—the most notorious smuggler in the trade and a man who is acknowledged to have no rival in the way of daring and success."

The commodore's agitation increased with his speech and he almost shouted, "Beat to quarters, Mr. Lassan, and give her a shot as soon as you can. The Sea Fox will doubtless engage us, for there is no surrender about him. He'll show fight, I'm sure!"

A hum of excitement ran through the thirty-two gun frigate as the men ran to quarters, for here was indeed a quarry worthy of any ship's metal. In another half-minute the frigate yawned slightly, a sheet of red flame issued from her starboard bowchaser followed

by the sullen boom of a twenty-four pounder and a shot kicked up the spray close alongside of the *Wild Pigeon's* port quarter.

But contrary to the commodore's expectations, the Sea Fox made no hostile movement; holding his ship steadily on her course, her long, black, exquisitely proportioned hull cleaving the blue sea with all the grace and speed of a dolphin.

"*Mon Dieu!* He thinks he can escape from under my guns!" muttered the commodore, striding excitedly up and down the quarterdeck. "And he will, too," he added to himself, "if I keep off to bring my broadside to bear. I'll have to depend on my bow-chasers to wing him."

For a few minutes the black brigantine gradually increased her lead over the frigate, and the foaming bar of the Calabar River could be seen plainly about two miles ahead, when, of a sudden, the wind dropped to a faint zephyr. The slaver had run into a nearly calm streak. And while they were fanning across this the *Araignee*, which still held the wind, was overhauling them hand over hand and already her shots were spraying the water all about the contraband-vessel. But as yet no shot had struck her and this fact awakened a suspicion in the mind of the commodore. It suddenly dawned upon him that possibly the Sea Fox had sympathizers aboard the frigate. Then he remembered that among his crew were some men of the wrecked French brig *L'Aigle* whom the Sea Fox, at imminent risk of being captured meanwhile, had rescued and taken into Ayudah, nine months ago.

"Mr. Lassan," ordered the commodore dryly, "have the men serving the guns relieved and see if the firing is not more accurate!"

It seemed to be, but just as a shot tore through the second reef-band of the smuggler's mains'l she got the wind again, a sweet, strong breeze from the eastward. But it came too late. The frigate was now too close for the Sea Fox to hope to escape by

depending on the speed of his craft alone. Realizing this, the *Wild Pigeon's* foremost hands—thirty seasoned ocean-scamps—looked inquiringly aft at their famous leader.

The Sea Fox regarded them with his curiously unflinching black eye—he had but one—and waved his hand in a reassuring gesture, his rugged, powerful features lighted by a smile. In the midst of this danger, imminent and threatening, which would have broken the spirit of a less resolute man he seemed actually happy.

Turning his short, thickset figure to windward the Sea Fox took a squint at the *Araignee* soaring down, her grinning guns run out, and gave a rapid order to Tom Dollar, the long, lanky mate, who immediately left the poop, a wide grin on his leathern countenance.

PULSES leaping with the fever of the chase so that he could hardly hold the glasses to his eyes, Commodore Murat saw the *Wild Pigeon*, of a sudden, yaw wildly and then come staggering up into the wind, while her sheets and braces were let fly. The next instant her crew began running along the decks, dragging long poles which they flung over the side and began pushing on frantically.

"Hurrah, hurrah, Mr. Lassan!" exploded the commodore in a very frenzy of delight. "The clever Sea Fox is caught at last! He's gone aground on 'The Dutchman's Grave,' part of the Bakasi Banks. I didn't think it ran out quite this far, though. See they are trying to shove the vessel off. Ha-ha, much good it will do them. We—" He broke off suddenly, his face blanching as he gave an apprehensive glance at his three soaring steeples of canvas and then across the long green swells to where the breakers were blossoming white as they boomed on the yellow African sands.

"*Mon Dieu!* We're not sure of the water under us either, Mr. Lassan!" he interjected hurriedly. We might go aground,

too. Hard down your wheel and let her come to the wind. Back your main-yard!"

These orders were executed in a twinkling and the first lieutenant sought the commodore for further instructions.

"Man first, second, and third cutters, Mr. Lissan!" he directed, "and pull over to the slaver and take her by boarding. If the Sea Fox attempts to repel you, tell him unless he desists you will draw your boats out of the line of fire and signal the frigate to give him a broadside. But in any case he can't escape. See how vainly his crew are trying to shove her off with the poles!"

