

*His Was Certainly a Singleness of Purpose—He Meant
to Sail the Seven Seas Below Decks*



LONG JOHN EAMES

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HE MUST have been a throwback from some ancient forebear. Spawn of a Phoenician furler of purple sails, possibly from some later Norse raider. For the sea was born in him, the sea plus a bent for machinery's kingdom of steel.

He landed in the *Lake Forrest's* bunkers before he knew forward from aft. He arrived at the handles of a bunker wheelbarrow direct from the glamor of a high school graduation and speeches about conquering the world. Long John Eames had departed the lure of city career to start at the bottom, a coal passer in a freighter's bowels. Life had begun at nineteen.

John Eames was lucky; he had tumbled onto Terry Regan, oiler. Barely ten minutes before sailing, Regan had led him aboard the *Lake Forrest*; Regan had shoved the close lipped young giant below in new dungarees. He liked the kid's silences, his modesty, his untried physique.

John Eames was unlucky, too. Regan

hadn't told him about the Second's good-for-nothing young brother. Regan had omitted to say that the Chief himself had sent that brother back ashore for drinking. He might have told John how the Second was hiding his babbling brother in his room, confident that the Chief would have to come to terms with him the last minute for want of a more decent coal passer.

Regan, however, had told John nothing. He, along with all the Second's watch, despised the worthless fellow, so he had hustled Long John aboard and below to work—to force the hand of Boggs, the second assistant. Boggs, junior, went ashore; Boggs, senior, cursed the lengthy apparition passing coal already. The only reason he didn't run John ashore was that he supposed the chief had hired the greenhorn.

And the only inkling of all this imparted to Long John Eames was in a speech. It was Terry Regan's longest speech to his stop-gap discovery; it was salve to his own conscience, as well, for the grief in store for John. "I'm warnin'

yer, kid, ye're in fer a ridin' aboard here. But you asked fer it, you said you hankered fer a license and here's where you start, at the bottom."

"By 'n' by I'll get me books and cram." John spoke soberly and economically, without inflection. He trundled the barrow into the dark bunker for more coal. Regan climbed back to his oiling—and to wonder about a guy like that. Already talkin' about books and crammin'!

FROM the lofty stokehold entrance, Second Assistant Engineer Boggs leered upon the lad who had replaced his useless brother. All last month through, Boggs had kept his protégé in his own watch where the other fire room denizens dared not report his loafing, dared not refuse to do his passing for him. Boggs resented John Eames; he watched John scoop and wheel and pile coal on the open plates as any passer can—and will if his back holds out. The Second spied on the kid long and often, at times he must have fathomed the dream in the lad's eyes. He cursed Long John, he despised him, he hankered for some flaw in the fellow's work or attitude, some excuse to ride the greenhorn, to blast that dream of career.

John Eames hadn't noticed; he was studying the art of stoking. Coal he moved, yes, but he caught that ceaseless rotation of feed, slice and rake. For he was going through that stage, in turn, on his way up the ladder to a license in the engine room—some day. He rather presumed that engineers would welcome ambition in a coal passer or stoker—if they noticed it at all.

One night came the inevitable. *The Lake Forrest* poked into a southerly below Gay Head. She was southbound, therefore light. Her toe spanked with resounding whacks that sent earthquakes all the way

aft to the stokehold. She trembled and reeled—and Eames' barrow zigzagged dizzily between bunker and fire room.

Eames himself wandered. Glows from ashpits danced before his eyes, the whole stokehold kaleidoscoped. His head swam, his stomach dragged anchor. The terrible moment arrived when the kid dropped his barrow handles precipitately and shot into a bunker—that rose with an abrupt lurch of the ship to meet him. He went more than his share of the way. He butted his skull to a wall of coal, he lost all save his bare stomach. While the coal pile above responded to the impact and black dust buried him to the shoulders. It filled his ears and closed them to the chorus of insistent yells out there for more coal.

Scarcely had he emerged from the avalanche when the *Lake Forrest* spanked and hove the other way. She caught him off balance and pitched him headlong again, this time out of the bunker. Into the open he volleyed to new trouble that was worse than nausea or plugged ears. For the watchful Second had heard the stokers' yells and come running below; he had waited long for this moment.

Boggs braced and grunted to the impact of a hundred and sixty pounds of reeling youth. He waited only for the sick youth to drop sprawl, then reached down as an eagle strikes. He clawed hold of the kid, rocked him to his wobbling legs and hove him at the barrow.

"Who ever told you you was a coal passer? Muckle to them handles, keep these firemen supplied. Smartly there!"

"Yes, sir," came thickly from the sooted apparition and firemen guffawed at the first words they'd ever heard from Long John. "I'll be all right d'rectly, sir." While he talked and spat coal, Eames clamped determined fists to the handles. He swayed uncertainly to the lift, but the Second got a glimpse of a will to do that

should have opened his eyes.

From that moment, John Eames despised the claws that had roughed him to his feet, the slack, truculent mouth that had cursed him. He despised Biff Boggs. Nor would the Second let him do otherwise. Craftily he stalked the kid, pretended a sort of sympathetic curiosity. Why was Eames here, what was on his mind? It sounded like a truce, but crafty Boggs was merely feigning civility to get silent John to talk about himself.

This from a licensed man, an engineer. John talked. Not extensively because he simply wasn't verbose; he said it all briefly. "I'm heading for a license up there, sir, in the engine room. Going to get the books and cram, then when I've served out my required time—"

Boggs roared in derision. His roar ended strangely in a fit of resentment. The nerve of this callow kid, telling him, of all persons, that he expected to equal Boggs' rating—after snatching the brother's job! Thus Boggs reasoned. Ah yes, and Boggs' intuition told him that that Long John had the stuff, he'd climb. From stokehold to oiling; eventually to a Third's ticket, then on up to Second. Blast him, his kind might go up to a chief's papers—while Boggs' spineless brother, with the opportunity thrown at him, preferred to drift; while Boggs himself stayed a second assistant. The engineer's blood boiled. The mere sight of Eames roiled him. He drove Long John to his grind as though the kid had committed a felony. And Terry Regan, within earshot, took his own lesson from the greenhorn he had injected into this situation aboard the *Lake Forrest*.

ONE noon off Lambert's Point, the *Lake Forrest* got a coal charter south to the Argentine and three firemen quit her. Eames saw his chance, he would advance to stoker's rating, it would be his

first step up. He knew, of course, that the Second has charge of the boiler room, so he asked Boggs for the job. And Boggs? He shoved a greasy hand into Long John's face and howled, "You bohunk. Git b'low. Learn to pass coal without dumpin' yer dinner into it. Go on, git outa my way!"

Henceforth he withheld nothing. He vented his bilious wrath upon the lad, he drove him unmercifully. Until the oiler who had brought him aboard regretted it. "But I warned yer," said Regan defensively, "I knowed Biff Boggs afore you did. What the hell did yer tell a mutt like him you was aimin' at a license fer?"

"I know," said Long John while the heritage of some forgotten Norse ancestor returned him undaunted to his task in the bunkers.

Good old Regan. He quit the Lake Forrest and straightway lost track of the kid he had launched. But the kid lost nothing save verdance. To Boggs' punishment he hardened; through many a month he weathered it, along with bounding deck plates and catwalks awash. Then, quite deliberately, he transferred his rippling brawn, steeled ambition and calloused goat to a South African tramp. Thus, and only thus, did he manage to attain stoker's rating.

Long John Eames fed, sliced and raked his rolling way down the antipodal wastes. Occasionally he swayed to blinding hot furnace maws over mile-long seas—and kept his eye on oilers in his off watches to acquaint himself with their cult.

In due time, he rose to oiler. Out of the grim stokehold at last and the big up-and-down babies filled his admiring eyes. They thrilled him. They were his goal, the symbol of his career, his rainbow end. John Eames studied that engine as a medico studies the human anatomy. He did more; he learned its whims. He became the most curious mind aboard the

Ubangi Prince. Feed, vacuum and lubrication grew into the young man, they became almost second nature to him while he acquired the expert feel—and it is expert—of huge bearings. While he raced oilcans over cross rods and reasoned why condenser pumps were placed at the very lowest point in the system, Long John's dream was materializing.

Practical books he had, American books. In Cape Town he added certain English, more profound, treatises on steam power. He put in weeks of contemplation of oil fueling, he grew hungry for more information than his own library afforded. Then he took his shelf of information from the African to the American-Gulf trade, that he might make a Boston library regularly. He proposed, now, to spend his evening shore leaves in that library.

That he did—and he met Olive Lane. Before he realized it, the girl stood on a par with his love for marine engines. Her unwavering eyes and chestnut wave vied with Scotch boiler designs, triple expansion power, coal versus oil fuel—vied for his supreme interest. A miracle had happened, the knight of steam had found his lady fair.

WEEKS and months of this until Olive Lane waxed more than interested. Thoughtful weeks until she said, "This career of yours, John—do you have to confine it to the sea?"