Mr. Lissan smiled at his volatile commander, who was so delighted at cornering the great Sea Fox that he was now actually doing a little dance-step.

In three minutes the same number of boats were dropped into the water, each one full of bluejackets armed with pistol and cutlass. They had hardly gotten a cable's length away from the frigate, however, when the commodore's face underwent a frightful contortion as he saw the slavers suddenly drop their poles overboard and make a dash for the running-gear. In another minute the beautiful brigantine with every stitch of canvas set was flying like a monstrous albatross over the rippling sea for the bar, now about a mile and a half distant.

"Tricked, by God, tricked!" bellowed the commodore like a bull in pain and slammed his glasses to the deck with such violence that the lenses flew about the deck. "That damned Sea Fox wasn't aground at all—he just pretended to be so as to render us temporarily helpless!"

Commodore Murat's lips trembled so with impotent rage that it was all he could do to stutter the order to recall the boats and then fill the yards. But all this took precious time, as the Sea Fox had very nicely calculated, and before the frigate was again in pursuit the black brigantine was safely out of gunshot.

"The game is not played out yet, sir," ventured the first lieutenant. "Look at the bar! It would be next to madness for the Sea Fox to attempt it, sir!"

HOPE indeed revived in the breast of the fuming, commodore as he scanned the bar. It was one boiling mass of surf; great green billows rolling in and breaking on it and filling the air with spume. Would the Sea Fox dare to take his vessel through that maelstrom or wait until slack water when the bar could be navigated in comparative safety? If the Sea Fox decided to wait, as it appeared he must, there was a chance for the frigate to work inshore and take the brigantine by boarding.

But in another minute the commodore got an inkling of the desperate nature of the man he was endeavoring to capture. Through another pair of glasses he saw the Sea Fox being lashed to the wheel. Her crew then sprang upon the sheerpoles and clustered in the lower rigging. Not a halliard or sheet was started.

Breathlessly the men on the *Araignee* watched as the *Wild Pigeon*, her broad canvas wings stretching far out over the boiling water and towering in graceful symmetry to the blue African sky, hurled herself into the flying spume.

The Sea Fox was steering her like a thread through a needle and both skipper and ship were getting the bath of their lives. For part of the time the green, white-maned sea-horses were racing over her decks almost to the top of her bulwarks. Then the noble craft would shake herself, rise on a monstrous billow, her long polished hull shooting out of water until nearly half her keel, with the bright copper sheathing flashing in the sun, was visible. Then she would be buried again leaving nothing to be discerned but two snowy canvas spires rushing through acres of foam and the man-of-war hawks circling and dodging those sky-scraping trucks and

screaming their exultation. One minute more and the *Wild Pigeon* had crossed the bar without parting so much as a ropeyarn.

An involuntary murmur of admiration came from nearly three hundred throats aboard the frigate as the *Wild Pigeon* shot into smooth water and trimmed her yards for the run up the river to Old Calabar (Duketown). She was safe now in the territory of Duke Ephraim, king of Calabar. Two hours later the *Wild Pigeon* was snugly moored in the midst of thick mangroves, close to the slave-baracoons, and about a quarter-mile above Duketown.

IN A black and brooding silence Commodore Murat watched the Yankee brigantine until she melted into the shadows of the high wooded banks. Then he gave orders for the frigate to haul her wind and lay off and on until the turn of the tide. After which he strode into his cabin his eyes glaring from under the frowning brows like those of a madman's.

"I'll be ruined—ruined!" he grated, slamming his gold-banded cap onto the table. "Yes, I'm done for if the Governor of San Luiz ever learns of the manner in which I've been outmaneuvered by that devilish Yankee." In a sudden fury he dashed his fist onto the polished mahogany: "*Mon Dieu!* I will become the laughingstock of the squadron. I might possibly be court-martialed! The one thing that will save me now is to capture the Sea Fox. He must leave this river in irons, my prisoner!"

Late in the afternoon the *Araignee* sailed up the river, and rounding-to in a direct line with the King of Calabar's English house, let go her anchor.

"I shall have to set a snare for that Sea Fox," the commodore confided to his first lieutenant. "Match cunning with cunning so to speak." He let his eyes rove over the town of palm-thatched huts, shaded by great tamarinds and coco-palms, until they rested on a

thatched-over hulk moored to a bamboo-landing, and flying the French flag from her stub of a mizzen-mast.