John hadn't considered anything else, of course. "What do you mean by that?"

"Why, there are all kinds of engineering."

"Oh, I see. I'm for steam—steam or Diesel."

"You forget, there are engineers on the land," she ventured carefully.

"Yes, but—"

"But what?"

"We-ell I'll tell you, they go to college

for that."

"Yes, that is just what I mean. John, you've saved enough to do what they did. You've got the brains, too."

John guided her across the Boylston Street traffic but himself he could not guide, not inwardly. The suggestion that he could or should alter his plans, his life dream, so readily and radically—or shift plans at all bewildered him.

But Olive Lane had grown upon him, she had become essential. What could he do? He expected to see her between trips, to confide in her as he'd never confided his innermost thoughts to anybody. And yet—and yet she did seem, all at once, to become a huge problem. A delightful problem, too.

Meanwhile John Eames acquired a license, he rose from oiler to third assistant engineer in the *Hacienda*. He ran regularly between a Boston refinery and a sugar port on the back of Cuba. Nor did he relax; he studied for his second assistant's papers with that same unveering zeal—and won them with high rating. Straightway he pointed himself for his next goal, a first assistant's license.

But John Eames had slid a diamond, a Cape Town memento of his that bespoke his instinct for values, slid it onto Olive Lane's third finger. He showed her off to his family, his cup was full. Ah yes, and Olive Lane now cast her feminine eyes into the future. It was to be their future, no less, and she realized more and more poignantly how lonely it must be if John spent weeks at sea, only hours at home with her. Olive Lane wept secretly over the prospect, wept until she dared to broach again her better plan.

"Johnnie boy, we're engaged now, aren't we?" John dashed aside his mental picture of an ailing centrifugal oil filter aboard the *Hacienda*. "Wha—yes." He gave her elbow a playful nudge to add,

“Ask me something hard.”

She did. It came like a long impending thunderclap. “John, dear, you’ve never refused me a single favor so I’m going to ask the biggest one yet.” She paused for a good lungful of the fog that was giving them dogdays isolation on the Mall. “I want you to get an engineer’s degree at Tech.”

John was stunned. His tongue forsook him.

“With your present licenses you’ll get a degree in no time at all.”

“In what? Marine engineering ashore? Be yourself.”

“Don’t get hot, Johnnie, I want to see you a top notch engineer where you’ll live at home, our home, instead of away off in those grimy ships. Can’t you see my—?”

JOHN EAMES heard her out. He tried to weigh the pros and cons. He took the trip south to contemplate upon it, he dreaded the unspoken risk of saying no too abruptly. He feared the possibility of losing Olive Lane and he simply couldn’t fathom a world without her.

He came back from Cuba once and they talked. Again, and they talked. In the end, autumn found Long John Eames at Tech. He was what she called being reasonable. What he called being fair. He loved Olive Lane.

Stuffy dry classrooms and parched laboratories. Long lectures, dusty blackboards and untempered youth; unscathed lads who’d never glimpsed the dirty inside of a bunker nor the truculence of a Biff Boggs. Fathoms of theory, abstract math, questions that John Eames had answered in grimy sweat aboard the *Lake Forrest*, the *Ubangi Prince*, the *Hacienda*. So this was Tech to John Eames and he resented it—and wondered where the *Hacienda* might be right this minute. Time and again, day after day, he

wondered and sniffed in vain for salty spume at the alleyways’ end while he digested courses along with the flocks of embryo engineers. He did more, he comprehended what they, lacking his experience, merely acquired. He saw yachts on the Charles and scorned the toys, he tried in vain to divorce the *Hacienda* from his mind. For he had agreed to get a degree—and Olive Lane secretly marveled at her own success with the man.

Oh, Long John realized the fun value of these studies, at times he was even grateful for this interlude—but not convinced withal. Not one wit converted to the possibility of that other dream, that strange fantasy of a life work ashore.

Quietly and defensively, he kept in touch with his former employers, with the wharves. One day he went straight into his examination for chief’s license like a hypnotized subject who must follow the gleam on the tiny spoon. And he passed a remarkable examination. In the matter of comparative operation on varied fuels, he revealed an inordinate comprehension.

That much he owed to Tech and that proved the fatal cast of the dice for John Eames. Olive did not know what he had done, this time, because he had dreaded hurting her. Nevertheless, she did discern in him a change that boded ill. She blamed the abrupt change from a life on the open sea to that in closed rooms, she almost suspected that in seeing more of her, now that he was ashore, he had wearied of her. Yet she couldn’t understand it clearly and she dared not speak of it to him. She endured the ominous suspense until her anxiety brought courage. The day came when she mustered her forces to ask her Johnnie what was wrong.