"There is Trader Target's hulk over yonder," he mused. "He is a Frenchman transacting business under our flag. If the Sea Fox should set foot aboard there he would be in French territory in a manner of speaking. Hm, we shall see!"

"You mean, sir," asked the first officer, looking puzzled, "that you can't arrest the Sea Fox anywhere else but on the hulk?"

"Exactly. You see that while we are negotiating with Duke Ephraim for those Ibinku concessions, we naval commanders have orders not to molest any vessels trading in his territory unless they are known beyond doubt, to have slaves actually aboard. And I wouldn't care to take the responsibility of arresting the Sea Fox even on the hulk but for the fact that he is an escaped convict."

"An escaped convict!" echoed Mr. Lassan. "Why how could that be, sir?"

"Oh, you haven't heard. Well a little over two years ago one of the squadron found him aboard of a French slaving schooner coming down the coast and the judge at San Luiz sentenced him to ten years in the Brest prison. He served five months and then escaped in some mysterious fashion. There is still a reward of five thousand dollars for his capture!"

"That being the case," decided Mr. Lassan, "I doubt very much whether such a clever rogue will ever step foot on the hulk while we are here."

Commodore Murat shrugged his shoulders. "I doubt it myself. But I'll set my trap aboard of the hulk nevertheless. There is a bare chance the Sea Fox may step into it. He's reckless enough to do most anything." He paused and slammed his fist into the open palm of his left hand, "But I'll get him eventually. Listen, Mr. Lassan. Rear-Admiral Fusenot, the Governor of San Luiz y'know, is

bound down the coast on a dispatch-boat on his way here. A Mpongwe runner reported him a little to the north of the Bonny River yesterday. That means he'll probably be here sometime on Sunday, the day after tomorrow. Well, as soon as he clinches this concession with Duke Ephraim I shall have a free hand and I'm then going to throw a boarding-party aboard the *Wild Pigeon* and take the Sea Fox prisoner at all hazards. Remember he is an escaped convict and wanted by the French Government."

THAT night the Sea Fox had two visitors. The first to arrive was the Mpongwe named Krinji, the river pilot and chief of the Egbo spies for Duke Ephraim. Besides speaking all the native dialects, he understood English, French, and naturally Spanish, the language of the coast. That Krinji could speak French was an accomplishment the commodore little dreamed the pilot possessed and he had carried on the conversation with his first lieutenant, outlining his plans, unguardedly in the presence of the spy, who was standing at the time nearby, apparently unconcerned, gazing over the muddy river. Forthwith Krinji made the Sea Fox acquainted with the commodore's scheme and then departed hurriedly to amuse himself with the gathering in front of the evening bonfire in the square by the palaver house.

Twenty minutes later the next visitor boarded the *Wild Pigeon* and was warmly greeted by the Sea Fox and Tom Dollar. It was Trader Target from the hulk, a thin, tired-looking man with a kindly cast of countenance. He sank into a chair opposite the Sea Fox at the latter's invitation.

Clearing his throat the trader said finally, "I've come to tell you that Commodore Murat put five of his Senegalese, disguised as Kroomen, aboard my hulk not an hour ago. I suppose you know what he did that for, Captain Pepper?"

"To be sure I do," said the Sea Fox, twirling his inevitable quill toothpick. "He's setting a snare for me. Thank ye for coming over an' tellin' me."

"Why shouldn't I. I haven't forgotten the time three years ago when that fire burned me out how you lent me the money and goods to start and—"

"Oh, belay that, Target!" interjected the Sea Fox reddening. "We can live but once, d'ye see. Tell me about the commodore. Guess he's all het up over that leetle trick I showed him this mornin'." The Sea Fox chuckled reminiscently.

The trader leaned over in his chair and lowered his voice.

"Something has got into him. I don't know what it is, but he offered me thirty-five hundred dollars in gold if I would decoy you aboard my hulk so that his men could take you."

"Jumpin' Judith!" boomed the Sea Fox sitting bolt upright in his chair. "Thirty-five hundred, eh. Even at that the Commodore ain't hurtin' himself none. He'd collect five thousand dollars for my capture, d'ye see. What next?"

"Well, in my business I have to pretend to be friends with everybody, of course, but after listening to his proposition I pointed out to him that it would be useless to go to all that bother for if he did get you a prisoner aboard of the frigate, some of the crew would probably manage to let you escape."

"H-mm. An' what did he say to that, Target?"