Olive Lane never got that far. On that very afternoon John Eames phoned her from a pier. He stated his resolve as

something already accomplished, he invited no condemnation, no concession.

“Not really going back on a boat, dear!” It was her turn to be stunned.

Long ere she fully realized it all, John Eames thrilled to the good old throb of the propeller. He was on his way to sea. He was Chief Engineer on the same old *Hacienda* and his reviving young soul diapasoned the stark fullness of its relief. He was back to his dream once more.

CHIEF EAMES went to sea with vastly more on his mind than a girl. It was his first trip as top engineer, it was a precarious venture that hung his entire future in the balance. For the *Hacienda* had just emerged from an overhauling with oil burners in place of coal grates and thus far the burners had been a curse upon her. Eames, with his high rating on comparative fueling in that recent examination, plus his familiarity with the *Hacienda*, had been pitched headlong into the ship’s fueling problem on a moment’s notice. He was to rectify the curse at the outset of an important new sugar charter—and remain as chief if he rectified it before the concern that had installed it had to be called upon. John Eames had left the sea, the company, his very ship, to attend a college; today he stood face to face with a problem in that ship that had soured one good chief. If the interlude ashore hadn’t broken John’s career, this situation certainly must—unless he spotted the trouble. For the ship already had lost valuable time hove to at sea; and today she had valuable, perishable cargo in her hold. John Eames experienced a full realization of what he was doing and marveled at it. He yanked at his new uniform collar, he hitched around in his clothing uncomfortably. He shed the suit like something yet to be earned, shook himself into denim and went below wiping beads

off his brow.

He sized up the burners, watched them start off well enough, waited impatiently while the ship put more and more miles between her stern and marine repair shops. The waiting hung him on tenter hooks of anxiety, the waiting and that note of dismay in Olive’s voice over the telephone. He began to regret the abruptness with which he had broken the news to her; why hadn’t he explained that he’d been hired on the verge of sailing time? Now, he might lose the girl. He dreaded to think of his return to Boston lest the mail for the ship bring back that South African diamond.

John Eames learned very little by asking questions. He was not prone to discussion, he never aired his problems to reap the ideas of others. And today he didn’t even search out his three assistants aboard the *Hacienda*. At mess, perforce, he heard glum gossip; the ship had been hove to, fresh from overhaul and hove to! Out came tales of stokehold explosions, arguments about fuels. The mess room became a forum and John Eames cleared out; what did that deck crowd know about making steam anyway?

LONG JOHN EAMES entered the *Hacienda*’s power vault as chief. He was lord of it all, a top engineer now. He had arrived. First Assistant Duff turned envious eyes upon the younger man; they beheld only a poker face. For Duff saw only the static moment of a newly licensed chief’s first take-over, he knew nothing about Olive Lane, he little realized John’s anxiety over her and the diamond and the gamble of career against new burners that faltered.

Solemnly went the new chief down the nearest grilled flight, down by crossrods plunging eighty-odd times a minute. Farther down to pass auxiliary engines. He

disappeared into the oblong void at the bulkhead. And Duff began to glimpse success in a new light; he decided never to allow himself to be far away from the big engine's throttle—until this young chief could at least grin.

Eames stood at furnaces. Through peepholes he watched roaring, elongate cones ~ of spiraling flame, he saw Olive Lane in tears, hot tears. She, too, had fire. Was the girl, broken hearted or was she angry with him?

Clean fires, these, and steady. No spluttering. But the *Hacienda* was enroute to Cuba in the Gulf and she hadn't yet crossed Massachusetts Bay. John turned away sighing because she fired so smoothly. He decided to try those emergency, extension valves that ranged along the engine room side of the bulkhead above—just in case the trouble should swoop in wholesale.

He climbed the iron ladder out. He turned left—John Eames blinked twice. His hands flexed and became suddenly moist. His blue eyes gleamed like tempered steel and narrowed. His cup of anxiety had filled, all at once, to overflowing at sight of two huge paws on the extension valves. Above them, a head that was flat as a Hog Islander's tumble-home and he recognized it. He remembered that lantern jaw, that slack mouth already framing a foul snarl. The bold eyes were scorning brazenly and glowering in ugly recognition. Biff Boggs of the old *Lake Forrest* was here aboard the *Hacienda*, and a second assistant engineer still!