"He said he would take good care of that. He intends placing you in one of the staterooms adjoining his own cabin where he can keep you under personal surveillance."

"He said he'd put me in one o' them staterooms did he?" asked the Sea Fox eagerly.

"Yes. He will trust no one but himself

to guard you.”

FOLLOWED a long pause during which the Sea Fox chewed on his toothpick and every now and then scratched his short freckled nose meditatively.

“Let’s see, Target,” said the Sea Fox finally. “If ye had all that gold ye could go back to the south of France an’ set up that leetle wine-shop ye’re allus harpin’ on.”

The trader sighed and threw out his thin hands deprecatingly.

“True, but I would never betray a man like you for that hulk full of gold—no, not if I was starving!”

“I know it, ole feller,” agreed the Sea Fox heartily. “Now lemme think a minnit, an’ sorta get the twists out o’ this.”

After a little he mused, “One thing sartain, folks—if the commodore did take me prisoner he’d never leave the river till the Gov’ner o’ San Luiz arrived. That’s p’int number one. An* it looks like he’s got me completely bottled up here. There’s one o’ his cutters out thar’ now patrollin’ the river. An’ arter the Gov’nor settles his business one way or t’other the commodore intends to climb aboard here an’ yank me off by the neck. A hell of a prospect I must say.”

Cap’n Pepper grinned, scratched his nose and resumed.

“Now if the commodore had me in limbo aboard his frigate all this here vigilance would be relaxed, d’ye see. Tom Dollar here would be able to get the blacks aboard in readiness to sail sometime Sunday, which is the day arter tomorrow. Er, by the by, Target, you’ve been aboard the *Araignee* any number o’ times. Could ye gimme a plan o’ the commodore’s cabin.

Upon the trader saying that he could, the Sea Fox had him draw the plan on a piece of paper.

“What do you intend to do with it?” asked the trader, seeing the earnestness with

which the Sea Fox examined the sketch. “How can that help you, Captain?”

“This here is the key to the hull situation,” explained the Sea Fox smiling a little grimly. “Now brail out yer ears an’ listen, ye folks. Sunthin’ gotta be did darn quick. Fust I wanta know Target, could the commodore raise that thirty-five hundred dollars at a minnit’s notice?”

“Yes, he would get it from the French agent. And he said he would pay me half of the money upon my promising to get you aboard the hulk and the other half just as soon as he had you a prisoner. But why ask that?”

“Sall I wanta know, Target. Tomorrow sometime ye go an’ collect seventeen hundred and fifty dollars off’n the Commodore. Tell him that you’ve induced me to come aboard yer hulk that same evening to look at some tusks ye wanta sell me, d’ye see. I’ll be aboard ye ’bout eight-thirty—now don’t interrupt me,” as the trader and Tom Dollar leaped to their feet and began a storm of protest—“thar ain’t but one way outa this an’ that is for the commodore to take me in charge—for a while.”

AFTER supper, the next day, the Sea Fox brought a pair of marine handcuffs out of his room and had Tom Dollar snap them on his wrists. The Sea Fox then unwound a piece of fishline from the top button of his waistband. In the end of the line was a running bowline which he slipped down over the spindle of the lock in one of the cuffs and pulling back on the line with his teeth he drew the bolt. The handcuff slackened on his wrist and he slipped his hand out and went to work on the remaining iron. In less than three minutes from the time the irons were put on him the Sea Fox was, free.

“Hell’s lifts!” exclaimed the admiring Tom Dollar, “ye did that slick’s a whistle, cap’n. But, say, s’pose they ain’t got them kind o’ irons on the frigate. ’Twould be hell

to pay an' no pitch hot!"

"The *Araignee* uses the same kind," the skipper assured him. "Trader Target told me. But I'll take a bit of wire along in case. Now comes the principal part, Tom Dollar."

He stripped off his upper garments to the skin and then had the mate strap a short, double-barreled pistol underneath the upper part of his right arm close to the armpit in such a way that when the arm was extended, as it would be if the Sea Fox was searched for weapons, it was entirely free from contact with the body.

The Sea Fox put on his clothes and looked at his watch.

"Eight o'clock, Tom Dollar. Time I was goin'."

They went on deck and Robin Hood, the Negro bosun, brought the dinghy to the gangway.

"You know what to do, Tom Dollar," said the Sea Fox, "whether I weather this thing or not. An' if I don't come back at the time specified, jes' give my regards to the boys in the Astor House bar an' buy 'em a drink for me."