John's immediate reaction was suspicion. It was justified by Boggs' every movement, the way he let go of those valves to brace himself, the way he defied and challenged when his new chief had startled him by appearing from nowhere. Ages ago Boggs had resented this young

man's ambition, he resented it a thousandfold more now; for Boggs was a Second still.

His own brutishness was partly to blame, his very willfulness more so. Boggs never had taken things as he'd found them, he never would. The miracle was that he'd retained his rating. From ship to ship he'd jumped, and his jumpings had been hot. It was touch and go, bully and run, with him; nor had he once mentioned the deep, underlying reason for it all. Biff Boggs had a secret fear.

He did not disclose it now. Cursing, he strode farther to port and clamped down a stairway. John watched him out of sight, then he tested the extension valves himself and left the engine room wondering whether they might fail in a pinch—whether Boggs, too, would fail to measure up. Biff Boggs here, eh? The one and only man he had ever learned to despise.

THE ink was fresh on the license of Third Assistant Engineer Morley; he was new. Early in his eight-to-twelve watch off Cape Cod, Morley waited uneasily for a good look at the new chief. In the mess room John had appeared too young, in Morley's eyes, for the peculiar situation aboard here. Hadn't the seasoned Second talked him down at the outset? Boggs was nobody's fool, so Morley was worried; he wanted to hear Chief Eames talk about those cursed burners that misfired in his watches despite the fact that a self-confident, experienced Second worked the suction that kept water out of the fuel. Morley wanted to know how much this new chief was bringing to the problem, for it was in the Third's watches that the blasted burners always had misfired. Was the new chief going to blame it on him, too?

So the Third stood close to the starboard doorway. His ear was keened to

the sounds in the alleyway outside, keened for the voice of John Eames and his opinions. The noise he got, however, was not a voice, it was a backfire in the stokehold. . He bolted to the nearest stairway toward the stokehold entrance with visions of seared firemen in his soul. A tall figure whisked down past him and led the way below.

Eames found a V-shaped sheet of iron slammed across the floor. It was an air door. He saw a furnace packed full of wild flames, a draft disk—revolving type—blown back from the plate as far as possible and bent over a connection. Smudge was bluing up against uptakes and stokers were hovering handy to the ladder. Trouble had struck.

He cut the feed to that roaring flame and lost brows and eyelashes before he could get away. Soon as the fire died, he showed the stokers the absolute necessity for airing out furnaces after cutting off the feed.

“Aw, we do all that,” one protested.

“Yeah. ‘Fore we starts up agin on it an’ gives it the blowtorch, another one splutters out. Oh it’s some hell round here, once this racket starts, mister.”

“So you watch through the peepholes and beat them to it,” the new chief prompted.

“Huh. And git meself blowed to hell? Lookit that air door,” the third stoker made bold.

Before Eames could speak again, number four quit firing. It spluttered and drizzled oil all through the hot furnace—and John Eames practiced what he’d preached. He leaped to the feed valve. He took half a turn when the red hot furnace touched off the accumulated fuel. An explosion shivered eardrums, closed eyes, pulsing the racing blood in men’s throats. It was terrific. It hove John Eames ten feet backward and plumped him down.

He rose stiffly. He went directly back to the peepholes. He peered into fires one by one while men bet covertly on his imminent destruction. He peered until he caught another burner missing. That burner he scrutinized—not because he was so inordinately bold or foolhardy, but because his career depended upon seeing exactly what was wrong and seeing it quickly. The instant he saw, he shut off the feed. Without another word to anybody, John Eames left the stokehold and went straight to Morley.

“Always happens in your watches, you say.”

Morley stiffened. So this chief, too, was blaming it on him. “Chief,” said he, “ever since those burners came aboard of us my watch below there has been cleaning, replacing and ducking for their lives. Looks to me like there’s water in the fuel, but the suck pump is run reg’larly by the Second and he swears it’s not so simple as that. Fact is, he raised hell round here when I fetched him below to see for hisself—”

“I know.” John’s experience with the trouble below had lamed him; while the Third unburdened his mind, the chief limbered up. And, too, Eames was doing some private thinking; he was recalling the Boggs he’d seen at the extension valves. Boggs had turned tail and gone below that landing to port—to port.

“Third,” said he contemplatively, “most of the burners that misfire are fed from which tank?”

“Port one, sir. The Second, he keeps both settling tanks dreened of water, I told you that, sir. He’s responsible for the boiler room and all, I look after the lower engine.”

“I know,” said John again, and he knew—or thought he knew—considerably more than the artless Morley even suspected. For a goat does not suspect; not

a human goat, anyway, who is being victimized and cowed into taking the grief.

“Third, go log this.”

John Eames dovetailed the facts he had accumulated since leaving port; they were significant facts to the man who had taken the gaff from Boggs in the *Lake Forrest*. John put every stoker on the alert at peepholes with ready hands on the feeds. That done, he went above.

In the engine room again, he turned left. No Boggs was there this time, but it seemed to the young chief as though he could feel the evil, grouty, willful, invisible hand of Biff Boggs hovering over the scene; somewhere in this trouble Boggs’ motive—Eames traced a feed line to the port settling tank. He stopped at the feed pump, inspected it; fuel was moving along there. He went on. He inspected both high and low suction. The former led out to fires, the latter drew off water from the bottom of the tank. At length John narrowed things down to the suction pump that removes water. This one need run only a short time every second or third day.

And it was running! Very slowly, but running, without the Second or any other engineer watching it, without Morley’s even realizing. At this rate, it must have sucked away bilge long ago and be draining fuel itself into the sea.

“Even so,” murmured Eames in a puzzled way, “even so, this doesn’t account for the water that certainly is going through those burners. It’s just the opposite, the reverse—reverse!” He gave that pump a most careful scrutiny and came up all standing. He hustled an oiler up top for Morley and a begrimed Morley came distractedly from furnaces that persistently misfired and smudged.

“Cripes, this is hell!” he groaned behind a gob of waste.

“Third,” said the chief slowly, “give

this pump the once over. Carefully, now.”

Carefully? Morley came up yelping. “This ain’t dreening; it’s been reversed. It’s pumping sea water into the tank!”

“And it is so cleverly timed that nothing happens in the First’s watch that comes between yours and the Second’s.”

“I don’t get that, sir,” Morley gaped.

“Boggs runs this pump. He times it from the last bell in his own watch, I’ve seen him come down here to it. He doesn’t dare to risk trouble with Mr. Duff, but you’re less experienced, so he’s set it slow to feed water along with the oil to the burners during your watch. In short, you’re the goat here. Why, I do not know yet.”

Morley cursed roundly. “Damn ‘im, I’ve took hell from his dirty tongue. Now this.”

“Go get him.”

Morley blanched. His small, sparse body seemed to shrink; he was no crusader. “He’ll be asleep, sir, he’s the devil to rouse out. I tried it once before and—”

John Eames caught the Third’s wavering eyes. “Bring the Second here to me, mister.”

Morley went. He returned with a smoky eye to prove he had roused an irate Boggs. He reported and hurried away to his engine before the Second could arrive.

Boggs came in his own good time. He lurched inside the engine room, squared his broad shoulders and glowered all around. He spotted the chief writing in the log and snorted. Let the cub scribble notes; efficiency guys all scribbled a lot, they were mere pad-and-pencil engineers, book experts. But what the devil would this one be writing, after sending for—

BEFORE Boggs could guess an answer to his own query, the chief turned on him. “Come below with me, mister.”

Below? In this eight-to-twelve watch? Not into the fire room, certainly. Thus Boggs made up his mind while John led the way. But the new chief couldn't see the fear flashing in Boggs' eyes. He hadn't learned that Boggs had quit the *Allegash* when her owners had converted her to oil—and come here only to run into another oil conversion. Boggs followed, but he vowed he'd balk at the stokehold entrance.

He did not. Before he could set himself, Eames wheeled right and led the way on to port. And down. Boggs' breath whistled in his teeth; down here, eh? Suspense began to dig into Biff Boggs, he wondered what that timid Morley really knew, and what had he been saying to this lanky cub of a chief? Certainly Eames was neither practical nor experienced enough to spot anything so clever—but they were away below now, already John was turning left.

He halted beside the low suction pump. He waited patiently for the surly Second lagging behind. He obliged Boggs to come close to the slowly wheezing pump before speaking. "You tend this?" he asked.

"It's part of a Second's duties, ain't it—sir?"

"You tend it in the last bell in your own watches—that is, when you do tend it." This was a clever barb, it challenged, and it struck home.

"When I do, huh? Listen, mister, I come to this pump every twelve-to-four watch I stand. In the last bell."

John Eames said coldly, "Rather hoped you'd confess that; once every two or three days should be often enough to draw off the settlings and water. Second, there's something wrong with this pump, notice it?"

Notice! Boggs' nerves jangled, he was on a spot, but for the life of him he

couldn't discern whether John knew.

It came crisply. "Second, you have reversed this pump from exhaust to intake. You've deliberately run water in with the oil to the burners in Morley's watches. You're the trouble with the fuel system aboard here, now what have you to say for yourself?"