Drawing a deep breath he shook hands with Tom Dollar, gave a long look slow and aloft at his beloved vessel, climbed down into the dinghy, and was rowed over the river to the bamboo landing.

Sending Robin Hood back with the boat the Sea Fox walked rapidly up to the hulk. Coming to the gangladder, he mounted this jauntily and leaped over the rail. His feet had hardly touched the deck when nine men, among whom he recognized one with the epaulets of a lieutenant, rushed out of the shadowed bulwarks and surrounded him, their drawn cutlasses gleaming in the starlight.

"Jumpin' Judith, lufftenant!" laughed the Sea Fox. "This here is a reg'lar surprise, ain't it. An' cussed if ye ain't got a reg'lar boardin' party. I ain't that tough be I?"

"Glad to see you take it this way,

Captain Pepper," rejoined Mr. Lassan, his fine features brightening. "Rather have taken you on the high seas, though. Now, sergeant," he motioned to the sergeant of marines, who advanced and snapped a pair of handcuffs on the Sea Fox's wrists. The latter noted with no little satisfaction that they were of the same pattern as the ones he had experimented with.

The Sea Fox was then put into the cutter lying on the outside of the hulk, and in another ten minutes he was set aboard the frigate and ushered into the presence of the commodore. Murat was striding up and down on the thick cabin-carpet, under the brilliant rays of a big chased silver hanging lamp, and there was a look more of relief than triumph in his eyes as they fell on the little prisoner.

"So, Captain Pepper," he began smilingly, "you've decided to pay me a visit at last. Delighted to entertain you, I'm sure." He turned to the lieutenant. "You have searched him, I presume."

"Yes sir," said Mr. Lassan, and laid on the table the derringer and pen-knife he had taken from the slaver's pockets.

"Sure that is all, Mr. Lassan? We can't be too careful, y'know."

He went up to the Sea Fox and deftly patted his clothing from head to foot, the slaver meanwhile smiling and extending his arms apparently to facilitate the search.

"Very good, Mr. Lassan, your work was thorough. You may leave the prisoner with me, I will assume personal charge of him."

THE officer saluted and withdrew with his men. The commodore closed the door, and coming back, said, "*Mon Dieu*, Captain Pepper! You have the reputation of being so clever. Is it possible you were not aware that Trader Target's hulk was French territory?"

Raising his manacled hands the Sea Fox fished a toothpick from the pocket of his pongee shirt, placed it in his mouth and smiled

a little ruefully.

"To be sure I knowed it was, commodore, but Duke Ephraim give me to understand that ye wouldn't molest me while I was in the river unless, in course, I was takin' natives aboard."

"Nor would I had you been a mere slaver, Captain Pepper. Evidently you forgot that you are an escaped convict. No agreement we have with the king provides for the immunity of such as you.

"Guess ye win, all right," conceded the Sea Fox. "But thar's jes' one thing I'd like to know. Did Target take any part in settin' that snare for me?"

"No, no, how could you possibly think that," said the commodore hurriedly. "I've had men aboard the hulk since the night of the day on which you arrived."

"Glad to hear that," said the Sea Fox. "I allus regarded Target as a friend, d'ye see. And," he added mentally, "Target will get his wine-shop in France." After a little pause he said, "If ye don't mind, commodore, I'd like to turn in somewhere. I've had ruther a busy day an' in course I never suspected this."

"Just a moment, captain, and I show you your room." The commodore went to a desk, pulled open a drawer, and took out a pair of shiny new handcuffs. To his dismay the Sea Fox saw that they were Poulet's patent. It would take him at least two hours to pick those locks with the wire he had concealed in his trousers waistband.

Commodore Murat snapped them on his wrists. "Double-irons for you, Captain Pepper. Your ability is too well known for you to be trusted with ordinary handcuffs. Now come with me."

He flung open the door of a stateroom and motioned the Sea Fox to enter. The latter found himself in a splendidly furnished little cabin with a deep wide berth.

"Get all the rest you can, my dear captain," advised the commodore. "Rear-

Admiral Fusenot, the Governor of San Luiz, will be aboard tomorrow, and I want you to look well when you meet him."

"Thanks," smiled the little smuggler. "I'll try an' give him a hearty greeting."

"That is the proper spirit, Captain Pepper," approved the commodore, and bidding his prisoner good-night, he locked the door carefully.