Boggs had nothing to say. In one tense instant he fully sensed that his very future depended upon this ex-coal passer of his, this cub chief. He wheeled, drove the heel of his hand to John's nose and hoisted it. Lip and nose parted, John reeled backward with blood streaming to his mouth. And John Eames found his temper. He packed a fist full of the scores of abuses he'd taken from this rascal. He blinked through water-blinded eyes and drove a punch—and Biff Boggs wasn't there.

John cleared his eyes. He looked all around and felt foolish. He was sole alone. He turned to the pump while Boggs, now up top, burst upon poor Morley like thunder. "Listen, you stool, I'm onto you. Playin' up to that kid chief, huh?" He clutched the Third's shirt for emphasis. "I just put that nut in his place, see, and the next time you blab stuff about me or the dam' oil fuel, I'll run you t'hell ashore!"

Morley's blackened eye still stung him, he couldn't see out of it at all—and even if he could have, he was no match for Boggs. So he took what the irate Second chose to render, just as he'd taken it many a time before.

Boggs walked to a rail, stood there a moment and came back with, "You don't understand. They's more to this oil racket than a guy like you sees. Me, I hate oil fuel, it ain't safe, it ain't perfected. Coal's the only steam-maker and coal keeps them lousy stokers to work like they ought to be. Did you ever face a real oil fire b'low there? No, and you never want to."

Scarcely had he said it when a terrific

explosion rent the air. It shook the entire aft end of the *Hacienda*. It bowled stokers off their feet. It wrenched one burner clean off its ground joint and let the oil flow straight down to the plates where it spread. The unleashed fire licked out upon it, flames shot into the air, slithered over the plates. The hold filled with blue clouds that volleyed out into the engine room and men scrambled for their lives.

The explosion caught John Eames at the pump. He had righted it. He was drawing water off the settling tank at top speed when the plates under foot shook. A wall of air rocked him, sang in his ears, prickled his scalp. He spat blood from the gash Boggs had made under his nose. He swung about and ran.

While he ran, stokers in choking fumes were shying away from licking flames, fighting for the ladder on their way to safety. One had beaten the others, he had escaped before Morley arrived to haul them one by one out over the coaming. Morley counted. That one man wasn't there, so the Third, with one eye closed and blacker than the smoke, went down the ladder after him.

JOHN EAMES got to the emergency valves outside the bulkhead. He tried in vain to shut off the feed from that port settling tank. The rods evidently had bent and bound in the explosion. John glimpsed crawling, gasping men; he ran on, snatched an extinguisher and hurried down the ladder while oilers came with scoops and sand, while Duff, standing by up top, yelled for Morley and the chief.

John knew well the danger in front of him; that next burner, and the next, might explode. Nevertheless they hadn't yet, so he stopped the flow of oil at the wrecked furnace front. He coughed and pawed his precarious way to every burner fed from the port tank, he shut them off and

wheezed for air.

He dropped to his knees—only to discover that they were afire. He beat the rags there to smoking tatters, only to discover flames along his upper arms, his shoulders. Blisters were rising and he broke them, raw flesh stung to the acrid smoke. In his blind haste he had worked in intense heat, had blotted up oil to become unwittingly a potential torch.

Still slapping at smoking rags upon himself, he crawled toward the ladder. Air, he must get air into his aching lungs soon. He inched along until his reaching hands touched cloth. Flesh! It was gritty with sand—and more sand coming. Eames moved closer, took a sand shower from an oiler's scoop overhead and felt the length of that body. When he dared open his eyes, he saw Morley lying there. Morley, the little Third who hadn't dared to call Boggs, Morley whose eye had been punched shut by Boggs. And where the devil was Boggs in this crisis?

John tried to lift the unconscious Third. He coughed and gasped over him. He slumped down again, it was useless to hope to move the man up that ladder. Up a ladder? The chief in his half stifled condition began to doubt that he could hoist himself out of this hell-hole. But that Boggs, blast him! He should be here. Duff had the engine, oilers were sanding, but Boggs—

A blob of more sand covered John's head, but it couldn't bury the grim purpose that had suddenly come over him. For he had divined the probable location of Boggs. He realized, now, why the irascible Second had been feeding water to burners in a little Third's watch. With such thoughts surging through him, John Eames reached the ladder. He climbed with a determination that only a grim errand could inspire. He was going for Boggs, the Boggs who had mauled him in the *Lake*

Forrest, defied him here, and all but doubled him over a reversed pump to escape before he could retaliate. The time had come to attend to Boggs!

John poked his head past a scoopful of sand. He went on, he stumbled his way out of a cloud of fumes.

"Here's the chief!" someone yelled to the First.

Eames brushed them away. He gulped air and went on. He climbed up and outside into the starboard passageway. There he filled his lungs with the tang and chill of fresh, sea-borne air while sailors and steward's men crowded the engine room doorway. He drove them off with one hoarse bark and drove himself along the Second's room. The screen door was locked—on the inside, he observed significantly. He crashed his way through that door.

CRAVEN Boggs groaned as though he'd been invalided in the ruckus below. It was a simulated groan, however; he was faking it. John was sure of it, so positive that he made one swoop at the hulk that lay face to the wall. He snatched man, bedding and all to the floor—and Boggs was dressed even unto his dirty boots!

Eames flung the bedding aside. "Onto your feet and out of this!" he barked.

The effect was astonishing, for Boggs came off that snarl of bedclothes fighting. He fought for his very license, this time, fought to silence this young upstart who had ferreted him out, who certainly would tag him with everything that had gone wrong below.

Boggs lashed out with the insanity of a last minute stand. He clawed for a strangle hold. He cursed and growled and lunged in anew when holds failed.

And Long John took a beating. Burns and blisters bled, blows rocked and twisted

and staggered him; it was an awful drubbing. And yet, through it all, he somehow managed to put Boggs between himself and the shattered screen door. He took more punishment until he got the Second within half his length of the coaming. Then, quite abruptly, John Eames came to life. He forsook mere defense to let go a lightning thrust of his long, right arm.

The fist smacked sweat; Boggs stopped the totally unexpected blow, bowled over backward and measured his length through the wrecked door. His clothing caught to splintered wood, wire screening interrupted his blows. In one violent heave he came up—only to be knocked down. Time and again he tried it, vowed he'd kill the cub and rocked backward whence he'd come.

But Eames had no mind to disable the man, he had further plans. He punished Boggs into submission, that was sufficient. Then he yanked him afoot and drove him to the engine room. Drove him to the nearest stairway. Down they went. At every landing they fought, off every landing John pushed and drove the rascal. Thus they reached the stokehold entrance.

At that point Boggs balked like a hog on ice. He fought again in a cloud of smoke and chemical fumes—and John drove him onto the iron ladder face outward like a landsman. But the Second descended because there was nothing else to do.

Below in the muck and fumes and sand, Eames relented not one particle. When Boggs spewed foul curses, John closed his mouth; when Boggs started for the ladder, John tripped him to the plates and wiped him around in the slime until he suddenly gave in, stared at the furnaces wild-eyed and became obedient—anything to get out of here.

John Eames made Boggs lift Morley to

his shoulder; made him carry the brave little Third up the ladder, out the engine room and away to the steward's room for treatment. When it was done, the new chief led Biff Boggs to his own quarters and rumbled, "Stow your dunnage to go ashore in Havana. You're through aboard here." He stood by to see that his order was obeyed, while raw flesh and sand-filled blisters reminded him that he'd been below while this misfit had hidden in his bunk.

THE *Hacienda* did not heave to at sea because her chief had not forgotten the perishable cargo in her hold. She made half speed while he and his after gang effected repairs and got her ready for the jingler. Then she redoubled speed to make up the lost time. Until Morro Castle's historic grimness softened in the winter's sunlight, until Havana smiled in cooling winds and the *Hacienda* tied up. Tourists were gay over their thumbnail whiskies ashore. Crowds yelled their glee on sidelines at jai alai, and John Eames sat in his chief's room aboard ship with his tousled head in his hands. He had solved the *Hacienda's* riddle, he had established

Chief Eames at the top of his relentless climb from a stokehole; yet, here he sat, sole alone in a fit of reaction and dread.

John dreaded the return to Boston. Every bag of sugar donkeying into the hatches seemed to warn him that he had chosen between Olive Lane and the sea. The dice had rolled, she was gone. His African diamond would come aboard in the ship's mail as soon as she docked next time—in Boston. Aye, the diamond ring and, possibly, a letter. Within a week, he'd be congratulated by the port chief and cursed by that farewell letter.

A week? His screen door flew open. The officers' mess boy breezed in, scaled a missive at his desk, breezed out, singing.

And John Eames glimpsed the handwriting, the air mail stamp. His shaking fingers made tatters of the envelope, they unfolded the letter. Somehow he managed to read until:

“. . . have come to realize, honey, that a man's career can be his choicest right, his own to decide. And his wife's part in it all is to stand with him on that course unto the end. So hurry home, Johnnie boy, I'll be waiting. . .”