A LONG about sundown, the following afternoon, the Sea Fox pricked up his ears at the sound of an unusual briskness over his head on the deck.

"Jumpin- Judith!" he exclaimed, "Here comes the Gov'nor of San Luiz or I'm a Dutchman!"

BOOM! The frigate trembled to the recoil of a twenty-four-pounder. Ten more guns were fired one after another, the eleven-gun salute accorded a visiting rear-admiral, and the Sea Fox knew that his surmises were correct.

"Now let's see," mused the Sea Fox. "I know the habits o' these navy folks pretty well an' I figger that the Gov'nor will have dinner fust, and arter his bilges is comfortably awash with champagne, he'll want to have a look at yours truly. Waal, I'll be ready fur him."

Cap'n Pepper glanced down at the double-irons on his wrists and chuckled. At the three meals served to him that day in his room the commodore and master-at-arms had been present and the commodore himself had relocked the irons when the prisoner had finished eating. And even an expert could not have told, unless he had taken the locks of the Poulet cuffs apart, that they had been tampered with in such a way that it only required a jerking movement of the wrists to spring them.

As the Sea Fox had conjectured, when dinner was over and cigars lighted, the Governor proposed to the commodore that they have a look at the famous prisoner. It was

then just eight-fifteen by the cabin clock and a minute later the Sea Fox was aroused by the turning of the key in the lock and as the door swung open wide he found himself confronted by the commodore and a short, thick-set man with a square, broad-boned face and restless gray eyes. This little man was all rigged out in the bullion epaulets and gold buttons of a rear-admiral and wore a glittering star on his left breast. Of course the Sea Fox needed no one to tell him that he was looking at the governor of San Luis.

Elevating his eye-glasses the governor surveyed the prisoner for a long moment in much the manner of one inspecting some strange wild animal at the zoo, and then observed, "So this is that clever American slaver is it; h—mm. Commodore Murat, permit me to congratulate you on this capture. You have performed a signal service and I shall emphasize that fact in my dispatches which I am forwarding soon to the Admiralty."

He had a high, squeaky voice which struck the Sea Fox as being strangely odd, issuing from that deep chest.

Turning from the beaming commodore, the governor addressed the prisoner, "You may come out into the cabin, my man. There are some questions I should like to ask you. You of course may answer at discretion."

The Sea Fox bowed and followed them into the luxurious apartment paneled in rosewood and mahogany and stood as far away from the direct rays of the great hanging lamp as he could.

The two officers seated themselves near the center-table and the Governor began, "If you should tell us how you managed to escape from the prison at Brest, Captain, doubtless you will be treated less rigorously when you are placed on trial."

The Sea Fox smiled and advanced two steps toward them.

"Ye wanta know, I take it, jes' what means I employed to break jail, Gov'nor?"

"Quite right, my man," said the governor graciously, scenting a confession.

"*I escaped somethin' like this!*" said the Sea Fox, his voice low and vibrant with lethal earnestness.

THE words had hardly left his lips when to the officers' surprise and horror the shackles flew from his wrists and a double-barreled pistol leaped from some part of his clothing into his hand, the polished steel bores pointed directly at them.

"One yelp out o' ye for help an' ye are dead meat," he warned them. "Ye know me!"

Indeed they did know him. And they sat motionless, recalling vividly to mind the many instances of the terrific power which this little man by sheer force of character had exerted over his enemies.

"I see ye prefer to live," observed the Sea Fox smiling grimly. Now, commodore, pick up them handcuffs an' iron yerself an' the gov'nor, cross-fashion. Ye know how it's done. Better be quick about it, too, afore I go sorta crazy an' start shootin' regardless."

"For God's sake, commodore!" muttered the governor, the color of ashes, "do as he tells you. His eye is glaring like a maniac's already!"

Like one in a trance the commodore obeyed, and when the irons were on the Sea Fox stepped up and rapped the locks of the Poulet cuffs smartly with the butt of his pistol, thus resetting the springs with which he had tampered.

"Good enough!" approved the Sea Fox. "Now kindly march into that room I stayed in."

When they were in the room the Sea Fox said: "I don't wanta be too harsh with ye gentlemen. I s'pos I oughta gag ye but if ye'll give me yer word o' honor ye won't call for help inside o' a half-hour I won't humiliate ye

that way.”

“You have my word for it,” promptly replied the Governor. “If I were gagged I’d be suffocated in no time. I can’t breathe through my nose.”

“How about ye, commodore? Gimme yer word?” asked the Sea Fox.

In a sullen tone the commodore agreed and the slaver locked them in the room. Then he crossed to the portieres at the back of the cabin and swept them back, disclosing a solid bulkhead.

“Here,” the Sea Fox told himself, his heavy jaws clamping on his toothpick, “Here is where I’ve slipped. But I couldn’t have foreseen this, nohow.”

The bulkhead had been built in back of the gun-ports since Trader Target had visited the cabin and he had told the Sea Fox that he would have an unobstructed access to the ports. The slaver’s original plan had been to overcome the commodore and then slip overboard out of one of the stern ports and swim to an old dismantled bark belonging to Duke Ephraim, anchored about a hundred yards down the river, where he would find a canoe waiting to convey him to the *Wild Pigeon*. Now the only way to get to the ports would be to leave the commodore’s cabin, pass the sentry at the door, and also pass in plain sight of the officers in the ward-room before he reached the alley-way. Quite out of the question.

“Pepper,” the Sea Fox told himself. “Ye are in a hell of a fix. Ye’ll have to do some tall scratchin’ to get outa this hole, an’ that’s a fact.”

And then through an open door of a stateroom, the one allotted to the Governor, he caught sight of the rear-admiral’s gold-laced chapeau and a cloak hanging against the bulkhead.

TEN minutes later the sentry before the door froze into attention and saluted as the

governor passed him hurriedly and made for the gangway. The junior officer on watch espied the cocked hat and naval cloak by the light of the gangway-lantern and hurried up to him in some trepidation, for the little governor was known to be rather eccentric in his ways.

“Lieutenant,” snapped the governor in his high squeaky voice, his face averted over the gangway. Dispense with all ceremony and get a boat here for me as quickly as possible. It is imperative that I see the King of Calabar at once.”

He spoke in Spanish but the officer attributed this to the fact that as there were men about he didn’t wish them to know the business he was going on.

In a twinkling a boat was gotten ready and the governor in almost indecent haste for one of his standing hurried down the gangladder, got into the boat and gave the order to shove off. Eight minutes later the governor was stepping ashore on the landing and without so much as a word to the boat-crew he scampered away and vanished amidst a group of palms.

“Queer old coot, that governor,” commented one of the sailors. “I’ve an idea he’s about half-seas over. Did any of you notice he ain’t got no coat on under that cloak. His hat was wrong side first and damned if he wasn’t wearing his sword on the starboard side. Must be pretty drunk, eh, mates?”

Presently the eyes of the officer on watch on the *Araignee* nearly popped from his head as he saw the *Wild Pigeon*, her towering canvas like two peaks of snow in the moonlight, come flying down the river. The officer at once sounded the general alarm, but it being Sunday night, the weekday discipline had been relaxed and before the singing, wine-drinking crew could respond and go to their stations the brigantine was upon them.

The next instant an electric thrill went through the ship’s complement as the sultry African river suddenly reverberated to the roar

of an eighteen-pounder close aboard. The *Wild Pigeon* was merely giving a parting salute, however—a blank charge—and immediately swerved back on her course like a gull dipping its wing. And by the time the frigate’s crew, working against wind and tide had hauled on the spring to their cable so as to get a broadside to bear the *Wild Pigeon*, going like a race-horse, had flashed out of sight behind the high bluffs of Dindo Point. She would, wind and weather permitting, never stop again this side of America—While the first lieutenant was staring at the point where the slaver had vanished a quartermaster came up and reported that he had seen a little man wearing an admiral’s cloak standing on the poop of the slaver and waving a gold-laced chapeau as she flew past.

Upon hearing this the first lieutenant was seized by a dread suspicion. Rushing down into the commodore’s cabin and hearing

some one kicking on the stateroom door his worst fears were realized as he unlocked it and beheld his two superiors shackled together—the governor minus his trousers.

On the table the Sea Fox had left a hasty scrawl addressed to Duke Ephraim and requesting him to reimburse the governor for the loss of his wearing apparel and the sword and to charge it to the Sea Fox’s account.

The little governor read it and chuckled. Unlike the commodore, he was a good loser.

“Call him slaver, pirate, or what you will, commodore,” he observed, “but I can’t help feeling that there is something really great about a man who will take the chances he does. And another thing, commodore, there is no doubt but that he feels he is engaged in a worthy trade and that we have no right to interfere. But I think I shall take him up, after all, on his offer to buy me new trousers!”